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Sunni Islamists in Tripoli and the Asad regime 1966-2014

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A city in North Lebanon with 320,310 inhabitants, Tripoli is one of the so-called "sensitive" zones where the Syrian war threatens to spread into Lebanon. While the Syrian army withdrew from North Lebanon in April 2005, Tripoli's destiny remained intrinsically linked to Syria. This was because of the numerous historical, political, family, and economic ties linking the social space of north Lebanon to its Syrian hinterland. The demographic composition of the city resembles Syria. Tripoli's population is in majority Sunni Muslim (80.9%) and includes, in addition to a Christian minority in decline, the largest Alawi community in Lebanon (8,9 %, or 28,525 persons) [1]. This paper analyses the consequences of the Syrian intervention and presence in Lebanon on political leadership in Tripoli. It shows how the Syrian presence created alliances, conflicts and divisions still present in Tripoli today. The main argument is that the Syrian presence in Tripoli de-structured Sunni leadership in North Lebanon. New Syrian political-economic networks emerged, where clients were awarded with political and economic influence. Common interests between Tripolitanian businessmen and actors in the Syrian military developed during the period of the Syrian presence. Tripoli's political field became more split, between winners and losers of the Syrian presence. The losers of the Syrian period included in particular the urban poor, who suffered from Syrian repression and from competition from Syrian labourers. This led to the disintegration of internal solidarity within Tripoli's political field, until then known for its unity around anti-imperialist and Sunni Islamic norms. Tripoli's

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[1] Statistics of registered residents in Tripoli (al-Mina included) for 2013, generously put at the author's disposal by Kama Feghali, director of the Lebanese Office of Statistics and Documentation and independent consultant.

Sunnism had, at least since the struggle against French mandate in the 1920s and 1930s, constituted one sole actor on the Lebanese scene, calling for Muslim rights and re-allocation of state resources to peripheral areas and affirming Lebanon's Arab identity. Rashid Karami, who served as Prime Minister during long periods in the Shehabist period, gained large electoral majorities in Tripoli in the 1960s and redistributed state resources to Tripolitanians. Karami had a very good working relationship with Syria. After 1967, the political scene in Tripoli was fragmented between Karami and movements of the Arab nationalist left, including Iraqi Ba'athism and Arafat's Fatah. The Syrian intervention consolidated and accentuated the split in the Sunni population in Tripoli.

This chapter first addresses the research literature on the Syrian presence in Lebanon and outlines the general background information on Syrian, involvement, in particular the motives and interests for the Syrian intervention to Lebanon in 1976. Secondly, it analyses the transformation within Tripoli's field of politics before, during and following the Syrian intervention (1976). Finally, three hypotheses to account for the Syrian determination to control Tripoli and its hinterland are considered. The first centres on Tripoli's Islamists, the second on communal motivations, and the third on economic and material gains.

Existing literature

Despite the insightful lessons North Lebanon can bring to the study of Syro-Lebanese relations, the region is notoriously understudied. Few in-depth studies exist in English or French. The Arabic-language literature on Syrian policies in North Lebanon are somewhat more extensive but not until recently. A key problem has been the difficulty for foreign scholars to gain access to good primary sources in the heavily Syrian-controlled region. The most published scholar on North Lebanon, the late Michel Seurat, was abducted in 1985.[2] During 1993-2005 period, the Lebanese press was subject to heavy restrictions, which made it virtually

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[2] Michel Seurat, 'Le quartier de Bab Tebbané à Tripoli (Liban). Étude d'une 'asabiyya *urbaine'*, in *l'État de barbarie,* Paris: Seuil, 2012, 1989, p. 235-284.

impossible for sociologists to analyze political dynamics in North Lebanon in any significant detail.[3]

This changed in 2005, after Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. A number of Tripolitanian political actors, journalists, and sociologists lifted the veil on the issue and published books and a series of articles in the Lebanese press[4] about their experiences between 1986 and 2005. The main focus was on the Syrian regime's repression of Sunni Islamist movements[5] and on the relationship between local notables and Syria.[6] Although, much of the material was written by actors; not observers, and therefore may suffer from inaccuracies and political bias,[7] it can be

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[3] A few doctoral dissertations analysed the relationship between Islamist groups in Tripoli and Syria in the 1980s. Joumana al-Soufi Richard, *Lutte populaire armée. De la désobéissance civile au combat pour Dieu (du kifah al musalah au jihad)*, PhD dissertation, Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris III, 1988; Dalal Bizri-Bawab, *Introduction à l'études des mouvements Islamistes au Liban*, PhD dissertation, January 1984, École Pratique des hautes études en sciences sociales; "Le movement 'Ibad al-Rahman et ses prolongements à Tripoli", in Olivier Carré and Paul Dumont (eds.), *Radicalismes Islamiques. Tome I*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985, pp. 159-214 and *Islamistes, parlementaires et libanais. Les interventions à l'Assemblé des élus de la Jama'a Islaiyya et du Hibz Allah (1992-1996)*, CERMOC, Document Nº 3, 1999.

[4] 'Fatfat: haqaza hawala dubbat al-mukhabarat ib'adi 'an al-hariri. Musalsal harb al-ilgha did al-hariri. 1998-2011', *Al-Mustaqbal* (Beirut), 27 July 2011.

[5] Bernard Rougier, *L'Oumma en fragments. Contrôler le Sunnisme au Liban*, (Paris, PUF, 2011); Nasser Kalawoun, "Tripoli in Lebanon: An Islamist fortress or a source of terror?," in George Joffé (ed.), *Islamist Radicalisation in Europe and the Middle East*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2013; Abdel-Ghani Imad, *The Islamist movements in Tripoli*, Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 1998; Abdel Ghani Imad "A Topography of Sunni Islamic Organizations and Movements in Lebanon," *Contemporary Arab Affairs, 2 (1), 2009, pp. 143–161.*

Mohamed Abi Samra, *Tripoli. The Allah square and the port* of modernity (in Arabic), Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 2011.

[6] Bruno Dewailly, "Transformation du leadership tripolitain: le case de Nagib Mikati", in Franck Mermier and Sabrina Mervin (eds.), *Leaders et partisans*, Paris: Karthala/IFPO, 2012, pp. 165-185;

[7] See, for instance, Nusri Sayigh, *Abd al-Hamid Karmai, Rajul al-Qadaya (Abdel-Hamid Karami. The man and the cause)*, Beirut: Sharikat al-Matbu'at li'l-tawzi' wa'l- Nasr, 2011. For studies published by the actors themselves (mainly al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya), see Amal 'Itani, 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ali and Mu'in al-Manna', *Al-Jam'a al- Islamiyya fi lubnan munthu alnash'a hatta 1975 (al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya in Lebanon from the creation until 1975)*, Beirut: Zeituna (edited by Mohsen Mohd Saleh), 2009; Fathy Yakan, *Qatuf Sha'ik fi haql al-tajarib al-islamiyya. Ru'a islamiyya min 'am 2000 (Difficult harvests in the arena of Islamic experiences. An Islamic vision from the Year 2000)*, Beirut: al-Risalah, 2001; Majid Darwiche, "Ghayat al-sukkan wa'izhar al-manan fi tarjamat al-da'aiyya Fathy Yakan (1933-2009) ("The goals of the population and the appearance of blessings

complemented with other issue-specific material, on the modes of intervention in the Tripoli's parliamentary elections,[8] Tripoli's municipality,[9] social conditions,[10] rural dynamics in Akkar,[11] and the compliance with Human Rights.[12]

The written material is complemented with fieldwork research carried out during a six-year period in North Lebanon (2008-2013). The author met with politicians, religious shaykhs, grassroots activists, university professors, and journalists, from all sides of the political spectrum.[13] Because confidence was built up with the informants over time, revealing, hitherto unknown, anecdotes and more precise information were obtained. Triangulating the different sources, the present study attempts to describe, in the most empirical and nuanced manner possible, Syrian practices in North Lebanon, and to put it into context with the general political practices during Pax Syriana.

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in the life-story of the preacher Fathy Yakan)", in *Al-da'aiyya Fathy Yakan, al-mu'tamar al-duwali alawal*, Tripoli: Jinan University, 13 June 2010, pp. 372-389.

[8] Safuh Munajjid, *al-intikhabat al-niyabiyya fi trablus wa'l-shamal khilal miat 'am. 1909-2009* (*Parliamentary elections in Tripoli over hundred years. 1909-2009*), Tripoli: Dar al-Bilad, 2009.

[9] Bruno Dewailly, "La municipalité de Tripoli entre pouvoirs locaux et services de l'Etat", in Agnès Favier (ed.), *Municipalités et pouvoirs locaux au Liban*, Beirut: Cahiers du CERMOC, 24, 2001, p. 295-318.

[10] Catherine Le Thomas, *Pauvreté et conditions socio-économiques à Al-Fayhâ'a: diagnostic et éléments de stratégie*, report published by l'Institut Européen de Coopération et de Développement (IECD) and l'Agence française de développement, December 2009.

[11] Joseph Ibrahim Abdallah, *al-sir'a al-ijtima'i fi 'akkar wa' thuhur 'ailat al-b'arini* (The social conflict in Akkar and the rise of the B'arini family), Beirut: Mokhtarat, 1993.

[12] Virginia N. Sherry, *Syria's Tadmor prison: dissent still hostage to a legacy of terror*, 8(2), Washington: Human Rights Watch report, 1996, 26; *Syria. The price of dissent*, Washington: Human Rights Watch Report, 7(4), July 1995; Amnesty International, 'Arbitrary arrests, 'disappearances', and extrajudicial executions by Syrian troops and Syrian-backed forces in Tripoli, February 29 1987, MDE 24/02/87.

[13] 180 semi-structured interviews were conducted between March 2008 and October 2013 with 140 actors.

The Syrian presence in North Lebanon

Syrian troops, which at most numbered 40,000, first entered Lebanon on June 1st 1976 during the first round of the Lebanese civil war to crush the momentum of the Palestinian-Islamo-Progressive alliance.[14] It was mandated as an Arab Defence Force (ADF) in October 1976.[15] The non-Syrian elements of the ADF were withdrawn during the spring of 1979, while Syrian forces remained in Lebanon until April 2005.

After initially intervening at the request of the Christian conservatives, Syria reknitted ties with the PLO, the Lebanese left, Iraq, and Jordan after Sadat's travel to Jerusalem in November 1977. The marriage of convenience between Syria and the PLO ended after Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, and turned into outright war in Tripoli in the autumn of 1983. Syria's strategy in Lebanon was nonetheless consistent in the sense that it at all times aimed to impede either of the conflicting parties in the Lebanese war from conclusively defeating the other.[16]

Motives for the Syrian presence in the existing literature

Much has been written about the possible Syrian motives for its paradoxical intervention in Lebanon, to contain the PLO and National Movement. Five motives identified in the literature are detailed below:

• *Geopolitics:* Lebanon is a buffer protecting Damascus and Syrian industrial centres against any potential Israeli offensive through the Beqa'a.[17] The intervention into Lebanon occurred in a context when a victory of the National Movement was impending and Syrian decision makers feared that the Lebanese

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[14] Adeed Dawisha, *Syria and the Lebanese crisis*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980, p. 99.

[15] Theodor Hanf, *Coexistence in wartime Lebanon. Decline of a State and Birth of a Nation*, London: I.B. Tauris, Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1993, p. 288.

[16] Adeed Dawisha, 'Syria in Lebanon, Assad's Vietnam?', *Foreign Policy*, 33, Winter 1978-1979, p. 144.

