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31 May 2004

ZZZ42700.FE

Lebanon/Syrian Arab Republic: Treatment of Palestinian supporters or suspected supporters of Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement by the Lebanese and Syrian authorities (including their secret services) in Lebanon
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Information on the treatment of Palestinian supporters or suspected supporters of Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement by the Lebanese and Syrian authorities in Lebanon was limited among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. However, the following information may be of interest.

On 21 May 2003, the United States Department of State indicated that the Fatah-the-Intifadah was one of a number of other terrorist groups that received refuge and logistical support from the government in Damascus (HRW 2003). An article in *The Boston Globe* reported that Lebanese officials had accused Sultan Abul Aynayn, head of Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement in Lebanon, of organizing illegal groups (30 Mar. 2002). A source indicated that Aynayn "was sentenced to death *in absentia*" by Lebanese officials, who accused him of "belonging to an armed group" (AFP 13 July 2002). However, in July 2002, Aynayn called for the arrest of a militant accused of killing Lebanese agents (*ibid.*; Xinhua 13 July 2002). Agence France Presse (AFP) indicated that Aynayn-who must remain in the Rashidiyeh Palestinian camp, which has [translation] "de facto extritoriality status"-requested that the Syrian government negotiate with the Lebanese authorities to review the conviction (AFP 7 Feb. 2004).

Since the 1969 Cairo Agreement, the Lebanese army has refrained from entering a Palestinian camp (*ibid.* 5 Sept. 2002). Despite its military power in Lebanon and its opposition to Yasser Arafat (which led to its attempts to decrease the influence of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Lebanon, according to the AFP), Syria no longer enters the camps either (*ibid.* 16 July 2003).

However, in September 2002, for the first time in 40 years, the Lebanese army entered a Palestinian camp by laying siege to it (Deutsche Presse-Agentur 5 Sept. 2002). According to Deutsche Presse-Agentur, the "army patrol stormed into an office of the Fatah Revolutionary (FRC) in the [Al Jalil] camp to arrest a wanted man and confiscate weapons. . . . The Lebanese army entered the camp without . . . notifying the camp's officials" (5 Sept. 2002). As a result of this, militants opened fire on the army and four people were killed: one Lebanese soldier and three Palestinians (Deutsche Presse-Agentur 5 Sept. 2002). According to Amnesty International, the Lebanese army entered the camp "ostensibly" to seize weapons and documents from an abandoned FRC office (2003). Shortly after, Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian officers met but were unable to reach an agreement to stop the siege (AFP 5 Sept. 2002).

Despite the clashes between the various armed Palestinian groups in the Ain al-Hilweh camp in Lebanon, Lebanese and Syrian authorities are not getting involved because, according to a Fatah movement officer's statement published in an AFP article, [translation] "neither Beirut nor Damascus, both of which disrupt life in the camps in more ways than one, wants a victor" (*ibid.* 20 May 2003). AFP reported that 8 people died and 25 were wounded on 19 May 2003 in the Ain al-Hilweh camp during clashes between supporters of Arafat's Fatah movement and Islamic groups (1 June 2003).

In December 2003, the Lebanese Armed Forces arrested Khalid Shayeb, Fatah chief official in the Biq'a, without charge (*Country Reports 2003* 25 Feb. 2004, Sec. 1.d). "He was released shortly thereafter" (ibid.).

On 7 February 2004, Sultan Abul Aynayn stated that the Syrian authorities had released an officer of the Fatah movement, and he "voiced hope that Syria would release [about] 20 other . . . political prisoners, who have been in Syrian prisons" (Voice of Palestine 7 Feb. 2004; see also AFP 7 Feb. 2004). Syria had accused these Palestinians, imprisoned since 1983, of cooperating with the Muslim Brotherhood—a group that [translation] "led an armed revolt against the Syrian Baathist regime in the early 1980s" (AFP 7 Feb. 2004). According to two sources, Aynayn noted that [translation] "Syrian-Palestinian relations are improving" (ibid.; see also Voice of Palestine 8 Feb. 2004).

During a 25 May 2004 telephone interview, a Georgetown University Arab studies professor, who is an expert on Lebanon, provided the following information. The professor said that he was not aware of any general problems or specific incidents between Lebanese or Syrian authorities and Palestinians living in Lebanon who support Arafat's Fatah movement. The professor pointed out the tensions that exist between various armed groups in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon and explained that Lebanese and Syrian soldiers do not enter the camps. He also said that he was not aware of the situation of Palestinians outside the camps, but that he knew that it was difficult for them to find work and medical care because of their ambiguous legal status.

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

References

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Professor at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, Washington, DC. 25 May 2004. Telephone interview.

Voice of Palestine [Ramallah, in Arabic]. 8 February 2004. "Fatah Official in Lebanon Notes Improvement in Syrian-Palestinian Relations." (FBIS-NES-2004-0208 9 Feb. 2004/WNC)

_____. 7 February 2004. "Fatah Official in Lebanon Says Syria Releases 122 Palestinian Prisoners." (FBIS-NES-2004-0207 9 Feb. 2004/WNC)

Xinhua News Agency. 13 July 2002. "Fatah Official Orders to Arrest Killer of Lebanese Agents." (NEXIS)

Additional Sources Consulted

Attempts to reach the Institute for Palestine Studies, the Palestinian American Research Center and a professor at the University of Michigan were unsuccessful.

Internet sites, including: European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI), London Middle East Institute, *L'Orient-Le Jour*, *Syria Times*, World News Connection (WNC).

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