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# Converging Interests of Conciliation: The Social Stability Context in the Marjaayoun and Hasbaya Qazas

*Conflict Analysis Report - May 2016*



Supported by:

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Front page picture: Marathon in Chebaa, organized in the framework of UNDP Peacebuilding in Lebanon Project Credit: Ramiz Dallah



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## Summary

This report summarizes the conflict context of the Hasbaya and Marjaayoun Qazas of the Nabatieh Governorate, a religiously and politically diverse area which has for decades been at the forefront of regional dynamics and conflicts. In terms of composition and key actors, the area can roughly be divided into four sub-region. First is the predominantly Sunnite Arqoub region where Future Movement and Islamic political parties are the main actors, though with significant support to leftist and nationalist parties. Second are the Druze villages of Hasbaya where Irsan is dominant but where intra-sectarian consensus – within and beyond the Lebanese border – is given priority. Third is Marjaayoun and its surroundings, home of both Christian political parties and nationalist parties. Last are the mostly Shiite southern Marjaayoun villages where the March 8 coalition of Hezbollah and the Amal movement dominates.

A long history of coexistence supported by economic and geostrategic interdependence and historic cross border relationships, as well national level political will and existing local networks of communications, are maintaining the region’s stability and safeguarding it from being drawn into the adjacent battles of the Syrian crisis. Some competition over resources and livelihood opportunities between members of the host community and the Syrian refugees exists. Day-to-day livelihood of Syrian refugees is made more difficult by the new requirements for the renewal of residency and the discrepancies in the application by the authorities, coupled with the contestation of members of some of the Lebanese communities of the presence of informal settlements of Syrian refugees. The unknown fate of the Syrian crisis, the vulnerability of the area to ramifications of developments in Syria and/or Israel, and the increasing dependence on revenue from the war economy and aid might have a dividing impact. To offset these possible dividers the report recommends that humanitarian and stabilization partners and civil society organizations invest in impact driven local development projects, further prioritize border areas in the distribution of both humanitarian and stabilization assistance, and support existing conflict mitigation mechanisms. Furthermore, a review of the entry and residency renewal regulations on Syrian refugees by the Lebanese Government would not only uphold the human rights of refugees but also contribute to the wider stability of the area.

## I. Introduction

This report provides a quick description and analysis of the conflict and social stability context in the Qazas of Marjaayoun and Hasbaya in the Nabatieh governorate. The analysis is based on fieldwork conducted in both Qazas between 14 October and 22 December 2015, and included interviews with 27 key informants including members of civil society organizations, journalists, local government representatives, representatives of local political parties, and local business people, in addition to members of the Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities.<sup>1</sup> In addition, one focus group with seven Syrian refugee women was conducted.

The report provides an entry point into the context and a quick conflict analysis based on the limited field work conducted, news reports and relevant current research and should be treated as a snapshot of the current context and not as a comprehensive profile of the area. Yet the report aims at filling an important information gap, considering that there has been no recent publicly available analysis on this area since the start of the Syria crisis. The analysis is concerned primarily with conflicts at the social and socio-political dimensions at the local level, with particular focus on issues of concern to humanitarian and peacebuilding organizations. In addition, there was a particular focus on the Arqoub region, where the majority of political actors there were interviewed, particularly in Chebaa, in an effort to assess risks for escalation in this border region.

## II. Context

The Hasbaya and Marjaayoun Qazas are both part of the Nabatieh governorate which includes also Nabatieh and Bint Jbeil covered in an earlier report<sup>2</sup>. The boundaries of both Qazas are fluid, since the southern villages of Marjaayoun share many historic and social similarities with the villages of Bint Jbeil, as well as sectarian affiliation, as do the villages of Hasbaya with the Rashaya Qaza of the Bekaa. Certain communities also enjoy strong long standing connection with different parts in Syria, particularly between the Druze communities of Hasbaya and those of Syria, as well as between the two border villages; the Lebanese Chebaa and Syrian Beit Jinn. These regional connections, as well as a long history of coexistence in this mixed area, impose a cautious approach in political engagement which prioritizes sustaining peaceful relationships.

### A. Demography

The Qazas of Hasbaya and Marjaayoun have an estimated total population of 83,931 inhabitants, which is around 2% of the total Lebanese population. The number of Syrian refugees these communities host is approximately 13,264, making the proportion of Syrian to Lebanese residents at 1:6, less than the national ratio of 1:4. Around a quarter of the refugees in the area live in informal settlements, mostly in the north of the Marjaayoun Qaza (See Table 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Interviews were conducted in Arabic by two researchers, one Syrian one Lebanese, and if interviewees accepted, were recorded. The report though does not provide a mere summary of the key issues reported by interviewees, but provides an analysis which does not always take statements by interviewees at face value and rather compares and contrasts various perspectives and opinions to provide this analytical summary. Names of all interviewees specific villages visited are not provided in this report to ensure protection of individuals who shared sensitive stories.