[17] Reuven Erlich (Avi-Ran), *The Syrian involvement in Lebanon since 1975*, Boulder: Westview, 1991, p. 8.

state could disintegrate.[18] This caused Syrian alarm because a defeat of the Lebanese Christian-conservatives could lead to an Israeli intervention into Lebanon and/or a break-up of the country into confessional enclaves, and a defeated Christian community might have an incentive to strike an alliance with Israel. After the Egyptian-Israeli bilateral peace, Lebanon became a card against which to swap the Golan Heights. Damascus wanted to ensure Washington and Israel that there could be no durable peace without Syria.[19]

- *Patronising the Palestinians*. After 1973, Syria understood it was bound to lose another conventional war with Israel and wanted at any price to avoid being dragged into armed confrontation. Moreover, the Asad regime perceived the PLO's growing recognition and autonomy as a great threat. In 1974, the PLO gained observer status in the UN General Assembly and, during a summit of Arab state leaders in Rabat, it was declared the "sole representative of the Palestinian people".[20] For Asad, who insisted his country was the cradle of Pan-Arabism, control over the Palestinian cause was an invaluable source of internal and regional legitimacy. It was an essential card to use against Saddam Hussein's Iraq and internal political enemies.[21]

- *Ideology*: Since the Islamic conquest of Damascus in 636, Syria was thecentre of *Bilad al-Sham* (Greater Syria), which included Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and parts of Turkey. The redrawing of international borders by the British and French in 1920 and the loss of Lebanon were great traumas for Syrian Arab nationalists. Lebanon and Syria were perceived as constituting one indivisible nation.[22] Dawisha argues that this belief was fundamental in shaping Syrian policies towards

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[18] Hanf, *Coexistence in wartime Lebanon, p.* 215.

[19] Joseph Bahout, 'Le Liban et le couple syro-libanais dans le processus de paix. Horizons incertains', in May Chartouni-Dubarry (ed.), *Le couple syro-libanais dans le processus de paix*, Paris: IFRI, 1998, p. 59.

[20] Nadine Picaudou, *Les Palestiniens. Un siècle d'histoire*, Paris: Éditions complexe, 2003, pp. 172-173.

[21] Ghassan Salamé, 'The Levant after Kuwait', *European Journal of International Affairs*, 12(2), 1991, p. 29.

[22] For this reason, Syria refused to open an embassy in Lebanon. Adeed Dawisha, 'The Motives of Syria's Involvement in Lebanon', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Spring, 1984) (pp. 228-236), pp. 235. It accepted to open an embassy in Beirut in 2008.

Lebanon.[23] It helped legitimise the intervention in some segments of the domestic public opinion and amongst Syrian policy makers. Pan-Syrianism does, however, not suffice to account for the timing of the intervention in 1976.[24] Pan-Syrianism was not the only reason why Syria intervened in Lebanon, but a complementary explanatory variable. When, in spring 1976, the Asad regime finally decided to intervene in Lebanon, it was for the pursuit of more tangible strategic gains, essential for regime survival.

• *Regime survival*: Lebanon was central to the debate on Syrian internal stability because of its role, since 1949, as a centre of conspiracy and subversion, from which coups d'État occurring in Damascus were planned.[25] Since 1970, a growing part of Syrian society had protested against the usurpation of power by a military clique hailing from rural, minority backgrounds. In February 1973, protests erupted against the new constitution, which omitted the article of former Syrian constitutions requiring that the president had to be a (Sunni) Muslim. [26]

• *Political economy:* Despite economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s, Syria suffered from a widening balance of payment gap already in 1976.[27] The outbreak of the Lebanese civil war had hampered the accessibility of capital, on which Syrian heavy industries depended.[28] Some scholars therefore argue that Syria intervened in Lebanon in order to extract the needed resources, from the Lebanese banking system, the port of Beirut and cheap Lebanese manufactures, to prevent the escalation of a social conflict at home.[29] It is pertinent to point to the economic gains actors in the Syrian regime made in Lebanon (see below), but there is not a solid enough empirical data to demonstrate that domestic protests in Syria took off

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[23] Dawisha, *Syria and the Lebanese crisis*, p. 72.

[24] Fred Lawson, 'Syria's intervention in the Lebanese civil war, 1976: a domestic conflict explanation', *International Organization*, 38, 1984, p. 457.

[25] Ba'ath leaders, including Michel Aflaq and Salah Bitar, as well as Syrian Muslim Brotherhood leader, Mustafa Siba'i, fled to Lebanon in 1953.

[26] The Alawi community, to which the Syrian president and a very high proportion of his lieutenants belonged, was seen as non-Muslim by many Sunnis. Olivier Carré and Michel Seurat (Gérard Michaud), *Les frères musulmans (1928-1982)*, Paris: Gallimard, 1983, pp. 132-134.

[27] Volker Perthes, *A political economy of Syria under Asad*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1995, p. 29.

[28] Lawson, « The Syrian intervention » p. 469.

[29] Lawson, « The Syrian intervention » pp. 473-475.

prior to the intervention into Lebanon.[30] The tipping point for the unrest seems to have been immediately following the intervention, when tens of thousands of Syrians took to the streets against the crushing of the Lebanese National Movement and the PLO in Lebanon.[31] This led to the arrest of several hundred people in Syria, mainly communists.[32] The presence in Lebanon was moreover a financial burden on Syria in the early phase.[33]

The intervention of Syrian troops into Lebanon is therefore best explained using a realist paradigm: a consolidated and unitary state seeking to protect its security in the face of external aggression. This did not exclude the fact that Syria also benefited from the intervention into Lebanon to quell domestic political enemies, in particular in Tripoli. However, over time, once Syria consolidated its influence in Lebanon, economic interests and concerns related to Syria's domestic politics became more important. This was especially so after 1983, when Syria's economy began to suffer from a serious decline and budget deficits.[34]

Although a set of defined long-term foreign policy objectives existed, the Syrian regime operated without a general plan and grasped opportunities as they arose.[35] The departure of the PLO from Lebanon (1983) extended Syria's margins of manoeuvre. The deepening of the alliance with Iran by the mid-1980s and Syria's isolation from the Arab world during the Iran-Iraq war also helped modify the stakes within Lebanon.

The Syrian continuing role in Lebanon after the end of the civil war was enshrined by the Ta'if accords (October 1989), which formally ended the war in Lebanon.[36] The accords provided that the Syrian forces would assist the Lebanese

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[30] Raymond Hinnebusch, 'Pax syriana? The origins, causes and consequences of Syria's role in Lebanon', *Mediterranean Politics*, 3(1), Summer 1998, p. 141.

[31] Carré and Seurat, *Les frères musulmans,* p. 134.

[32] Dawisha, *Syria and the Lebanese crisis*, p. 72.

[33] Hinnebusch, 'Pax syriana?', p. 142.

[34] Élizabeth Picard, "La politique de la Syrie au Liban", Paris: CERI, 1987, p. 11.

[35] Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon,* p. 563.

[36] Weapons stilled after the defeat of General Michel Aoun's "liberation war" against Syria in October 1990. For mor on Aoun, see Philippe Abirached, « charisme, pouvoir et communauté

government in restoring sovereignty throughout the country. Two years after the ratification of the accord, they were to redeploy to the Beqa'a. Further redeployments would be decided later by a Lebanese and Syrian military committee. Bilateral treaties, such as the May 1991, Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination Treaty, gave further legal grounds for the Syrian presence. This "Syrian peace" was accepted by the Bush administration, partly because it was considered better than the alternative of anarchy from the Lebanese civil war, partly because Hafiz al-Asad's regime was already in 1989 seen as a potential source of support against Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

The roots of the conflict between Tripoli's Sunnis and the Asad regime

Muslim elites in Lebanon and Syria respectively had, ever since the 1930s, somewhat uneasy relations.[37] These emerged out of conflicting interests, not religion. Since Lebanon lacked Arab nationalist credentials and Syria saw itself as the cradle of Pan-Arabism, Syrian notables felt entitled to give ideological guidance to the Arab nationalist movement in Lebanon.[38] Lebanese Arab nationalists resented this intervention in their affairs. They also denounced Syrian Arab nationalist governments' use of food blockage vis-à-vis Lebanon as an instrument to solve economic differences.[39] They saw Gamal Abdel-Nasser, not the Syrian Ba'ath party, as being entitled to lead the Arab Umma. When, at the break-up of the United Arab Republic in 1961, many of Tripoli's Muslims sided with Abdel-Nasser,[40] Syrian notables were annoyed.[41] In the 1970s, urban poor Sunnis in Tripoli gave strong support to all of the Asad regime's regional enemies: Fatah, the Iraqi Ba'ath party and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. This support may be

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politique : la figure de Michel Aoun », in Mermier and Mervin (eds.), *Leaders and partisans au Liban*, pp. 31-35.

[37] Adeed Dawisha, *Syria and the Lebanese Crisis*, p. 24.

[38] Interview, Radwan al-Sayyed, Beirut, August 2011.

[39] Youssef Chaittani, *Post-Colonial Syria and Lebanon: the Decline of Arab Nationalism and the Triumph of the State*, London: New York, I.B. Tauris, 2007, pp. 128-158.

[40] Interview, Radwan al-Sayyed, Beirut, August 2011.

[41] Kalawoun, *The Struggle for Lebanon,* p. 107.

interpreted in light of the increasingly conflictual relationship between Sunnis in North Lebanon and Syria.

Until the late 1960s, Alawis in Tripoli had formed part of the same social space and political masses as the Sunni Muslims. The politicisation of Alawi identity in North Lebanon began in the 1970s. While Sunni Muslims and many Christians in Tripoli in the late 1960s adhered to New Left parties and movements close to Yasser Arafat, Alawis in Tripoli increasingly began to see Hafiz al-Asad as a model.

Salah Jadid's regime and the peasant movement in Akkar

Syria began to increasingly meddle in domestic policies in North Lebanon after Salah Jadid's takeover in 1966. The main Syrian entryway was in this early period through the peasant movements in Akkar. The protesters could be identified not only in terms of their class but also by their sect: the great majority of the protesting agricultural labourers in the plains of Akkar were Alawis, while the landlords were Sunnis.

The first Alawi families in Lebanon emigrated in search for work from the impoverished Jabal Ansariyah in Syria starting from the end of the 19th century. [42] The emigration was accentuated during the years of economic boom (1950 et 1960) and, more intensely, during the period of the Syrian tutelage. Many were seasonal labourers, who travelled back and forth from Syria.

The two main protest leaders included Khaled Saghieh, a Greek-Orthodox Ba'athist lawyer who had studied in Damascus, and Mohamed Ba'arini, a Sunni tribal chieftain. Saghieh was a pragmatist close to the Ba'ath party. [43] He was guided by some general beliefs on Arab nationalism and rights of peasants, but did not develop a sophisticated ideology. His leadership recalled that of Akram Hourani in the Hama region. As a permanent candidate for the legislative elections since 1964, Saghieh wooed the Alawi community, which he hoped could adopt him

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[42] Fabrice Balanche, "Les alaouites et la crise politique en Syrie", *Les clefs du Moyen Orient*, 7 mars 2012*Les alaouites, l'espace et le pouoir dans la région côtière syrienne. Une intégration nationale ambigue*, PhD dissertation, Université de Tours, December 2000, p. 70.

[43] Interview, Hazem Saghieh, Beirut, June 2012.

as their representative, given that Alawis had no parliamentary representation in Lebanon before Ta'ef. Ba'arini hailed from Fneideq, a perfect example of what Michael Gilsenan called the "Lebanese marches".[44] Here, men worked in the Lebanese army or gained a living from smuggling. Having relations with Syria was primordial for the population to survive. Ba'athist Arab nationalism was popular amongst the peasants.

In March 1973, after an assassination attempt targeting landlord leader Sleiman al-Ali's brother, Malik, Khaled Saghieh and Ba'arini escaped to Syria. Saghieh returned in early 1973. He was shot shortly afterwards and died three months later from his wounds.[45] Mohamed Ba'arini stayed in exile in Homs, and was de facto pardoned in 1976, after the Syrian entry to Lebanon. The peasant revolts ended because of the war. Ba'arini became one of Syria's main allies in Lebanon. His son, Wajih Ba'arini, took over his leadership, and accumulated personal wealth through smuggling. When candidates were appointed to the legislature to replace deceased MPs and fill new seats, Wajih Ba'arini was appointed from Akkar to replace the late Sleiman al-Ali.

It may be hypothesised that the peasant revolts were instigated by the Syrian regime to gain leeway in North Lebanon, and later, continued under Asad, once it started to prepare for a larger-scale military entry into Lebanon. The fact that regular New Left parties failed in their mobilisation attempts in Akkar strengthens this argument. When the Organisation for Communist Action in Lebanon (OACL), as well as a few Maoist parties, also tried to mobilise peasants,[46] they received a warmer welcome in Sunni villages than in Alawi villages.[47] If Alawi peasants identified with Saghieh, it was because he was close to the Syrian line.[48]

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[44] Gilsenan, *Lords of the Lebanese marches*, pp. 26, 47.

[45] Abdallah, *al-sir'a al-ijtima'i fi 'akkar*, p. 116.