<sup>2</sup> See Al-Masri, Muzna. 2016. "The Social Stability Context in the Nabatieh and Bint Jbeil Qazas: Conflict Analysis Report." Beirut: UNDP.

**Table 1: Key Demographic Data**

	Marjaayoun Qaza	Hasbaya Qaza
Number of municipalities <sup>3</sup>	26	15
Total number of Lebanese population <sup>4</sup> (largest villages are Khiyam, Kfar Kila, Majdel Selim, and Marjaayoun in Marjaayoun Qaza and Hasbaya and Chebaa in Hasbaya Qaza)	52,928	31,003
Number of Syrian refugees <sup>5</sup> almost half of whom live in the villages of Chebaa, Khiyam, and Marjaayoun	8,180	5,084
Number of residents in informal settlements (IS) <sup>6</sup>	2,688 (39 IS)	445 (13 IS)

## B. Political and religious composition

The two Qazas are characterized by religious and political diversity, with a Muslim Shiite majority (57% mainly in Marjaayoun), followed by Muslim Sunnis (17% mainly in the Arqoub area of Hasbaya), Druze (10%) and several Christian sects (Greek Orthodox 6%, Maronite 5%, and Roman Catholic 3%)<sup>7</sup>.

Assessing the political loyalties of local residents based on results of the 2009 parliamentary elections is slightly deceptive, as the results in the region – being one electoral district – is largely dominated by the Shiite numerical majority which is pro-March 8 (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Members of Parliament in the Marjaayoun-Hasbaya Qazas (elected 2009)**

Name of MP	Sect	Political affiliation
Ali Hassan Khalil	Shia	Amal Movement
Ali Fayyad	Shia	Hezbollah
Anwar Khalil	Druze	Amal Movement
Assad Hardan	Greek Orthodox	Syrian Social Nationalist Party
Qassem Hashem	Sunni	Baath Party

<sup>3</sup> According to the MOIM summary of electoral Qazas for 2010 municipal elections <http://www.elections.gov.lb/Municipal/Electoral-Qazas/المجالس-البلدية.aspx> (accessed 21/12/2015).

<sup>4</sup> According to UNHCR's summary data of Lebanese and Syrian refugee population ranked vulnerability, dated January 2014 available on <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=4596> (accessed 21/12/2015). Number of registered voters in both areas is relatively high, and is not indicative of the actual resident population due to high percentage of migration.

<sup>5</sup> Based on August 2015 data according to: UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP. 2015. "Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) in Lebanon: Executive Summary" <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=9645> (accessed 21/12/2015).

<sup>6</sup> According to UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2015. "Equity in Crisis Response InterAgency Mapping Partners IAMP V19 Refugees in Informal Settlements Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon November 2015." <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5641a73f4.html> (accessed 21/12/2015).

<sup>7</sup> Percentage out of the total number registered voters according to the MoIM voting registers as compiled by the Lebanese Elections Data Analysis. See Lebanese Association for Democracy of Elections (LADE). 2016. "The Lebanese Elections Data Analysis (LEDA)" <http://lebanonelectiondata.org/confessions.html> (accessed 2/10/2015).

Broadly the region can be divided into the following sub-regions:

1. The Druze villages of Hasbaya, which enjoy historic and religious importance for the members of the Druze sect regionally, and where the Irsan family (March 8th) enjoys political popularity. Continuities exist between these villages and neighbouring Rashaya Qaza of the Bekaa.
2. The Arqoub region, comprised of predominantly Sunni villages. Historically at the forefront of the Lebanese-Israeli conflict and supporters of the resistance to Israel, though today incorporates a mix of loyalties to Future Movement, Islamic religious parties, as well as the communist, Syrian and Arab nationalist parties, and Hezbollah.
3. The Southern villages of Marjaayoun: predominantly Shiite supporters of Hezbollah and the Amal movement and similar in context to the Bint Jbeil area.
4. The town of Marjaayoun and surroundings, with predominantly Christian villages whose political loyalties vary, with a historic favoured position for the Syrian Nationalist Party.

Municipal unions follow, to some extent, the sectarian characteristics, with the predominantly Sunni border region of Arqoub as one sub region, and the conglomeration of Druze villages in the Hasbani union as another (see Table 3). That said, these conglomerations are formed by the intersection of family, sectarian and political loyalties, and most decisive at the local village level are the family loyalties which mostly date back to times of Ottoman rule which subdivided families into groups. This arrangements still have a significant impact on local politics.

Also of note is the relationship of the various villages to the centre of both Qazas: the town of Marjaayoun, historically the hub for regional activity, has been surpassed by Hasbaya which has taken a greater commercial and administrative role vis-à-vis the surrounding community. All regions, with the exception of Hasbaya, witnessed a high percentage of migration for decades and the actual residents through the winter season are estimated by one of the interviewees to be less than a third of the local population.

**Table 3: Member Villages in Municipal Unions of the Hasbaya Qaza**

<b>Arqoub municipal union</b>	<b>Hasbani municipal union</b>
Chebaa, Al Fardis, Kfarhamam, Kfarshouba, Al-Habariya, Al-Mari	Hasbayya, Al Kafir , Shouweia, Ain Qeniya, Maimas, Kaoukaba

### **C. Security**

A primary concern since the clashes in Aرسال in August 2014 has been the risk of the development of a scenario in the area similar to that in Aرسال, particularly given the strong relationship between the Lebanese town of Chebaa and the Syrian Beit Jinn which are separated only by a porous border. This risk appears to be minimal today, particularly because of solidarity between Lebanese communities and local political actors to ensure stability locally and increased securitization (see conflict issues below). Another major security and regional concern is the conflict over the Chebaa farms and the border with the occupied Golan Heights and possibility of a violent escalation with the Israeli Army. While recent incidents have remained in check, the context needs continued monitoring, particularly with possible impact of the developments, if any, on the Syrian-Israeli border. Internally, no security concerns are evident although regular security checks by security apparatuses of the Syrian refugee population are conducted. These checks need to ensure respect of human rights of refugees.



## D. Economy

Economic activity in the two Qazas varies by sub-region, although generally speaking the main sources of income are agriculture and livestock, and employment in the public sector. Remittance from migration is the main source of income for the Arqoub residents (mainly to the Gulf countries and Kuwait in particular) and Marjaayoun (to Latin America and West Africa). Agriculture is the main economic activity in most of the Druze villages of Hasbaya (who despite economic hardship and decades of Israeli occupation are reluctant to migrate) and in some of the southern Marjaayoun villages. Another major source of income for border villages is revenue from smuggling, predominantly of goods into Syria across the mountainous borders of Chebaa. In the larger towns of Marjaayoun and Hasbaya as centres of Qazas, there is also a limited number of government and private sector employees. Syrian refugees work mostly in agriculture and construction.

In terms of economic conditions, the Nabatieh has overall an estimated low prevalence of extreme poverty at 2% in 2008, and a below-average prevalence of overall poverty (close to 20 per cent)<sup>8</sup>. In the two particular Qazas subject of this report, only 10 villages have 7% or more of their population living under 4 USD/day. The highest percentage of poor people, and largest number of refugees, is mostly in the four largest towns of each of the sub-region which are also the only four towns to be defined as the most vulnerable, namely Hasbaya (with 17% of all Lebanese living under 4USD per day) Khiyam, (14%), Chebaa (12%), and Marjaayoun (9%)<sup>9</sup>.

## III. Conflict Issues

In general the relationships among members of the Lebanese community, and between them and the Syrian refugee population in the area is positive. A long history of coexistence, driven by economic and geostrategic need for an amicable relationship between the Sunni and Druze communities in both Lebanon and the bordering areas of Syria, has ensured prompt management of possible causes of conflict. Nevertheless, the clashes in 2014 in Arsal, and the infiltration of the village by armed groups engaged in the battles in Syria, have raised concerns over a possible similar scenario in Chebaa, particularly given that like Arsal, Chebaa's residents are Sunni with many among them having sympathies with the Syrian opposition. The paragraphs below discuss this possibility in addition to other concerns arising from the area's border location, as well as issues pertaining to the day-to-day relationships of the Syrian refugees with the local population.

### A. Ramifications of the conflict in Syria and particularities of border locations

The strong historic relationship between the Lebanese village of Chebaa and bordering Syrian village of Beit Jinn, both predominantly Sunni, and a long history of smuggling across the border in the rough terrain of that area, have raised concerns of the possibility of Chebaa and its people getting involved in the Syrian conflict in support of the armed Syrian opposition. These concerns heightened after the clashes in the Arsal area in the summer of 2014, and the military take-over of the areas bordering the Golan Heights by the Syrian opposition<sup>10</sup>. Further complicating the situation were clashes in Syria

<sup>8</sup> See El-Laithy, Heba, Kamal Hamdan, and Khalid Abu-Ismaïl. 2008. "Poverty, Growth and Income Distribution in Lebanon". UNDP (page 18).

<sup>9</sup> According to UNHCR's summary data of Lebanese and Syrian refugee population ranked vulnerability, dated January 2014 available on <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=4596> (accessed 21/12/2015). Other towns with a relatively larger percentage of Lebanese living under 4USD per day are Kfar Kila (10%), Majdel Selm (9%), Taybet (9%), Qlaiaa (9%), Houla (8%) and Meiss El-Jabal (7%).

<sup>10</sup> For details on areas of military control in Syria at the time, see the "Estimated Areas of Control" maps, by the Strategic Needs Analysis Project - SNAP <http://www.acaps.org/en/pages/syria-snap-project> (accessed 21/12/2015).

between Jabhet Al-Nusra in Beit Jinn and armed Druze groups from the village of Aarna in November 2014 causing many deaths among the latter<sup>11</sup>. In Lebanon, the shooting in the Druze village of Ain Atta (in the neighbouring Rachaya Qaza) on a van with passengers smuggled from Syria causing the death of at least one of the passengers raised alarm bells on the porousness of the border<sup>12</sup>.