[46] Interview, Nahla Chahal, Beirut, June 2012.

[47] Nahla Chahal and her associates worked in Biré, a Sunni village, as well as Tall Hayat, an Alawi village. Interviewed retrospectively in June 2012, Chahal said: "We did not receive the same welcome in Alawi villages. I do not know if the communal belonging played a part or not".

[48] Interview, Nahla Chahal, Beirut, June 2012.

The growing support for the peasant movements was perceived by Sunni landlords as a communal mobilisation and made them look towards the state to protect them from bands of Alawi peasants armed by Damascus. Sunni peasants found support among Palestinians in Nahr al-Bared and Beddawi, and began to mobilise in favour of the Palestinian resistance, which, at certain points, would have put them in opposition to Syria's strategy in Lebanon. Similar polarisations between Alawis and Sunnis in Tripoli began in Tripoli a few years later.

The rise of Ali Eid and the Alawi Youth Movement

The Alawis in Tripoli numbered approximately 20,000.[49] They were poor, and most settled in Bab al-Tebbaneh, the most affordable area. Most lived on the upper side, called Jabal Drawish or Jabal Mohsen. Like other residents in Bab al-Tebbaneh, Alawis worked at the vegetable market, the wheat souq, the factories in Bahsas or at the port in al-Mina.[50]

Alawis and Sunnis in Bab al-Tebbaneh belonged to the same social strata and until the early 1970s, were part of the same political realm as the Sunnis in Tripoli. Alawis were often business associates with Sunnis, and intermarriages were relatively common.[51] Class was initially the driving force behind political action in Tebbaneh.[52] However, when it came to obtaining official positions within the state, Alawis had to convert to Sunnism to have the chance to hold an official function. In the late 1960s, with the consolidation of the Alawi in power in Damascus, Lebanese Alawis began to look to Syria for political support.[53] Some adhered to pro-Syrian political groups, such as the Lebanese branch of the Syrian Ba'ath Party.

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[49] Kramer, *Shi'ism, Resistance, and revolution*, p. 248.

[50] Interview, Nahla Chahal, Beirut, June 2012.

[51] Mustafa Allouche, an MP of the 2005-2009 period, for instance, is from a joint Alawi-Sunni family.

[52] Abi Samra, *Tripoli*, p. 98.

[53] Interview, Nahla Chahal, Beirut, June 2012.

In 1972, a group of Alawi young professionals created a movement campaigning for political rights for Lebanese Alawis, the Alawi Youth Movement (*harakat al-shabiba al-alawiyya*). [54] Its two main claims were Alawi representation in parliament (at least one seat) and naturalisation of 20,000 Alawi workers who had migrated from Syria.[55] Ali Eid, an Alawi from Jabal Mohsen, soon became President of the society. Eid's grandfather had emigrated from Syria and opened a large shop in Tripoli's wheat souq. Eid travelled to the US to study, married an American woman and had a daughter, but was expelled the same year because he committed a crime.[56] He returned to Lebanon and studied political science at the AUB. He claimed to have been inspired by US civil rights movements, and considered the Alawis in Lebanon to be in a position similar to the blacks in the US.[57]

In 1972, Ali Eid was stabbed with a knife in the back by a Saudi prince, during a night out, and hospitalised.[58] Eid was close to President Sleiman Frangié, who arranged for Prime Minister Sa'ib Salam to strike a deal between Eid and the Saudi prince according to which the prince paid a large sum of money to Ali Eid to get his agreement to withdraw charges.[59] Eid consolidated his ties with the Salam and Frangié families and became close to Frangié's son, Tony. The latter supplied Eid with weapons, which originated from Syria.[60] Salam and Frangié sought to split Tripoli's political scene and weaken Rashid Karami, their political enemy.[61] Frangié also introduced Aid to the Asads. It cannot be ruled out that the patronage

[54] Interview, Badr Wannous, Tripoli, June 2012.

[55] Richard, *Lutte populaire armée*, p. 188.

[56] Interview, Badr Wannous, Tripoli, June 2012.

[57] This is written on his Wikipedia page, in itself a eulogy to Ali Eid, probably written by one of Eid's close aids upon his own instructions. It gives an idea of how Eid wishes others to look at him.

[58] Interview, Ahmad Karami, Tripoli, June 2012.

[59] The sum was between 400 and 500 thousand dollars according to Ahmad Karami and Badr Wannous.

[60] Interview, Badr Wannous, Tripoli, June 2012.

[61] Interview, Badr Wannous, Tripoli, June 2012.

of the Frangié family for Eid, constituted an exchange of service, after Frangié had received help of various types from Syria in the late 1950s onwards.[62]

With the financial power of Ali Eid, the Alawi Youth Movement soon became a tool for the Eid family to control the Alawi community in Tripoli. Eid put his own family in all its positions.[63] Moreover, Sa'ib Salam, Prime Minister and Interior Minister, who had given it official authorisation, came to Tripoli and celebrated the official launch of the society.

Musa al-Sadr, the Asad regime, and Tripoli

From initially being close to Frangié, Ali Eid soon developed contacts with the Syrian regime. This occurred after Eid organised large protests against Shi'i cleric Musa Sadr, the Chairman of Lebanon's Supreme Islamic Shiite Council (SISC). Eid's opposed Sadr's ambition to put the personal status codes of the Lebanese Alawi community under the jurisdiction of the SISC. In 1973, Sadr issued a fatwa that Alawism was a part of Shi'i Islam. Although Lebanese Alawis were *de jure* under the jurisdiction of the Sunni-dominated Supreme Islamic Shari'a Council, the sect had *de facto* obtained autonomy in internal affairs under the French. Since they were part of the same tribes as the Syrian Alawis, they referred to Alawi religious shaykhs in Syria on important communal matters.

Alawi traditional tribal and religious shaykhs in Syria proper were initially reluctant to give Sadr jurisdiction over Lebanon's Alawis,[64] but priorities changed in early 1973, after Sunni protests swept through Syrian cities against Hafiz al-Asad's assumption of the presidency, the first non-Sunni to hold the post. The Syrian President needed an external authority, preferably a Twelver Shi'i cleric, to boost his regime's Islamic credentials. During a public ceremony in July 1973 in Tripoli, al-Sadr, in his official function as chairman of the SISC, appointed a Lebanese Alawi to the position of Twelver Mufti of Tripoli and Northern Lebanon.

[62] Mohamed Abi Samra, *Tripoli*, p. 100. A famour rumour has it that Frangié met Assad in Qardaha in 1957, when he fled after a massacre in Miziara, near Zghorta, which killed several dozens.

[63] Interview, Badr Wannous, Tripoli, June 2012.

[64] Martin Kramer, *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1987, p. 246.

A delegation of Syrian Alawi religious shaykhs endorsed the move with their presence.

The Alawi Youth Movement opposed al-Sadr, arguing that Alawis should gain separate legal recognition, independent of the Twelver Shi'is. The society mobilised in the days before al-Sadr's arrival in Tripoli. Tensions in the streets of Tripoli ran high, and roadblocks were set up.[65] Rifa'at al-Asad visited Tripoli to mediate and convinced Eid that Syrian patronage would protect the Alawis in Lebanon.[66] Al-Sadr was obliged to issue a "clarification" in which he declared that SISC's aim had been not to absorb the Alawis into the Ja'afari sect but to provide them with "a service they lacked", that is, communal tribunals.[67]

Rifa'at al-Asad had been recommended to Eid by Tony Frangié, son of President Sleiman Frangié and a close personal friend of Rifa'at's. Eid soon gained strong support from Rifa'at and Jamil al-Asad, who were developing the Ali Murtada organisation in Syria against the Muslim Brotherhood.[68] Rifa'at sent one of his three sons, Ribal, to Tripoli to help his ally.[69] Eid gained access to important funds, which enabled him to expand his clientele in Jabal Mohsen. By 1976, Eid had become the symbol of the Syrian regime in Tripoli. He married a Syrian Alawi from Safita, and travelled regularly to Tartus.[70] When he had a son in 1977, he named him, coincidentally or not, Rifa'at. When Syria turned against the Palestinians in the spring of 1976, Eid remained a Syrian protégée. The Syrian intervention led to a worsening of the Alawi-Sunni conflict. While all other political parties were banned, Eid was given large concessions and developed his presence in Tripoli.

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[65] Kramer, *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution*, pp. 246, 248.

[66] Interview, Badr Wannous, Tripoli, June 2012.

[67] Kramer, *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution*, p. 246.

[68] Interview, Badr Wannous, Tripoli, June 2012; Seurat, *L'État de barbarie*, p. 138.

[69] Interview, Ignace Leverrier, Paris, October 2013.

[70] Interview, Badr Wannous, Tripoli, June 2012.

Strains in the Palestino-Syrian relations: North Lebanon as an example

During an offensive in April 1976, prior to the June Syrian intervention, the Palestinian-Progressive coalition [71] forces in Tripoli struck Jabal Mohsen and destroyed several houses, including Eid's.[72] This forced many of Tripoli's Alawis to leave Jabal Mohsen and abandon their houses, and many went to Syria. [73] The strike targeted Eid because he allied with Syria, and also occurred in a context of strikes against Syrian allies, Sa'iqa and PFLP-GC,[74] but was framed by Eid as an attack against the Alawis as a community.

Eid used the event as a casus belli and began to argue that the Alawis needed to protect themselves militarily. Alawis became increasingly fearful for their existence in Tripoli, and many began to leave other areas in Tripoli to settle in Jabal Mohsen, which became a sectarian sanctuary.[75] The attack also worsened relations between Sunnis in Bab al-Tebbaneh and Alawis in Jabal Mohsen, since men from Tebbaneh supported Fatah in the attack.[76]

The impact of the Syrian intervention on Sunni militancy in Tripoli

Rashid Karami and other Sunni institutional leaders welcomed the entry in June 1976 of the Syrian army to Lebanon to re-stabilise Lebanon. Karami developed close bonds to Syria. The same was true for many of Tripoli's merchants and notables, who developed friendships and close economic and political bonds to officers of the Syrian army. Tripoli's left-wing parties, on the other hand, opposed the entry of the Syrian army into Lebanon as a bid to crush PLO. The Syrian army outlawed all political parties, with the exception of the SSNP. All the left-wing parties, including the 24 October movement, the strongest local militia, decided to

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[71] Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, pp. 384-385.

[72] Interview, Nasser Kalawoun, London, March 2012.

[73] Abi Samra, *Tripoli*, p. 103.

[74] Interview, Nasser Kalawoun, London, March 2012.

[75] Abi Samra, *Tripoli*, p. 101.

[76] Interview, Badr Wannous, Tripoli, June 2012; interview, Ahmad Karami, Tripoli, June 2012.

withdraw without a battle.[77] The PLO left Tripoli and settled its forces in the nearby Palestinian camps, Beddawi and Nahr al-Bared. Other activists stopped their activities and went underground.

The Iraqi Ba'ath party became one of the heaviest Syrian targets in 1978. Ghassan Salamé wrote in 1991 that Syria in its regional policy was driven more by the rivalry with Iraq than by Arab nationalism and the Palestinian cause.[78] The Tripoli case shows that, although the overall cause for the Syrian intervention into Lebanon was to avoid breakdown of the Lebanese state and thus a direct confrontation with Israel, Syria's entry into Lebanon assisted it in crushing its own geopolitical enemies. An illustration of the Asad regime's sectarian policies in Tripoli was that unlike Abd al-Majid al-Rafa'i, the Sunni head of the Lebanese branch of the Iraqi Ba'th, whose house was destroyed and who was forced into exile,[79] Dr. Khodr, an Alawi cadre of the Iraqi Ba'ath party in Tripoli, was not arrested or targeted, but co-opted and moved to Jabal Mohsen[80]

Jund Allah, the largest Islamist militia in Tripoli at the time, took pains to appease Syria. The group stopped all activity between the entry of Syrian troops in 1976 and until 1978.[81] In 1978, Jund Allah leader Fawaz Agha was arrested by the Syrian intelligence and held for 40 days. When released, he was forced to give up his weapons and cease his political activities. This event coincided with the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon, and Jund Allah was allowed to send combatants to defend the south.[82] This helped Jund Allah gain new legitimacy, access to centres of military training in the south, and contacts with Fatah, which began to send weapons and money.[83] By 1979 Jund Allah had become a well-developed group, with military activities in South Lebanon, religious training, a dispensary and a sports club. Although the PLO formally realigned with Syria in 1979, Jund Allah

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[77] Richard, *Lutte populaire armée*, pp. 164-165.