Despite these raised concerns, the possibility of any spill over appears minimal. For one, according to our interviewees, and while smuggling on foot or with mules continues, the terrain which requires seven or eight hours to cross by foot is too difficult to negotiate by a large number of troops. The smuggling of armed Syrian opposition fighters was halted. Yet, according to interviewees in Chebaa, one-way smuggling from Lebanon to Syria of both products and Syrian individuals continues, and is a source of considerable income locally<sup>13</sup>. As reported, individuals smuggled are Syrians who do not have a valid legal residence in Lebanon and cannot enter Syria legally. The individual leaving is first cleared by army intelligence before he can leave. A network of smugglers that extends beyond Chebaa seems to exist, and a number of individuals involved in smuggling have been caught by army officials and arrested previously.

More importantly, the popular and political will prioritizes stability in the region. Following the above mentioned series of events, both Druze leader Walid Jumblatt and his representative minister Wael Abou Faour reached out in a series of visits to various villages in Rachaya and Hasbaya in an effort to diffuse the tension and safeguard the area from the ramifications of what is happening in Syria. This is particularly important given that the predominant allegiance of members of the Druze community in Syria remains to the Syrian regime, and retaliation against Druze communities in Lebanon by sympathizers with or members of the armed Syrian opposition is a concern<sup>14</sup>. The tension was further diffused by Future Movement, as well as the March 8 supporting political groups including the Baath, Communist and Syrian Nationalist parties in the area. The army subsequently strengthened its presence locally, put the area under close surveillance and initiated a check point (which acts as a quasi-border crossing) to regulate movement in the border areas.

On the popular level, these moves appear to be welcome by local residents, refugees, as well as local political actors, who have prioritized the protection of the long history of coexistence necessitated by cross sectarian interdependency. In this respect, the monthly meeting which brings together representatives of municipalities and most of the local representatives of political parties is particularly important to coordinate management of the security issues, deal with the refugees, and help mitigate conflicts. Islamic political groups remain a potential source of concern, particularly the Salafist groups who seem not to favour this arrangement and might have felt disempowered and side-lined by these increased collaboration between other actors.

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<sup>11</sup> For details of incidents and possible ramifications in Lebanon, see Al-Akhbar's reporting (in Arabic) on 6/11/2013 <http://al-akhbar.com/node/194503> and on 8/11/2014 <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/219357>

<sup>12</sup> For details on the incident see CSKC conflict incident report: "Syrian dead, others wounded in shooting at Van after refusing to comply with Army orders" - <http://cskc.daleel-madani.org/sir/syrian-dead-others-wounded-shooting-van-after-refusing-comply-army-orders> (accessed 28/02/2015).

<sup>13</sup> According to interviewees, the best indicator for the growth in the smuggling industry is the increase in the number of mules in the village – instrumental in carrying products across the rough border terrain - which has more than doubled in the past few years.

<sup>14</sup> For further discussion of this see Nicholas Blanford. 2014. "Druze on Edge over Jihadi Incursion Fears" The Daily Star, November 15, sec. News, Lebanon News. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Nov-15/277707-druze-on-edge-over-jihadi-incursion-fears.ashx> and Omar Abdallah. 2015. "Syria's Druze 'Not Part of This War'" Syria Deeply. August 21. <http://www.syriadeeply.org/articles/2015/08/7997/syrias-druze-not-part-war/> (both accessed 28/02/2015).

## B. Regulations on residency of Syrians and restrictions on movement

The most prominent of complaints of Syrian refugees in the two Qazas and the one with the greatest impact on their movement and livelihood is the new regulation on residencies introduced at the beginning of 2015. Some of the Syrian refugees in the area have not entered through official border crossings, and many of those who did, have not renewed residency regularly. In addition to the prohibitive cost of \$200 per Syrian of 15 years and above, some of those interviewed claimed the need to pay sponsors double that amount to receive support for their application for residency. Some are sponsored by their local employers and are then vulnerable to exploitation by them. While some (particularly women) have not a valid residence permit or have not regularized their situation, men often need to do so. Indeed, lack of residency increases the risk of arrest at the numerous checkpoints and they need to remain mobile to access work and livelihood opportunities. In practice, some Syrians interviewed continue to move and work only within the village where they reside despite lack of papers, but either significantly restrict their movement and avoid checkpoints and main roads or are often working under the patronage of their local employer, an arrangement that could leave them subject to exploitation<sup>15</sup>.