[78] Salamé, "The Levant after Kuwait", p. 27.

[79] Interview, Abdel-Majid al-Rafa'i, Tripoli, May 2010, Paris, October 2012.

[80] Abi Samra, *Tripoli*, p. 101.

[81] Interview, Kana'an Naji, cited in: *al-Shir'a.*

[82] Richard, *Lutte populaire armée*, pp. 283-284.

[83] Richard, *Lutte populaire armée*, p. 284.

began to oppose Syria. [84] The opposition became more and more pronounced, and in 1981, Jund Allah had gained enough strength to expel the Syrians from their positions in Abi Samra.

The Creation of the Arab Democratic Party

The entry of the Syrian-dominated ADF facilitated the penetration of a strong contingent of Syrian intelligence agents in Lebanon. In Tripoli, it took the Communist Action Organizatin's former office at the American School in Jabal Mohsen as its headquarters. From the Syrian side, protecting the Alawis was subordinate to the fact that[85] Jabal Mohsen was a strategic place on a hill and at a distance from the Lebanese army HQ in Qubbeh. Moreover, because Alawis had left their houses subsequent to the attack on Jabal Mohsen, there were many vacant houses. Syrian forces moved in to control these areas. The choice of Jabal Mohsen was perceived by many Tripolitanians as a sign that the Syrian regime was pursuing a sectarian policy in Lebanon.[86] Eid returned to Tripoli with the Syrian forces, and rebuilt his house where it had been, as a challenge to his political enemies.[87] The Arab Youth Movement in Jabal Mohsen developed into a militia, the Red Knights, under Syrian control.

In June 1981, Eid and certain other Syrian allies created the Arab Democratic Party (ADP).[88] The party had no obvious Alawi appearance. Nassib al-Khatib, the Sunni lawyer from South Lebanon, was elected President, and Rashed al-

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[84] One day the Syrians arrested nearly 2000 persons. "We had no choice, but to combat tyranny", a Jund Allah members explained. Cited in: Richard, *Lutte populaire armée*, p. 285.

[85] Interview, Nasser Qalawoun, London, March 2012.

[86] Seurat, "Le quartier de Bab Tebbané", pp. 241, 254, 265, 267; Interview, Badr Wannous, Tripoli, June 2012.

[87] Interview, Ahmad Karami, Tripoli, June 2012.

[88] Al-hizb al-'arabi al-dimiqrati yakhtatim mu'tamirahu b'intikhab Rashed al-Muqaddem aminan 'aman' ["the Arab Democratic Party concludes its conference electing Rashid al-Muqaddem Secretary General", *al-Safir*, 16/6/1981.

Muqaddem, a Sunni from Tripoli, became Secretary-General.[89] Yet, de facto power within the ADP lay with Eid and his patron, Rifaʿat al-Asad. ADP's Alawi character became more avowed in 1985, when al-Khatib was replaced with Eid. Al-Khatib was assassinated the following year.

Proxy battle between Tebbaneh and Jabal Mohsen (1979-1982)

Bab al-Tebbaneh was one of the few areas in Tripoli where the Syrian army was not immediately heavily deployed. The strength of the Popular Resistance, a local social and military group, led by a young local charismatic leader, Khalil Akkawi, hindered the Syrian troops' entry there.[90] Yet, growing pressure from Syrian intelligence centred in Jabal Mohsen forced the group to demobilise.[91] A wave of arrests began, and some activists were found assassinated. Akkawi went into hiding in Beddawi under the PLO's protection.[92] Those, who remained in Bab al-Tebbaneh stopped their activities, for fear of arrest and assassination.

Despite the end of open fighting, relations between pro-Syrian and Fatah-affiliated Palestinian groups remained tense. Kidnappings and assassinations targeted prominent communist, Iraqi Baʿathist and Popular Resistance leaders.[93] The civilian population suffered from siege and electricity- and water cuts. Barricades were set up in the poor quarters. People in Tebbaneh were threatened by snipers located in Jabal Mohsen, and many were arrested or attacked by the Syrian forces. The situation led to a growing anti-Syrian climate. The leader of the new anti-Syrian mobilisation was Saʿid Shʿaban, an Islamic religious preacher and former member of al-Jamaʿa al-Islamiyya (JI), the Lebanese branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. He became increasingly popular because of his violent denunciations of the Syrian presence. Resentment was directed against Eid. With the help of the

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[89] "Iʿalan wiladat al-hizb al-ʿarabi al-dimoqrati*"* ("Announcement of the birth of the Arab Democratic Party"), *al-Nahar* (Beirut), 15/6/1981.

[90] Seurat, "Le quartier de Bab Tebbané à Tripoli (Liban)",.

[91] Richard, *Lutte populaire armée*, pp. 168-169.

[92] Abi Samra, *Trablus*, p. 95.

[93] Abi Samra, *Tripoli*, pp. 103-104

Syrian intelligence, Eid took control of state infrastructure in Tripoli and important sources of material wealth. Arafat-sympathisers in Bab al-Tebbaneh increasingly began to see him as a puppet of the Syrian intelligence machine. The rise of Jabal Mohsen as an Alawi communal ghetto worried people in Tripoli, who also felt that the Syrian army was partisan in local conflicts and that its presence tilted the internal balances of power in Tripoli.[94]

The first instance of heavy fighting between Arafat-supporters in Bab al-Tebbaneh and Alawis in Jabal Mohsen broke out in the spring of 1979, following the withdrawal of the last non-Syrian contingents from the ADF. Many Sunni movements, including Jund Allah supported the Popular Resistance. Syria was involved in the confrontation yet officially insisted that it was doing nothing other than carrying out its mandate from the Arab countries, i.e., to separate between fighting forces, repress militias, and end the civil war".[95]

The Popular Resistance fought against what it perceived to be a Syrian occupation, and defended what it saw as the integrity, honour and collective memory of Tripoli as a "combative city state".[96] The fighting between Eid's group and the Popular Resistance initially occurred in spite of, and not because of, alliances at the regional level.[97] Despite the rapprochement which occurred between Fatah and Syria against Egypt in late 1977 (see above), Hafiz al-Asad and Fatah chairman Yasser Arafat were never allies. They competed for the control over the Palestinian cause. Arafat pursued a double strategy vis-à-vis Syria. He granted concessions to Asad but maintained relations with Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Sadat's Egypt.[98] Syria accused Arafat of hindering a common Arab front against Egypt, and being fooled by the US administration and gave full backing to Arafat's rivals within the PLO. With the late 1970s outbreak of the Muslim

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[94] Sayigh, *Armed struggle*, p. 412.

[95] Abi Samra, *Tripoli*, p. 104.

[96] Seurat, "Le quartier de Bab Tebbané", p. 242, 251, 254.

[97] Sayigh, *Armed struggle*, p. 520.

[98] Sayigh, *Armed struggle*, p. 507.

Brotherhood insurgency in Syria, Asad also accused Arafat of sheltering fugitive Brotherhood fighters in the Palestinian camps in North Lebanon.[99]

Tripoli became a microcosm of the Syrian-Palestinian rivalry. The city was a confined social space, where damaging ripple effects of local battles could be managed relatively easily. Thus, Asad and Arafat were partners at the regional and national Lebanese level, but in Tripoli Fatah backed the Popular Resistance movement, while the Syrian regime continued to prop up Ali Eid.[100] Fighting between Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tebbaneh escalated in July 1981, and intermittent heavy clashes and car bombs caused over a hundred casualties during the year preceding the Israeli 1982 invasion.

As the Syrian regime and Arafat both invested politically in Tripoli, Bab al-Tebbaneh's struggle increasingly became part of the broader regional conflict.[101] The conflict was at the time not sectarian. One of the Popular Resistance field commanders, Samir al-Hassan, was Alawi and fought alongside Akkawi against Eid.[102] The front line of Syria Street, which divided the two quarters, was used by external actors as a means to send messages, and the dynamics were understood as such.[103]

Syrian motivations in North Lebanon

In this section, three hypotheses on the Asad regime's motivations in North Lebanon will be tested. First, it will be argued that Syria considered North Lebanon a high risk-area because of the rise of Islamist movements in Tripoli after 1982. Second, it will be asked whether the Asad regime had a specific antipathy towards Sunni Muslims, which made it seek alliances to counter the influence of Sunni leaders. Thirdly, it will be argued that North Lebanon became a centre of a Syrian-dominated informal economy.

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[99] Sayigh, *Armed struggle*, p. 507.

[100] Seurat, « Le quartier de Bab al-Tebbané », p. 148.

[101] Interview, Azzam Ayubi, Tripoli, February 2009.

[102] Interview, Mustafa Allouche, Tripoli, June 2009.

[103] Seurat, *l'État de barbarie*, p. 255.

The Syrian opposition to the Tawhid movement

In September 1982, in the wake of the Israeli invasion and the PLO evacuation from Beirut a new Islamist militia, the Islamic Tawhid movement (*Harakat al-Tawhid al-Islami*), emerged in Tripoli. The movement was created by the unification of three movements: the Popular Resistance, Esmat Mrad's Arab Lebanon movement, and shaykh Sa'id Sh'aban and his supporters. The Popular Resistance and the Arab Lebanon Movement were Maoist movements close to Fatah, in particular to Fatah's Student Squad. Both Akkawi and Mrad had recently turned towards Islam, as a means to become closer to the ideology of the people they sought to mobilise.[104] Because they lacked Islamic credentials, they turned towards Shaykh Sa'id Sh'aban and asked him to become their public face. Jund Allah joined Tawhid three months later, and gave additional Islamic legitimacy to the movement.

Tawhid is often described as a movement supported by Iran, but recent empirical research indicates that Iran supported shaykh Sa'id Sh'aban more than Tawhid as such.[105] Other leaders within Tawhid, Mrad and Akkawi in particular, were closer to Fatah than to Iran (although Akkawi travelled three times to Iran before he was killed).[106] Tawhid fought on Fatah's side in the Syrian-Palestinian war in Autumn 1983. When Fatah evacuated, it left its weapons with Tawhid and this facilitated a further Tawhid takeover of Tripoli. Tawhid waged battles against the Iraqi Ba'ath party and killed several dozen members of the communist party. It declared the creation of an Islamic emirate, imposed its own preachers to teach religion in public and private schools and created a morality police. The Syrian army besieged Tripoli but let Tawhid retain power. In September 1985, the

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[104] Nicolas Dot Pouillard, *De Pékin à Tehran, en regardant vers Jérsualem: La singulière conversion à l'islamisme des "Maos du Fatah"*, Cahiers de l'Institut Religioscope (Friburg, Switzerland), 2, December 2008, p. 33.

[104] Dot Pouillard, *De Pékin à Tehran* pp. 20-21; Manfred Sing, "Brothers in Arms.", pp. 20-28; and Erik Fosse, *Med Livet i hendene,* p. 76; Interview, Erik Fosse, Oslo, 7 March 2014.

[105] Interview, Azzam Ayubi, Tripoli, February 2009; Interview, Abu Daoud (Esmat Mrad's brother), Tripoli, June 2012.

[106] Interview, Nahla Chahal, Tripoli, July 2010.

communist party, the SSNP and other secularist parties, bolstered by Syrian support, gave an ultimatum to Tawhid, where they demanded to be allowed to return to Tripoli. A 21-day battle ended with an armistice signed in Damascus, the Damascus II agreement. Although Syria was a party to the conflict, Abdel-Halim Khaddam publically fronted himself as a mediator.

According to the Damascus II Agreement, Tawhid gave up their weapons and control of the city to the internal security forces (i.e. Syrian intelligence) in return for impunity. The agreement was not respected by Syria. Large waves of arrest of Tawhid members ensued. The first Tawhid leader to be assassinated was Khalil Akkawi, killed at a Syrian roadblock in February 1986. Others killed in the same period included Abd al-Karim al-Biddawi, a cadre and shayhk of Jund Allah[107] and Abu Rabi'a al-Kurdiyyeh, an al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya [JI] member who had played a prominent role in the battle against the Syrian army in 1985. Many of those killed were of the Maoist-Islamist line, and had been part of Fatah's Student Brigade.[108] The killings and assassinations led to the flight of most Tawhid first- and second-rank leaders from Tripoli.