## C. Competition for work and resources

Members of the Syrian refugee population are predominantly working in agriculture, providing low waged labour to the existing agricultural season or as skilled and semi-skilled labour, particularly in construction. Despite the relatively limited number of refugees in the area, members of the host community expressed that refugees are competing with the Lebanese as labourers, and at times contributing to competition over natural resources and straining the infrastructure. These claims reflect a more complex interplay of factors, including the role of cheaper Syrian labour in the production of competitively priced agricultural products compared to products relying predominantly on Lebanese labour. A sectarian element is also in play, where the mostly Druze villages of Hasbaya have discouraged the residency of Syrian refugees in their areas, partly because residents tend to labour their agricultural field themselves and are concerned about competition, but also because of the predominantly Sunni sectarian belonging of incoming refugees. The issue of the strain on resources, whether real or not, was also observed to be used to discourage or contest the presence of informal settlements for the same reason above. In the most serious incident that occurred, the burning of refugee tents, several causes were at play, including competition over natural resources, interpersonal disagreement, unpaid wages, and resentment towards the Syrian refugees' presence. Nevertheless, key informants interviewed underlined that even if not the main reason behind the incident, the burning of tents is also a way for some residents to send a message to refugees and their employers that their presence is not welcome (see case study below for more details).

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<sup>15</sup> The implementation of regulations governing the legal status and residency of Syrians in Lebanon, whether registered with the UNHCR or not is arbitrary and leaves Syrian refugees vulnerable to exploitation as documented by recent reports by Human Rights organizations. See:

Amnesty International. 2015. "Pushed to the Edge: Syrian Refugees Face Increased Restrictions in Lebanon." Index: MDE 24/1785/2015. London.

Bobseine, Haley, and Human Rights Watch (Organization). 2016. "I Just Wanted to Be Treated like a Person": How Lebanon's Residency Rules Facilitate Abuse of Syrian Refugees. [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/lebanon0116web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/lebanon0116web.pdf).

NRC, and IRC. 2014. "Legal Status of Refugees from Syria: Challenges and Consequences of Maintaining Legal Stay in Beirut and Mount Lebanon."

## IV. Actors

It is not easy to pin-point one or two main actors in the Hasbaya and Marjaayoun Qazas as a broad range of actors exists, particularly because of the area's religious diversity. Loyalties to each of the actors follow the divisions of sub-regions on mostly sectarian grounds as described above. Nevertheless, a long history of political engagement and being at the forefront of the Arab-Israeli conflict including the strong presence of the "Palestinian Liberation Organization" back in the seventies - which has caused the Arqoub area to be dubbed "Fatah Land" - and many years of Israeli occupation until the year 2000 has contributed to caution on the part of local actors in their engagement with regional challenges. Most actors interviewed expressed converging interests in keeping the area relatively stable despite - or because of - national level or Middle East regional considerations.

It is also important to be sensitive to nuances in political affiliation and to the differences between villages within the same area. Whereas the bigger villages like Chebaa, Hasbaya, Khiyam and Marjaayoun set the political tone of the sub-regions where they are located, there are significant differences between villages in the same area. For example, while interviewees in Chebaa described their village as the 'graveyard' of political parties, where no party can truly take control, adjacent Kfarchouba champions leftist parties and Hibbarieh stands in support of the Islamic parties. On the village and town level, family considerations and divisions play a crucial role in determining local power structures – and by extension results of municipal elections – as well as supporting conflict mitigation mechanisms. The paragraphs below describe the key actors in each of the sub-regions, particularly as the actors and their power differ significantly from one sub-region to the other. Contrary to previous conflict analysis reports, Syrian refugees were not highlighted as an actor since across all villages their role has been minimal because of their small number and their tendency in the region to keep a low profile. Figure 1 presents a map of the actors and relationships between them.

### A. The Druze villages of Hasbaya

Dominating the political scene in Hasbaya (and neighbouring Rachaya of the Bekaa Governorate), are the **Lebanese Democratic Party (LDP)** and the **Progressive Socialist Party (PSP)**. The two groups belong to different camps vis-à-vis the national and regional politics, with Talal Arslan of the LDP supporting March 8 and the Syrian regime, and Jumblatt of the PSP leaning towards the March 14 camp while at the same time retaining a fluid more central position. LDP is estimated to have the loyalty of about two thirds of Hasbaya's population compared to about a third for the PSP, despite a strong presence for the latter because of its national level influence and Jumblatt's patronage as a za'im of the Druze sect.

LDP's popularity is also tied to the presence of several other political groups and parties, most prominently the **Syrian National Party. Anwar El-Khalil**, the region's Druze parliamentary representative of the two Qazas belongs to neither the LDP nor the PSP, but rather to the **Amal Movement**. His following seems to be tied to his own personal connections and status and not exclusively to party politics. **Wiam Wahhab**, of the recently founded pro-Syrian regime Arab Tawhid Party also has a small following. That said, strong intra-communal bonds exist prioritizing the interest of the minority group in Lebanon and beyond. In addition, the **Sheikhs of Khalwat al-Bayada**, a Druze sanctuary in the area over 300 years old, play an important moral role legitimizing the political role of both parties and maintaining limited internal disagreement within the community. As mentioned before, the number of Syrian refugees in the area is limited partly for both sectarian and political reasons.

## B. The Arqoub region

The prominently Sunni residents of the area are spread over religious and nationalistic political parties. Following the 2005 assassination of Prime Minister Hariri and the ensuing withdrawal of the Syrian troops from Lebanon, the **Future Movement (FM)** experienced a surge in its popularity in the region, as the movement sought to build its constituency in the area, though it continues to have a limited socio-political infrastructure locally. This has been evident in the success of the Movement in the 2010 municipal elections in some of the villages, most notably Chebaa. While at the beginning of the Syrian crisis the Movement stood firmly in support of the revolution against the regime, the events of Arsal in 2014 has forced it to take on a more moderate position in support of the Lebanese army and state particularly vis-à-vis growing armed movements like ISIL and Jabhet el-Nusra. While this position might have had a negative effect on FM popularity in Arsal and the Middle Bekaa<sup>16</sup>, it had little negative impact on residents of the Arqoub region. Despite its continued privileged position, the absence of the movement's leadership and the decrease in the resources being invested locally<sup>17</sup> and to a lesser degree the tensions around the Syrian crisis has not helped the Movement maintain its position.

Another significant actor is the **Jamaa Islamiya** with has some supporters locally who join for both sectarian belonging and because of the group's philanthropic activities, including educational and medical institutions and charitable support to **Syrian refugees**. The Jamaa's presence is strongest in Hibbarieh and Chebaa, where it had partnered in the 2010 municipal elections with Future movement and won. What remains of that partnership is limited as relationships between the two groups locally now appear strained. The Jamaa sets itself apart from the Islamic armed groups in Syria and continues to present itself as part of the resistance to Israel in the area, as such creating a link with the pro resistance March 8 camp. At the same time, it maintains a Sunni Muslim religious agenda and continues to show empathy with the armed opposition to the Syrian regime as well as support for the medical treatment of wounded Syrian opposition militants transported across the border to Lebanon. This position has created some sort of distance between the group and other local actors and has forced the group to limit its activities to charitable ones.

Some interviewees have claimed that the Jamaa coordinates privately with the **Salafist groups**, who have a more problematic position given their more evident support of the armed Islamic groups fighting in Syria. The activities of these groups have significantly been curtailed after the Arsal events by members of the security apparatus and other socio-political actors, and today they are strictly limited to charitable work. Their charitable activities, though as reported by interviewees generously funded, are also slightly problematic as they are targeting only Syrian refugees and do not coordinate with the local municipalities, causing conflict with the latter and discontent among members of the host community. Both the Jamaa and the Salafist groups also see in the aid a source of clout over the Syrian **refugee community**, particularly given the limited aid from other sources.

On the other side of the political divide in support of the March 8 political camp and the Syrian regime, the sub-region is also host to Arab nationalist parties, namely the Baath Party (to whom the region's MP Qassem Hashem belongs) and the **Committee of the Sons of Arqoub** (a branch of the Kamal Chatila led

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the impact of the Arsal events on members of the Sunni communities in the Bekaa see: Al-Masri, Muzna. 2015. "Between Local Patronage Relationships and Securitization: The Conflict Context in the Bekaa Region." Lebanon Support / UNDP.

<sup>17</sup> Future Movement's perceived limited investment in the area is argued by local politicians to be the result of the marginal value of the area in parliamentary elections, given that due to division of electoral districts, the people of Arqoub who could vote for the FM are outnumbered by the supporters of the various March 8 political groups.

group the 'People's Congress')<sup>18</sup>. Both groups are relatively limited in their membership, but represent a broader Sunni sentiment in support of the resistance to Israel, and according to interviewees coordinate with **Hezbollah** and its limited membership in the village of Chebaa. According to interviewees this membership is motivated by financial interests and is recent, as the Shiite party had avoided building a constituency in the Sunni villages in the South in the past.

In the pro-resistance sentiment they are joined by also a limited, but deep seated, historic support to the **Communist Party** and **Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP)**. The presence of these groups, particularly leftist parties is strongest in the village of Kfar Shouba, though present across the Hasbaya-Marjaayoun Qazas.

The **Lebanese army and various state security apparatuses** also have recently strengthened their presence locally and play an instrumental role not only in maintaining security in border areas but also in supporting the sentiments in the region which prioritize avoiding the involvement of the Sunni communities in the Syrian crisis. Their information apparatuses – which we have encountered several time in our data collection - is strongly present, among both Lebanese and Syrians, particularly in Informal Settlements.

While the differences between the two political camps – which mirror national level political divides – are significant, these differences are kept in check by diverging interests locally and Future Movement's position in favour of stability in the area. **Local security coordination committees** bringing together most parties, security apparatuses and key local figures have been established, and these committees promptly and effectively deal with local conflicts between or within the Syrian refugees and the Lebanese host community. **Syrian refugees** interviewed appear content with this arrangement and relatively well integrated within the community.