In December 1986, former Tawhid members attempted an "Intifada" in Tripoli, and attacked and killed 15 Syrian soldiers at a checkpoint in Bab al-Tebbaneh.[109] This led to a strong Syrian reaction. On 21 and 22 December 1986, Syrian troops sealed off Tebbaneh, while Ali Eid's Alawi Red Knight militia and Tareq Fakhr al-Din's Tripoli resistance went into the district and committed the killings.[110] At least 200 people were killed, though the actual number of deaths was never established.

Although Syria affirmed that those who died were "those who had put up resistance during armed clashes",[111] eyewitness reported that most of those killed

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[107] Ali Shandab, "Shaykh Hashim Minqara in a first interview after his release from prison", *al-Jamahir*, 5 December 2000.

[108] Interview, Abu Daoud, Tripoli, June 2012.

[109] Interview, Nahla Chahal, Tripoli, August 2009; "Summary killings by Syrian forces in Tripoli", Amnesty International Newsletter entry, April 1987; "Lebanon: Arbitrary arrests, 'disappearances' and extrajudicial executions by Syrian troops and Syrian-backed forces in Tripoli", 4 March 1987, International Secretariat.

[110] *Ibid.*

[111] *Ibid.*

were civilians, political supporters and/or family members of Khalil Akkawi's. They were executed in front of their homes during the night, often in their pyjamas. Machine-guns, rocket-propelled grenades and tanks were used in the house-to-house search operations throughout the district. One of the first persons killed was the father of Riyadh al-Rifa'i, a religious shaykh. The Syrian army went to his house and asked his wife who to kill, the father or the son.[112] Most families in Tebbaneh had someone of their households who died or disappeared during the massacre. In total, several hundred people were reported "missing". An unknown number of people are still kept in Syrian jails. Although members of Tareq Fakhr al-Din's Tripoli resistance were working class Sunni Muslims who had joined for money, the massacre went down in the collective memory of Sunni Tripolitanians as one committed by the Alawi leader Ali Eid and the Syrian regime against the Sunnis. Unlike the Sabra and Shatila massacre, in which the killings had little potential political and military gains – since the PLO commandos had already left Lebanon, the massacre in Tebbaneh was part of a broader strategy of political domination.[113] During and following the massacre the Syrian army took control of Tebbaneh. Another aim was to create enmity between Sunnis in Tebbaneh and Alawis in Jabal Mohsen. Since Eid's Red Knights militia had played an important role in the massacre, Alawis began to feel more vulnerable and more dependent on Syria for their survival.

The impact of the Syrian civil war (1976-1982) on Tripoli
Tripoli was also affected by the armed confrontation within Syria pitting the Asad regime against Sunni Muslim opposition members from Homs, Hama, and Aleppo. This also explained the Syrian attempts to control Tripoli. After a massacre in April 1981 in Aleppo, clashes between Sunnis and Alawis within the Syrian army stationed in Lebanon were reported.[114] Publications by the Syrian Muslim

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[112] Interview, Omar Salamé, August 2009.

[113] For an analysis of the Sabra and Shatila massacre, see Hanf, *Co-existence in Wartime Lebanon*, p. 268.

[114] Carré and Seurat, *Les frères musulmans*, p. 171. The clashes mirrored similar army infighting between the 47th brigade and Rifa'at al-Assad's Defence Brigades within Syria.

Brotherhood (MB), which described Alawis as inheritors of a long history of plots and subversion against Muslims, stretching from the sacking of the Ka'aba by the Qarmates in the 9th century until the loss of the Golan in 1967, were distributed in Tripoli.[115] Nasheeds (songs) supportive of the struggle of the Syrian MB found their way to Tripoli, where they were played by sympathising Islamic activists. The Aleppean famous nasheed singer Mohamed Abu Ratib, who was affiliated with the Syrian MB and wrote many anti-Asad songs, dedicated one song to "the battle for Tripoli" against Syria and the massacre in Bab al-Tebbaneh. This was a way to link the two struggles and portray them as one.

After the sacking of Hama in 1982, some dozens of Syrian Ikhwan came to Tripoli fleeing persecution in Syria.[116] Approximately ten were from the Fighting Vanguard.[117] This occurred because of the close and persistent contact between the Lebanese Jamaa Islamiya (JI) and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and more generally between the population in North Lebanon and the Syrian hinterland. Yet, as Salim Allouche, a former coordinator of JI's political office in North Lebanon pointed out in an interview (February 2009), their number was exaggerated for political reasons. It provided the Syrian regime a justification to impose stronger political control on Tripoli. Allouche argued that there were no more than 50 such fugitives in Tripoli, who all arrived in Lebanon as separate individuals. Azzam Ayubi, currently leader of JI's politbureau, estimated the number to be 200.[118] Both emphasised that the refugees were second and third rank members. Syrian Ikhwan leaders almost exclusively fled to Amman, where the Brotherhood's leadership relocated after it was declared illegal in 1980. Sojourns in Syrian-controlled Lebanon were complicated for Syrian members of the opposition.

While individual JI members may have supported the quest of the Sunni Muslim majority in Syria,[119] JI as an organisation was not involved in the conflict.

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[115] Carré and Seurat, *Les frères musulmans*, pp. 174-176.

[116] Interview, Azzam al-Ayubi, Tripoli, February 2009.

[117] *Ibid..*

[118] *Ibid..*

[119] For instance, Abdallah Babitti, the local coordinator of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya in Tripoli during the war, stated in 1984: "the overwhelming Muslim majority in Tripoli, is eager to keep its religion

JI opposed the fight pursued by the Syrian MBs in the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s and did not act as a "Syrian MB auxiliary".[120] JI was organisationally tied to the MB network, but had from the outset chosen a more pragmatic political strategy than the Syrian and Egyptian Brotherhoods. Shaykhs in Lebanon considered that the Syrian MB had a "simplistic and idealistic style". The fact that the Islamist uprising failed in Syria demonstrated that it could never work in Lebanon, because of the plural Lebanese society.[121] Tawhid's war against the Syrian regime was distinct from the Syrian MB's confrontation against the same regime. The war in Bab al-Tebbaneh against the Syrian army and Ali Eid's Arab Democratic Party were expressions of Yasser Arafat's war against the Syrian regime. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, the PLO, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq had a common adversary in Syria, and this common interest united them.[122]

Tripoli's Salafis and the Syrian regime

Salafism had first gained a foothold in Tripoli when a generation of students of religion from Tripoli travelled to the Islamic University of Medina in the 1980s. Once their studies were completed, they returned to their hometown and established Shar'ia Institutes. Salafi ideology was not "imported" to Lebanon without modifications, but adapted to the Lebanese social reality. Da'i al-Shahal calls himself the "founder of Salafism"in Lebanon". [123] He studied in Saudi Arabia between 1980 and 1984 and returned to Tripoli and opened the Guidance and Well-doing Institute (*al-hidaya wa'l-ihsan*) in 1988.[124] Al-Shahal quickly rose to become the most prominent Salafi cleric in Tripoli. He directed five Islamic institutes in

and Islamic moral. Tripolitanians were therefore 'supportive of having an Islamic country as a neighbour'." *Al-Shir'a*, p. 197.

[120] Interview, Fathy Yakan, Tripoli, April 2008.

[121] Interview, Mohamed Khodr, reformist (moderate) Salafis shaykh, Tripoli, February 2009.

[122] Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, pp. 485, 487. Lefèvre, *Ashes of Hama*, p. 131.

[123] While Da'i al-Islam al-Shahal always uses this title and non-Salafis refer to him as such, the title is disputed by al-Shahal's Salafi rivals in Lebanon. The latter claim that Salafism is a current of thought – and not an organised movement.

[124] The institution obtained authorisation from the Lebanese state in 1990. Interview, Da'i al-Islam al-Shahal, Tripoli, April 16, 2008.

Lebanon and administrated the "Guidance radio", and large welfare projects in Sunni regions in Lebanon.[125]

The centre received funding from many of the large Islamic charities in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar.[126] Most of the Saudi funds were channelled through the al-Haramayn institution (*mu'assassat al-haramayn*), one of the largest Saudi charities, which closed down in 2004, after US pressure.[127] Although the institution was close to the Saudi state 'Ulama and the monarchy, it was also known to fund more politicised Salafists abroad. This reflected Saudi Arabia's willingness to counterbalance Iran's funding to Shi'a Islamists. Another important sponsor was the Kuwaiti Ahya al-Turath association, which funded al-Shahal for three or four years.[128]

The Guidance and Well-Doing Institute educated most Salafi high school graduates in Lebanon and employed a large number of the returnees from the Islamic University of Medina. The teaching staff included graduates from the Islamic University of Medina, such as Ra'ed Hlayhel, Mohamed Khodr, and shaykh Ahmad, a Palestinian from Nahr al-Bared. Another teacher, Safwan al-Zu'abi, was a businessman who had studied Arabic literature for two years and only studied Shar'ia at the local mosques.[129] There were also other teachers with future bonds to the global Jihadi movement, including Nabil Rahim, arrested in 2008, accused of being second-in-command of "al-Qaida and Fatah al-Islam" in Lebanon and the coordinator between Jihadists in Lebanon and actors in the global

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[125] *Ibid.*. Sa'ud al-Mawla, "al-Salafiyyun fi lubnan. Al-ta'arjuh bayn al-d 'awa wa'l-silah" (The Salafists in Lebanon. Fluctuating between the Da'awa and weapons"), *al-Jazeera report*, 15 November 2012, http://studies.aljazeera.net/reports/2012/11/2012111593541563647.htm (accessed November 2012).

[126] Interview, Da'i al-Islam al-Shahal, Tripoli, April 16, 2008.

[127] Pall, *Salafism in Lebanon*, p. 120.

[128] Interview, Safwan al-Zu'abi, Tripoli, February 2009. For more on Ahya al-Turath al-Islami, see Carine Lahoud, Islam et politique au Koweït, Paris. PUF, 2011, p. 138; Zoltan Pall, *Lebanese Salafis betweeen the Gulf and Europe. Development, Fractionalization and Transnational Networks of Salafism in Lebanon*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013, pp. 87-89.

[129] Interview, Safwan al-Zu'abi, Tripoli, February 2009.

Jihadi network.[130] Another teacher, Omar al-Y'ali, was a former member of the Tabligh society, who developed close bonds to Lebanese Salafi Jihadis in the Diaspora and in Ayn al-Helweh.[131]

In 1996 the Guidance and Well-Doing Institute was closed down by a decision of the Lebanese Interior Minister Michel al-Murr, for "inciting confessional hatred" (*na'arat taifiyya*).[132] Four employees of the institute, including al-Shahal's brother, were jailed for two months.[133] The decision was based on the paragraph in a book used in the Institute's curriculum, entitled *Contemporary Branches Belonging to Islam and the Declarations of Position of Islam towards These.* The book was written by a Saudi scholar and member of the teaching council (*hi'at al-tadris*) at the Islamic University in Medina.[134] A chapter on the Alawis (*nusayriyyun*),[135] reproduced in one the Guidance and Well-Doing Institute's textbooks, not only described the sect as apostates but indicated that the Syrian regime was in secret agreement with the Israeli government on the Golan question.[136] The introductory paragraph of the chapter on the Alawis read:

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[130] "The police surprised him in an apartment in Abi Samra, where he had been hiding for eleven months. The Second in command in al-Qaida is arrested" (in Arabic) ("dahamathu al-shurat fi shaqa fi trablus, heithu tawara 11 shahran. Tawqi al-rajul al-theni li'l-qa'ida fi'lubnan"), *al-Hayat* (London), January 11, 1008, http://www.alhayat.com/arab_news/levant_news/01-2008/Item-20080110-653d0b38-c0a8-10ed-01ae-81ab43198e43/story.html (accessed April 2008). Rahim was released in July 2011.

[131] Rougier, *Le Jihad au quotidien*, p. 212.

[132] The decision was made after a complaint filed by the al-Ahbash group to the ISF. The group's leader, Nizar al-Halabi, had been assassinated by Salafi Jihadis from Ayn al-Helweh in August 1995.

[133] Interview, Ra'ed Hlayhel, February 2009. Hlayhel was one of those arrested.

[134] Dr Ghalib bin Awaji, *Firaq mu'asira tantasib ila al-islam wa'bayan mawqif al-islam minha.* The book was published in Jedda by *al-maktabat al-'asriiyya al-thahabiyya* (third edition in 2001). The latest edition of the book may be downloaded at https://uqu.edu.sa/files2/tiny_mce/plugins/filemanager/files/4290561/1/moon547.pdf (accessed May 2014).

[135] Nusayriyun, a derogatory term used for Alawis, refers to Ibn Nusayr, who separated from Twelver Shiism in the ninth century and founded the Alawi sect.

[136] Interview, Ra'ed al-Hlayhel, Tripoli, February 2009.

The Nusayris, as the others of the Esoteric sects are among the enemies of the Islamic doctrine […] The closest example of the positions of the Nusayris is what happens in Muslim areas in Syria and Lebanon, where they killed innocent men, women, and children; another is the alliance of the Alawis with Maronites and Khomeinists. The Alawis also encouraged tensions in the old days. While the Crusaders slaughtered Muslims […], they did not do so with the Alawis, but recognised their holy book. Alawis create fitna because they lie in the same trenches as the enemies of Muslims against Muslims […]. Between the Alawis and the Jews there is love, and they concur on many principles. A certification of this fact came with the Six Day War as they call it. What happened during it is one of many indications on the positions and enmity of the Alawis towards Ahl al-Sunna […].[137]

Moreover, the same chapter directly mentioned the Hama massacre – stressing "we shall not forget Hama" and emphasised Ali Eid's role in "plotting" against Sunnis in Lebanon:

When the Nusayri Ali Eid set himself up as the leader of the Nusayri organisation in Tripoli, the owner of the Lebanese *al-Hawadith* magazine[138] paid attention to this and was killed by a plot of the Alawis. There are also many other examples indicating that the Alawis are not convinced of the appropriateness of their own sect.[139]

The book was used in courses at Saudi universities, including the Umm al-Qura University in Mecca in the 1990s and 2000s. This shows the difference between the Saudi Arabian and the Lebanese contexts, and, in particular, the red lines in Lebanon during the years of Syrian authoritarianism. Al-Shahal's official narrative

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[137] Awaji, *Contemporary Branches,* pp. 533-534. My translation.

[138] This paragraph refers to the killing of Salim al-Lawzi, a renowned Arab journalist and the owner of the Lebanese pro-Saudi *al-Hawadith* ("Events") magazine. Al-Lawzi was born in Tripoli, but moved to London in 1976 after receiving death threats. When he returned to Lebanon for his mother's funeral in February 1980, he was abducted by gunmen. Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament*, p. 2.

[139] Awaji, *Contemporary Branches,* p. 549. My translation.

of the closure of the Guidance and Well-Doing Institute was that it was a Syrian reaction to his growing strength. The growing popularity of the Salafi Da'awa had "irritated the Syrian regime", and made it realise that the presence of the Guidance and Well-Doing Institute was not in its interest:

The Syrian regime wanted the totality of the Islamic movements to be under its command and to work solely under its guidance. They want the Islamic movements to be an instrument (*wasat*) of the Syrian regime, as does the Ahbash and others. I was an unacceptable opponent (*mu'atarid ghayr shar'iy*). My doctrine, thoughts, and policies were against them. […] I did not enter into a conflict with the Syrians but doctrinally I am a Salafist and they are Nusayris. They don't believe in the religion. In the depth of their hearts, they have a "party spirit" (*ta'assub*) towards the Alawi sect and the Shias. [140]

In 2000, Da'i al-Shahal's name was mentioned in the indictment against the "Dinniyeh Group", which fought against the Lebanese army for six days in December 1999 and January 2000.[141] He fled Lebanon for Saudi Arabia and did not return until the men arrested in the Diniyyeh affair were pardoned and released in July 2005. Shortly after he had left Lebanon, al-Shahal was sentenced to death in absentia. Although the common interpretation is that the Guidance and Well-Doing Institute was closed down by the Syrians, because of the above-mentioned book, Bernard Rougier – the most established specialist on Salafism in Lebanon – has argued that according to the rumours at the time, al-Shahal diffused a tape with a sermon of Saudi oppositionist *alim*, Salman al-Awda on the Guidance and Well-Doing radio. The Saudi regime therefore asked the Lebanese authorities to close the Institute.[142] Although direct evidence that the Saudi Embassy was behind the closure is hard to find, the idea that Syria, at times, had interests in common with the Salafis was confirmed by the author's own empirical findings, detailed below.

When discussing the question of Salafism in Tripoli, it must not be forgotten than the rise of Salafism occurred simultaneously with the Syrian presence and that

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[140] Interview, Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal, Tripoli, April 2008.

[141] For a study, see Rougier, *Everyday Jihad*, pp. 229-265.

[142] Bernard Rougier, *L'Oumma en fragments*, p. 123. For a study of the Sahwa movement, see Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.

during Pax Syriana nothing could happen in Tripoli except with Syrian indirect endorsement. The presence of Da'i al-Shahal in Tripoli suited the Asad regime, because he called on his followers not to vote and thus helped weaken the clout of Rafiq Hariri and other representatives of Lebanese political Sunnism.[143] It also fragmented the religious scene and the influence of JI.[144] Although the JI leadership had accepted the Pax Syriana, not all its cadres and members in North Lebanon accepted all of Syria's practices. Khaled Daher, a JI parliamentarian who served between 1996 and 2000, was so vocal in his criticism that Syria vetoed his name in the 2000 parliamentary elections.[145]

Syria supported the rise of different strands of Salafism by "neglecting it". Many observers of the field of Islamism in Tripoli have pointed out that although al-Shahal always represented himself as someone persecuted during the Syrian period, his influence over Salafism in Tripoli was stronger in the 1990s than after he returned in 2005.[146] Al-Shahal, like all other institutional actors at the time, was obliged to interact with the Syrian intelligence[147] and became "indirectly supported by the Syrian security services".[148] Perceptions were often more important in politics than reality – and the closure of the institute was framed in the post-2005 period as a result of *Syrian* repression. The closure of the institute made is possible for Da'i al-Shahhal to make the Salafis look like victims of the Syrian intelligence services. This boosted al-Shahhal's credibility among anti-Syrian Lebanese Sunnis. Moreover, the idea that the Syrian army protected North Lebanon against Sunni Salafi Jihadi extremists was an argument that the Syrian regime used frequently in the 1990s. It became one of Syria's main arguments for maintaining a presence in Lebanon after Israel's unilateral withdrawal from South Lebanon in 2000.[149] The

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[143] Rougier, *l'Oumma en fragments*, pp. 72, 122-123.

[144] Interview, Salim Allouche, Tripoli, April 2008.

[145] Interview, Khaled Daher, Tripoli, April 2008, June 2012.

[146] Interview with shaykhs in Tripoli, 2008-2013; Rougier, *L'Oumma en fragments*, pp. 122-123.

[147] Interview, Salim Allouche, Tripoli, April 2008.

[148] Interview, Misbah Ahdab, Beirut, May 2010. The Syrian regime had also been behind the creation of other Islamist movements in Tripoli – such as al-Ahbash - and the Salafis and the Ahbash engaged in the 1990s in a war of attrition, which in turn strengthened Syria.

[149] On the impact of the Israeli withdrawal on Hizbullah, see Aurélie Daher, *Le Hizbullah. Mobilisation et pouvoir*, Paris: PUF, 2014, pp. 416-420, 241-243.

presence of Jihadi groups in North Lebanon created an image of Tripoli as a "cradle of terrorism", which justified the Syrian presence, especially vis-à-vis the West. [150] The Syrian regime could afford more ambivalence towards Sunni Islamists in Lebanon than within its own country.

The Salafi networks in Tripoli were autonomous and had their own leadership and support networks. It would be reductionist to reduce them to Syrian manipulation. Yet, Salafi youth did not always have a clear perception of the enemy. In the words of Nir Rosen: "the ideology of Jihad often seemed less important than the sheer will to fight – against whoever could be found".[151] Which target they finally chose depended on what those who provided them with weapons, money, and ammunition told them to do.[152] The Syrian intelligence agents were aware of this ambivalence and helped orient the activism of zealous Salafi youth in Lebanon and Syria towards targets associated with US imperialism, and away from targeting the Asad regime and its allies and *protégés*. This became even more evident after the US-led invasion of Iraq and the beginning of the Iraqi insurgency, when Damascus gave free passage to Salafi Jihadis who wanted to fight the Americans in Iraq. The Asad regime considered Salafis helpful in creating an anti-American atmosphere in Lebanon and Syria following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The policy continued after the Syrian withdrawal: Syria furnished vital birth-help to the nucleus of Fatah al-Islam, which fought the Lebanese army in the Palestinian camp of Nahr al-Bared in 2007. The group was created by former prisoners in Syria with the aim to create tensions within the Sunni community and hence weaken the political project of Saad Hariri.[153] Syria was therefore an arsonist

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[150] See, for instance, Hussein Ayyub, "What about Hizbullah, the fundamentalists, and the [Palestinian refugee] camps [in Lebanon] after the Syrian withdrawal?", *al-Safir*, 20 December 2004.

[151] Nir Rosen, "We run the road".

[152] Rougier, *L'Oumma en fragments*, pp. 104-106.

[153] The topic of the rise of Fatah al-Islam is outside the scope of this paper. For a study, see Rougier, *L'Oumma en fragments*, pp. 144-213 and Tine Gade, *Fatah al-Islam in Lebanon: Between Global and Local Jihad*, Kjeller: FFI-report, 2007, pp. 22-62. For a discussion of Fatah al-Islam after the battle of Nahr al-Barid, see Rougier, *L'Oumma en fragments*, pp. 213-221 and Bilal Y. Saab, "Lebanon at risk from Salafi-Jihadi terrorist cell", *CTC Sentinel*, 3 February 2010.

fire-fighter vis-à-vis radical Islamist groups in Lebanon. Thus, while Salafis emerged independently of Syrian manipulation, the Asad regime skilfully "neglected" Tripoli's Salafis in order to split the Sunni Islamist field and uphold "security vacuums" in Tripoli. Moreover, once the Salafi Jihadis were there, the Syrian regime was skilled at orienting Salafi violence against American and international targets, rather than against the Asad regime itself.

Did the Syrian regime have an anti-Sunni policy?

The Syrian tutelage, between 1976 and 2005, coincided with a loss of momentum for the Sunni political leaderships in Lebanon. A general crisis of political representation of the Sunni community in Lebanon began in the second half of the 1980s. There had traditionally not been specific political parties for Sunnis in Lebanon.[154] Sunnis were coreligionists of the Ottomans and saw themselves as a majority in the broader Arab Middle East. Political leaders of the Sunnis were notables and therefore usually not activist, although they supported the Palestinian cause. During the civil war, Sunnis in Lebanon had generally speaking not enrolled in sectarian militias. Sunni notables did not participate in the war, but were mediators, while the urban poor fought for the PLO in alliance with left-wingers from other Lebanese sects. An exception was the aforementioned Islamic Tawhid movement in Tripoli.

The crisis of political representation of Sunnis began with the evacuation of the PLO from Lebanon in the 1982-83 period. This weakened the Lebanese Sunni community relative to other Lebanese sects. The two exclusively Sunni militias in Lebanon, allied with Fatah, al-Murabitun in Beirut and Tawhid in Tripoli, were both crushed by Syria and its allies. Syria subsequently helped Hizbullah gain control of the frontline with Israel. After 1985, 90 per cent of the so-called resistance acts against Israel were Hizbullah's work.[155] Arab nationalism lost its

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[154] Albert Hourani, "Ideologies of the Mountain and the city", in Albert Hourani, *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East*, London: Macmillan, 1981, p. 177.

[155] Rougier, *Le jihad au quotidien*, pp. 49-52; "L'Islamisme sunnite face au Hezbollah", in Franck Mermier and Élisabeth Picard (eds.), *Liban. Une guerre de trente-trois jours*, Paris: La Découverte, 2007, pp. 111-119, p. 114; *L'Oumma en fragments. Contrôler le sunnisme au Liban*, Paris: PUF, 2011, pp. 18-23.

impetus. The PLO began negotiation with Israel, and Hamas was patronised by Syria and Iran. Lebanese Sunnis no longer had a militant cause. Sunnis became jealous of Hizbullah and began to see political Shi'ism as their main source of alterity.