### C. The Southern Villages of Marjaayoun

The predominantly Shiite villages south of Marjaayoun, the largest of which is Khiyam, are clear in their loyalty to **Hezbollah and the Amal Movement**. Both groups belong to the March 8 political camp and are supporters of the Syrian regime, and the former is involved in direct fighting within Syria. While these villages share to a large extent the same issues and actors as neighbouring villages of the Bint Jbeil and Nabatieh Qazas – described in detail in a previous report – the diversity of Marjaayoun Qaza gives them a different flavour. Hezbollah has stronger partnerships with leftist and nationalists parties, not least the SSNP which also has fighters on the ground in Syria. In addition, Hezbollah is more cautious in its relationships on the ground with members of non-Shiite communities, as it seems to respect unspoken rules of the Lebanese sectarian political system which delimits the boundaries of each party's accepted activities to the members of the sect it represents and forces local compromises.

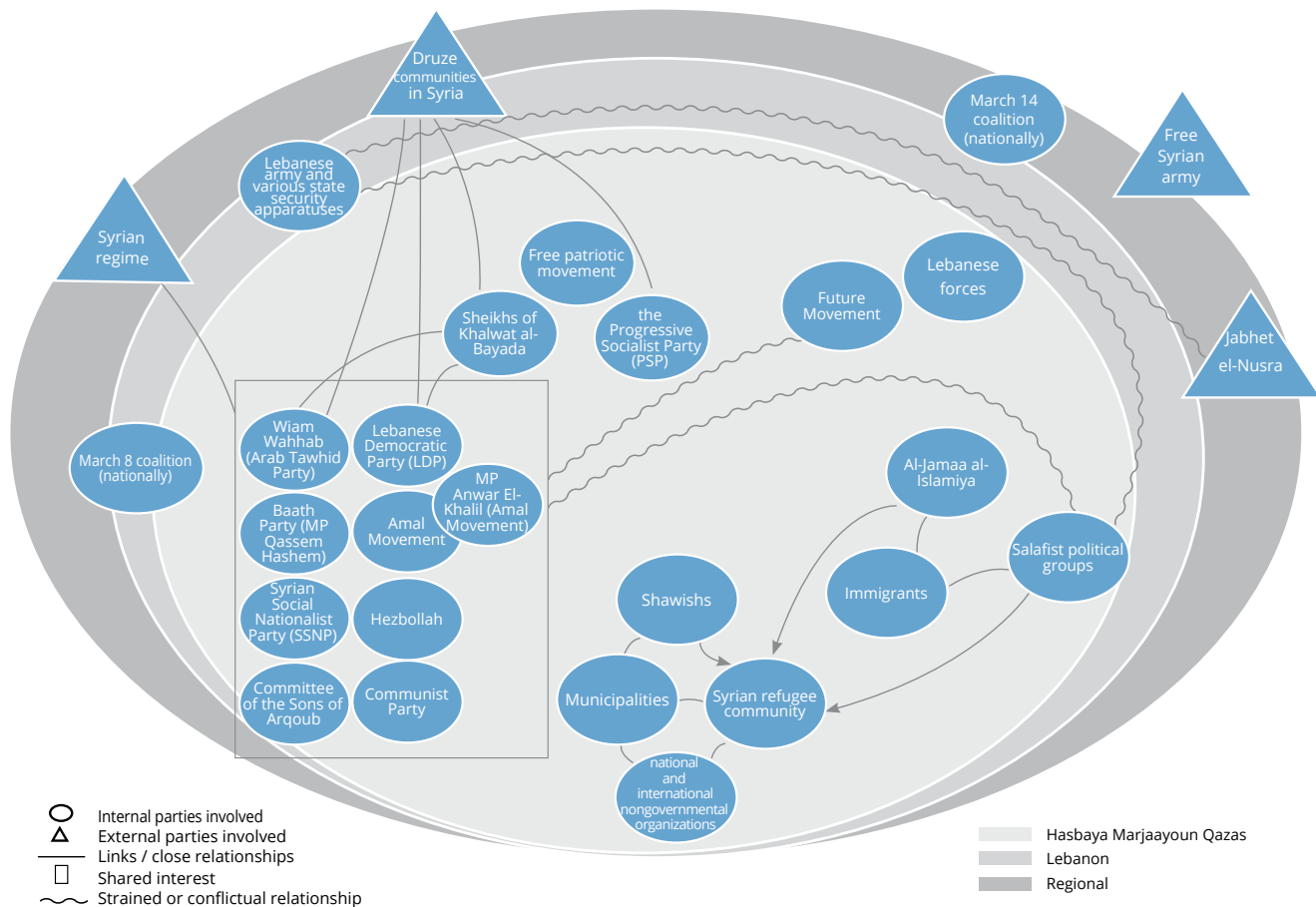
### D. The town of Marjaayoun and surroundings