Sunni leaders were not awarded control over an institution of state patronage they could use to consolidate their leadership, such as the Ministry of the Displaced People controlled by Jumblatt and the Council of the South, controlled by Nabih Berry. All these factors made it difficult for new Sunni leaders to emerge during the 1990-2005 period. Sunni urban poor quarters were heavily penetrated by the Syrian intelligence. Sunni leaders had lost touch with the population during the war. The new leaders were *nouveaux riches* businessmen with little historical legitimacy – or little legitimacy at all. They were patronised by Syrian intelligence, which vetoed all those electoral candidates of whom it disapproved. Loyalty increasingly became transactional. Some attributed the crisis of Sunni political representation in Lebanon to Syrian policies and argued that Damascus had a specific Sunni policy in Lebanon, to curb the autonomy of Lebanese Sunnis for domestic political reasons. Rougier relates the Syrian 'preventive repression' in North Lebanon to the large Sunni majority in the region.[156]

Certain aspects of Syria's policies indicated that Syria followed an anti-Sunni policy in Lebanon. Specific Syrian arrangements during the 1980s and 1990s disfavoured the Lebanese Sunni community, and particularly, in Tripoli. For instance, the Tripartite Damascus agreement signed in 1985 between the three militia-leaders Walid Jumblatt, Elie Hobeiqa and Nabih Berry left out the Sunnis and the Palestinians.[157] Moreover, during the 1990s, no institution of patronage was allocated to any Sunni politician in Tripoli. Asad feared that Sunni politicians might consolidate a political leadership at odds with Syria. Therefore, the Syrian regime made it clear to PM Rafiq Hariri that Tripoli was theirs and not a territory he could attempt to penetrate politically.

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[156] Rougier, *Le Jihad au quotidien*, p. 236.

[157] Rosemary Sayigh, *Too many enemies. The Palestinians experience in Lebanon*, London, Zed books, 1994, p. 142.

Syria also continued to give strong political support to Lebanon's Alawis, against the Sunnis. In 1991, two parliamentary seats were created for the Alawi minority in North Lebanon. Ali Eid obtained one, but was replaced with a figure more acceptable to Tripoli's Sunnis in 1996.[158] However, Syria did have many allies among the Sunnis in Tripoli, in particular traditional Sunni leaders from the bourgeois classes. While the Sunni urban poor were excluded from institutional politics in the 1990s and 2000s, traditional, secular politicians gained power in the Lebanese system. Few, if any, Tripolitanian MPs during the 1990 period opposed Syria.[159] This was because the Syrian intelligence vetoed all electoral candidates they opposed. This occurred during a period where Lebanese electoral candidates had to pay bribes to Syrian intelligence to appear on electoral list. This practice was widely known and contributed to discrediting electoral politics among the Lebanese.[160]

Despite the alignment between Sunni leaders and Syria at the surface, there were signs that many Sunnis were uneasy with the Syrian practices. One tell-tale came already in 1992, when Ahmad Fakhr al-Din, the brother of the leader of the Tripoli Resistance, who had been supported by Syrian intelligence, presented himself for parliamentary elections. Anonymous flyers were distributed in Tripoli's poor quarters against the Fakhr al-Din brothers with the slogan, 'Do not forget the Tebbaneh massacre.'. In 1996, Samir Frangié, the politician from Zgharta, obtained 12, 000 votes from Tripoli, a third of his total votes in the electoral district.[161] That was a high number, particularly compared to Omar Karami's 14,000 votes in Tripoli. Frangié succeeded because he allied himself with one of Khalil Akkawi's former comrades-in-arms and because he represented a line antagonistic to the Syrian regime. Another indication of Tripolitanian opposition to Syria was that Rafiq Hariri became very popular in Tripoli after he began to oppose the Syrian regime in the 2003-2004 period.

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[158] 'Nouvelle crise, vieux demons, p. 6.

[159] Although Misbah al-Ahdab joined the Bristol gathering in 2004, he had, as other Tripolitanian MPs, been forced to cooperate with the Syrian intelligence earlier.

[160] Interview, Samir Frangié, Beirut, June 2012.

[161] Samir Frangié had a total of 35,000 votes in the Muhafaza of the north, the electoral district.

The above could indicate that Syria was not necessarily afraid of Islamists, because it was so easy to manipulate them. Syria was more afraid of the emergence of a strong and independent political Sunni leaders in the Levant region, with international contacts and which could give ideas to Syria's Sunnis. Examples of such strong and independent leaders could be Yasser Arafat's Fatah (in the 1980s), Rafiq Hariri (until 2005) and his son, Saad Hariri (after 2005). Yet, the focus on confessionalism should not be over-rated. It should be combined with the economic motivations, discussed in the next section.

The Syrian-Lebanese informal economy

Until now the discussion has implied that the greater Syrian control of north Lebanon, occurred as a result of a Syrian plan, because Syria feared Sunni Fatah activists or Sunni Islamists in Tripoli. A competing hypothesis may be that Syrian-Lebanese ties developed without a political plan, as a result of the joint interests in the war economy. In other words, the Asad regime had no plan to control Tripoli more intrusively, but officers in the Syrian army developed particular economic interests in north Lebanon. During the Syrian tutelage, trans-state economic ties created overlapping interests between the Syrian regime, Syrian merchants, and Lebanese merchants. It was a win-win situation for most parties and contributed to consolidating Syrian tutelage. The big loser was the Lebanese state, whose revenues shrank by half over 10 years. [162] The Syrian-Lebanese networks introduced new norms in Tripoli, where short-term profit became more important than sustainable economic policies aiming at job creation. Thus, the Syrian-Lebanese networks created a new "moral community" in North Lebanon, which competed with the former Islamic and anti-imperialistic values of Tripolitanian Sunnism. [163] A new Syrian-Lebanese economic entrepreneurial class emerged.

Because of differences in climate, vegetation, and natural resources, the economies of Syria and Lebanon had always been complimentary. Although custom tariffs were introduced in 1950, trans-border economic exchange grew

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[162] By the end of the 1980s, one third of Lebanon's GDP was controlled by the militias. Élizabeth Picard, *Lebanon. A shattered country*, London/New York: Holmes & Meier, 1996, p. 147.

[163] A moral community is a community, which shares common norms.

during the 1960s, especially in the informal sector: After the beginning of the nationalisations of the Ba'ath party in the 1960s, Lebanon was increasingly used as a backyard for Syria's own informal sector. Syrian capital fled to Lebanon.[164] The imbrications of the Syrian and the Lebanese economies reached its peak during the Syrian tutelage, when most of the Lebanese economy fell under Syrian control. The main reason for this was that the Syrian economy was hit by a severe crisis in the 1980s, when purchasing power fell drastically. [165] The country experienced a foreign exchange bankruptcy, and was forced to drastically reduce imports.[166] Few commodities could be found at Syrian official markets, yet everything could be found on the black markets. Control over strategic sectors in the Lebanese economy became crucial to the survival of the Syrian economy, and regime, in the period.

Syrian business entrepreneurs in Lebanon, with connections to the army and the regime, invested in specific industries, of which there was a shortage inside Syria proper. For instance, a large banking sector was developed in Zahleh between 1983 and 1984. [167] The Lebanese economic space was important for those social categories who came to matter the most for the Asad regime in the 1990s and 2000s: army officers, who controlled large parts of the Lebanese economy; Damascene merchants, courtiers, and intermediaries;[168] and, from the late 1980s, a new Syrian class of business entrepreneurs linked to the regime.[169] Syria initially saw the Lebanese economic bourgeoisie as a competitor, and not a partner to its own businesses. [170] Yet, as the Syrian presence in Lebanon lasted, Lebanese

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[164] Kassir, 'Dix ans après', p. 14.

[165] Wages had grown twofold in the 1980s and prices sevenfold.

[166] The bankruptcy was due to a large import of consumer goods and ambitious industrialisation efforts. By 1986, only 40% of imports were covered by exports.

[167] Picard, 'La politique de la Syrie au Liban', p. 8.

[168] Picard, 'La politique de la Syrie au Liban', p. 8; Volker Peres, *The political economy of Syria under Assad*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1997, 1995, pp. 49-61.

[169] For an analysis, see: Joseph Bahout, *Les entrepreneurs syriens: économie, affaires et politique*, Beirut: Les cahiers de CERMOC, 1994; Maria Wadjinny, 'Les entrepreneurs de Bachar. Stratégies sociales et politiques des entrepreneurs privés face à la politique économique de Bachar al-Assad', MA thesis, Paris: IEP de Paris, 2008.

[170] Hinnebusch, 'Pax syriana?', p. 142.

entrepreneurship was compelled to not compete with, but to complement, the expanding Syrian private sector.[171]

Smuggling and trafficking in North Lebanon

During the war, militia leaders and other war profiteers enriched themselves through illegal construction, real-estate speculation, export of refined products of cannabis and the opium poppy produced in the Beqa'a, money raised from illegal taxes imposed on the civilians and on goods passing through the ports controlled by various militias.[172] The development of the war economy is one of the central reasons for the durability of the Lebanese war. The war economy made the militias richer and less dependent on external support.

The war economy in North Lebanon mattered to Syrian army officers, because they controlled a greater share than elsewhere. In coordination with the warring Lebanese militias, they were able to control key infrastructure, including the port, the refinery in Beddawi and the Chekka cement works. The cement works was initially controlled by Frangié's Marada militia and constituted the main source of the revenues of the latter.[173] It became a particularly important recipient of Syrian investments because Syria itself lacked construction materials at the time.[174] The oil refinery was managed by a group of Lebanese politicians and businessmen, in coordination with the Syrian army. Elements of Ali Haydar's Wahdat Khassa [Special Units] were based inside the refinery.[175]

Tareq Fakhr al-Din, the Syria-linked Sunni businessman, also had a central role. In the 1980s, he was given economic privileges in exchange for establishing the Tripoli Resistance, a militia funded and armed by the Syrian intelligence. The participation of the Tripoli Resistance in the massacre in Bab al-Tebbaneh soon

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[171] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

[172] Michael Johnson, *All honourable men*, p. 226; Fawaz Traboulsi, 'L'Économie politique des milices: le phénomène mafieux', *Naqd*, 19-20, Winter Automn 2004.

[173] Traboulsi, 'L'Économie politique des milices.

[174] Picard, 'La politique de la Syrie au Liban', p. 8

[175] Interview, Ahmad Karami, Tripoli, June 2012.

became a taboo among many Sunnis in Tripoli, who only remembered the Alawi responsibility. Fakhr al-Din became a respectable businessman, and his "Palma" beach resort, built up with war profits and drug money in the 1980s without a construction permit, quickly became one of the most popular in Tripoli.

The port of Tripoli, controlled by the Karami family, was the second largest in Lebanon[176] and used for hashish smuggling towards Turkey. It was in the early 1970s a major route for PLO supplies and reinforcement, and this continued more covertly during the Syrian presence.[177] However, the high number of taxes and impositions made it expensive, and other ports were opened north of Tripoli.[178] These were used for the smuggling of cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, and electrical domestic appliances towards Syria. During a short period in the 1980s, the Minqara-led branch of the Tawhid movement seized control over the port,[179] in coordination with Rifa'at al-Asad and his son Firas.[180] The royalties from the port made Minqara a very wealthy man[181] and helped his militia gain financial independence.[182] Mustafa Allouche, an anti-Syrian and anti-Islamist political leader in Tripoli, estimates lost taxes to a value of 600 million dollars.[183]

Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon had existed since the creation of borders between the countries, even during the customs union, which lasted until 1950.[184] It was amplified by the growing differentiation of the two economies in the 1960s. During the civil war, Akkar became the passageway between Syria and Lebanon for smuggling of construction materials, electrical domestic, and

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[176] Interview, Ahmad Karamé, manager of the port, 1972-1991, Tripoli, August 2010.

[177] Interview, Erik Fosse, Oslo, December 2013.

[178] Traboulsi, 'L'Économie politique des milices'.

[179] Interview, Hashim Minqara, Tripoli, February 2009.

[180] Gary C. Gambill, "Syria after Lebanon: Hooked on Lebanon", *Middle East Quarterly,* Fall 2005, pp. 35-42.

[181] Interview with political leaders, religious shaykhs and residents in Tripoli, 2008-2012.

[182] Interview, Hashim Minqara, Tripoli, February 2009.

[183] Interview, Mustafa Allouche, Tripoli, April 2008.

[184] Chaitaini, *Post-colonial Syria and Lebanon*, p. 158. Traboulsi, 'L'Économie politique des milices'.

foodstuffs.[185] Because of the wartime isolation of Tripoli from Beirut, merchants began importing directly through the port of Tripoli, instead of through Beirut.[186] They developed relations of confidence with Syrian traders on the other side of the border, who smuggled the goods using small pick-ups.[187] Smuggling took place everywhere, at all passage points. One route went through the village of Madaya, just south of al-Zabadani and near the Masn'a border, which developed into an important village of cross-border traffic. Smugglers also passed from north Lebanon and along the Syrian coast, through Masyaf and Tartus. There were more than 50 clandestine ports in North Lebanon and on the Syrian coastline, where one embarked goods on the sea, in arrangement with the customs officials. If they refused to let goods pass, smugglers could kill them. One passage point was controlled by a man called Hassan Makhluf, known to do "happy hours" where smugglers passed in exchange for a financial compensation.[188]

The trafficking arrangement benefited Syrian army officers and their friends, who imposed regularised taxes for vans and trucks.[189] The same figures as those controlling Tripoli's port and refinery were also important in the trafficking business. Fakhr al-Din and his brother, Ahmad, trafficked aluminium, wood and iron purchased from pirates,[190] in addition to drugs. Jamil al-Asad's two sons, Fawaz and Munzar, played leading roles in the lucrative smuggling of electronics and consumer goods from Lebanon towards Syria and Turkey.[191] Fawaz, a corporate lawyer in a leather jacket who had bought all of his diplomas, had

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[185] Traboulsi, 'L'Économie politique des milices'.

[186] Interview, Abdel-Ghani Kabbara, former Future coordinator of North Lebanon, July 2011.

[187] Interview, Joseph Wehbé, Tripoli, June 2011. Chaitaini, *Post-colonial Syria and Lebanon*, p. 158; Traboulsi, 'L'Économie politique des milices'.

[188] Interview, Ignace Leverrier, Paris, October 2013.

[189] Traboulsi, 'L'Économie politique des milices'.

[190] Interview, Ahmad Karami, Tripoli, June 2012.

[191] Interview, Ignace Leverrier, January 2012 and October 2013.

already accumulated wealth through racketeering in Latakia.[192] Fawaz and Munthar al-Asad were known for extolling and working with Tripoli's businessmen.[193]

Since Tripoli was geographically close to Syria, and in particular to Latakia where both men lived, personal links developed between Tripoli's businessmen and Jamil al-Asad's sons. Syrian army officers became heavily involved in trafficking and contraband of stolen goods. Army commanders did not crush these practices, but gave army officers and soldiers the opportunity to resort to corruption, theft, and even vandalisation for personal enrichment or power purposes.[194] For many Lebanese, this reflected the character of the Damascus regime as a military-mercantile crony coalition, which used power as a source of personal enrichment.[195] Thus, for the Syrian military constituency, the rent from illicit activities in Lebanon provided an alternative to oil-rent.[196] The petroleum sector had between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s constituted 70 per cent of the value of Syria's total export value, but declined afterwards.[197] One particularly lucrative sector was the booming drug trade, which benefited all sides of the conflict, and which linked the Lebanese militias up with European and Eastern mafias.

Most of the drug passed through the port of Beirut and and transported towards Europe, but the port of Tripoli was used for hashish smuggling towards Turkey.[198] Rifa'at al-Asad and his son Firas levied heavy taxes on this traffic.[199] Fakhr al-Din gained most of his fortune from wartime drug trade.[200] Drugs also passed from the Beqa'a to Tell Qalakh and Homs. Opium- and cannabis traffickers and merchants were often members of Lebanese political parties or militias, who used opium to

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[192] Interview, Ignace Leverrier, Paris, January 2012 and October 2013.

[193] Interview, Nahla Chahal, Beirut, June 2012.

[194] Interview, Mustafa Allouch, Tripoli, May 2009.

[195] Picard, *Lebanon*, p. 147.

[196] Hinnebusch, 'Pax syriana?', p. 154.

[197] Perthes, *A political economy*, p. 31.

[198] Traboulsi, 'L'Économie politique des milices'.

[199] Gary C. Gambill, "Syria after Lebanon: Hooked on Lebanon", *Middle East Quarterly* Fall 2005, pp. 35-42, http://www.meforum.org/769/syria-after-lebanon-hooked-on-lebanon

[200] Interview, Toufic Allouch, Tripoli, February 2009; Salim Allouche, Tripoli, May 2009.

finance warfare and exchanged drugs for weapons from the European and Eastern mafias.[201] As with the case of all other smuggling and war economy activity, warring militia leaders cooperated in smuggling and dispatching drugs, which flowed unrestricted through all frontlines without difficulties.[202]

Lebanese dependence on the Syrian-Lebanese networks

Economic interaction reaffirmed the strong social and historical links between Tripoli and its Syrian hinterland, mainly Homs, Tartus and Latakia. The same families were present on both sides of the international border, and in the period of the Syrian tutelage, children in certain villages in Akkar near the border went to school in Syria, where enrolment fees were considerably lower.[203] Another dimension of the complementarity between the two economies was the dependence of the Syrian workforce on the Lebanese labour market. Tripoli received a particularly high number of the Syrian migratory workers. Many were ambulant sellers, who gathered around the Abu Ali River.[204] Syrian workers numbered up to a million in Lebanon and made up between 20 and 40 per cent of the Lebanese workforce. They helped alleviate unemployment and poverty in Syria proper.[205] Contractors in Lebanon depended on their cheap labour. However, Lebanese labourers were put out of work by their Syrian counterparts, who did not pay taxes in Lebanon.

Lebanese entrepreneurs became increasingly dependent on Syria in the 1990s. They benefited from the opening of the Syrian economy and banking sector in the 1990s, and obtained licences to operate in Syria. Endorsement of the Syrian regime also became necessary to do business on a large-scale within Lebanon.[206] Indeed,

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[201] Makhlouf, *Cannabis et pavot au Liban,* pp. 34, 137.

[202] Traboulsi, 'L'Économie politique des milices'.

[203] Interview, Sophia Saadeh, Beirut, March 2009.

[204] Interview with politicians, university professors, and journalists in Tripoli, 2008-2011.

[205] John Shalcraft, *The invisible cage. Syrian Migrant Workers in Lebano*n, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 15.

[206] Shmuel Bar, *Bashar's Syria: The Regime and its Strategic Worldview*, Herzlya, Israel: Institute for Policy and Strategy, 2006, p. 395.

those entrepreneurs, who came to dominate Lebanese economy in the after-war era, were close to the Syrian regime and army. In Tripoli, the joint ventures between Syrian military elites and Tripolitanian businessmen developed new patterns of sociability. Syrian military officers became close to Tripoli's elites, and, as elsewhere in Lebanon, exchanged visits, and met for lunches and drinks.[207] The wives of the Syrian military officers became friends with the wives of Tripolitanian political elites and businessmen.[208]

Smuggling, illegal construction, and other parasitic activities helped create a new class of *nouveaux riches* Lebanese, and Tripolitanians, during the war. A considerable number of northern MPs of the 1990s had gained their fortune from trafficking activities that had begun during the war. Common interests developed as a result of these trans-state economic ties, and a network of actors favourable to a Syrian "solution" in Lebanon emerged.[209] This new and growing Syro-Lebanese entrepreneurial elite consolidated Syrian control over Lebanon. It included central figures in the political establishment; others were businessmen who entered the political arena in the late 1990s.

Najib Miqati, who served as Lebanese Prime Minister in 2005 and between 2011 and 2013, is one example. He entered politics in 1998 as Minister of Public Works and Transport and was elected MP in 2000. A considerable part of Miqati's fortune was earned in the mobile phone industry in Syria and Lebanon.[210] In both cases, favourable Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) contracts [211] were obtained through the close friendship with governmental caretakers, PM Rafiq Hariri in Lebanon and Bashar al-Asad and Rami Makhlouf in Syria.[212] In 2002, Orascom was pushed out of Syriatel after a row with Rami Makhlouf.[213] The episode

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[207] Interview, Ahmad Karami, Tripoli, June 2012.

[208] Interview, Hussam Sbat, Tripoli, 2009-2014.

[209] Hinnebusch, 'Pax syriana?', p. 154.

[210] Bar, *Bashar's Syria*, p. 395.

[211] Investcom operated companies granted a BOT in Lebanon in 1994 (Cellis) and in Syria in 2001 (Areeba).

[212] Interview, Tripoli politician, close to Nagib Miqati. Tripoli, July 2011.

[213] Tarek Zein, **'**Lebanon's Telecom adventurers', *Executive magazine* (Beirut), 77 (November 2005).

revealed that it was difficult to operate in the telecommunications sector in Syria without the consent of the influential Makhloufs. Miqati was also given an important role when Hashim Minqara and Samir al-Hassan were released from prison in 2000, which helped the former gain Islamist votes in the 2000 legislative election.

Ahmad Hbous, the late businessman who took over the Alawi seat in parliament in 1996 from Ali Eid, also gained his fortune as a contractor in Syria and Lebanon. Other prominent members of the rising Syro-Lebanese bourgeoisie outside of Tripoli included Abdel-Halim Khaddam and Rafiq Hariri, who developed business partnerships during the 1990s and prior to the Syrian withdrawal.[214] Rafiq Hariri aided Khaddam's son to establish himself in business. Other less prominent actors were Lebanese bankers, on whom Syrian entrepreneurs relied because of the failure to liberalise banks in Syria. In the 2000s, when branches of Lebanese banks were opened in Damascus, the interdependence continued.

Hence, the control over Tripoli's economy was a joint venture between the notable families of Tripoli and the Syrian military officers, and contributed to solidifying ties between the two. Local politicians were interwoven into the Syrian orbit to the extent that they constituted one social fabric. In the parliamentary elections of 1992, characterised by the Christian boycott, controlling candidates in the North helped the Syrian regime install a political system in favour of the Pax Syriana. The cooperation, shared economic benefits, and common interest in the perpetuation of Syrian influence in Lebanon helped modify norms and identities in both camps. A common moral community and a common interest-based 'asabiyya were created.[215]

Conclusion

North Lebanon, unlike the south and the Beqa'a, was not direct soil of the conflict with Israel and the motivations for Syrian control over Tripoli were not geo-political. North Lebanon's informal economy benefited Syrian military officers and

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[214] Hinnebusch, 'Pax syriana?', p. 154.

[215] Similar to the 'asabiyya created in Syria itself, see Alain Chouet, p. 2.

Lebanese merchants. The rise of common economic interests consolidated already existing family ties between North Lebanon and Tripoli's Syrian hinterland. Moreover, the Asad regime had, for tactical, and not confessional, reasons developed a particular "Sunni policy" in Lebanon. The aim was to hinder the emergence of a popular Sunni za'im, but also generally to fragment Lebanese society. The relationship with the Sunni Islamist movements in Tripoli was highly ambivalent. Contestation in Tripoli was the perfect excuse to perpetuate the Syrian presence.

Syrian policy makers held a very high degree of expertise on Lebanese geography and population, which helped them adapt concrete policies to each region. The knowledge of the Lebanese terrain was so intimate, and Syrian and Lebanese societies imbricated at so many layers – families, political elite, economy – that the presence of the Syrian army in Lebanon between 1976 and 2005 does not qualify as an occupation.[216] The situation resembled that of the USSR protectorates in central European countries. The flexibility of Syrian policies expresses the exceptional Machiavellian political skills of President Hafiz al-Asad, who understood the weakness, insecurities, likes, and dislikes of his Lebanese collaborators and rivals and turned this know-how into a political instrument.[217]

The creation of common interests in North Lebanon explained why, even after the Syrian withdrawal, many Sunni elites remained close to Syrian decision makers. The exclusion of the Sunni urban poor from the same networks and the repressive Syrian policies vis-à-vis Sunni poor quarters in Tripoli, explained why poor Sunnis in Tripoli opposed Syria and supported the Hariri family against Syria.

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[216] Samir Kassir, "Dix ans après, comment ne pas réconcilier une société divisée", *Maghreb Machreq*, No 169, July-September 2000 (pp. 6-22), p. 13.

[217] Joseph Nye, *The powers to lead*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 80.