Marjaayoun and its surroundings is home to a wide spectrum of actors, be it the well-entrenched SSNP, or the many **Christian political parties** including the Free Patriotic Movement and the Lebanese forces. That said, these parties have little weight given that the Christian villages are very scarcely inhabited due to immigration, and those who remain are either the older generation or government employees. **Immigrants** – both in this sub-region and in Arqoub – play an important role through the remittance they send, and when wealthy migrants take on local government duties and influence the development agenda locally. In addition, the area is distinct because of the strong presence of national and **international nongovernmental organizations**, many of whom based in the town of Marjaayoun,

<sup>18</sup> For more information about the committee see the website of Kamal Chatila: <http://www.kamalchatila.org/org.asp?pg=orgs&orgid=4&catid=0&search=&abspage=1> (in Arabic - accessed 28/02/2015).

employing local youths and more readily responding to the needs of the relatively small refugee community. In this region also, one model of joint coordination between the refugees and the host community exists in the form of a **joint Syrian-Lebanese committee**<sup>19</sup>. These types of Syrian-Lebanese endeavours seem to face some limitations as Lebanese members tend to hijack the group's voice, given their relative power as Lebanese nationals and the tendency of Syrian members to exercise caution to ensure their membership is not seen as once of political action by either the Lebanese and/or the Syrian authorities. The Shawish in Informal Settlements across the different regions also plays an important monitoring and patronage role.

**Figure 1: Actor map**



## V. Dynamics

Two years ago, a discussion of the dynamics at play in the conflict context of these two Qazas would have produced a complicated trajectory and an array of dividers and connectors. Today, though it seems that the majority of parties concerned have resigned themselves to sustaining stable conditions locally. The paragraphs below present connectors, or systems, institutions, attitudes, actions, values, interests and experiences which bring people together and dividers, similar elements which are a source of tension in the community<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> The committee was self-initiated by Lebanese and Syrian individuals without direct support from international organizations, but has collaborated with other Lebanese NGOs in UNDP funded projects.

<sup>20</sup> The tool for analysing connectors and dividers was developed by the Collaborative for Development Action (CDA) as part of the Do No Harm/Local Capacities for Peace program. For a description see [http://local.conflictsensitivity.org/other\\_publication/do-no-harm-local-capacities-for-peace-project/](http://local.conflictsensitivity.org/other_publication/do-no-harm-local-capacities-for-peace-project/) (accessed 7/3/2016).

## Connectors

1. A long history of coexistence supported by economic and geostrategic interdependence.
2. Sectarian solidarity across the borders encouraging parties locally to sustain amicable relationships in order to protect members of the same sect from retaliation across the border.
3. Strong local cross-sectarian networks and channels of communication and conflict mitigation between local notables, political party representatives and elected mayors and Mukhtars, evident in particular in the monthly meeting of representatives of most political parties and municipal board members in the Hasbaya Qaza.
4. Historical cross-border relationships between the Syrian Beit Jinn and Lebanese Chebaa and similarity in life style and modes of economic production facilitate coexistence locally.
5. The influx of a large number of refugees in some areas from the same village in Syria - who then settle also in the same geographical location in Lebanon - means that communal systems of managing conflict which were operational in Syria are still in use for conflicts in Lebanon among members of the Syrian community or between them and the Lebanese host community.
6. High-level Lebanese political support to stabilization in the area and popular trust among the Lebanese in the Lebanese Armed Forces.

## Dividers

1. Vulnerability of the area and its people to ramifications of developments in Syria and/or Israel because of location.
2. Increasing dependence on revenue from the war economy in border towns while other economic opportunities, historically scarce in this remote area, are diminishing. Despite the halt on smuggling of armed Syrian opposition fighters which was the cause of political concern, smuggling for economic is a significant source of income locally. As it appears, individuals in border town might have with time increased economic interest in the continuation of the crisis in Syria, and seem to be already adapting to modes of economic production that benefit both the war and aid economy.
3. The unknown fate of the Syrian crisis. Some interviewees expressed concern that it might be a while before Syrian refugees return home, if ever, and compared them with Palestinian refugees who have been in Lebanon for almost seven decades. According to them, concern over the possibility of Syrian refugees staying in Lebanon long term justifies an attitude that discourages refugees from coming to Lebanon and welcomes limitations on refugees' livelihoods.
4. The large number of Lebanese immigrants from the Arqoub areas in Gulf countries, particularly Kuwait, has contributed to increased Islamization locally and strengthened ties between local communities and Gulf Islamic organizations. Those immigrants are more prone to support Islamic groups and, since they are not currently residents in the villages, are less bound by the priority of maintaining positive cross sectarian relations locally.
5. Perception of unfair distribution of aid, and politicization of some aid distribution outside of the official humanitarian & stabilization coordination structure. In the Arqoub region, a good proportion of aid to Syrian refugees is from Islamic charitable sources, both individual and institutional, channelled through the Jamaa Islamiya or the Salafist groups. Such aid contributes to strengthening



clientelistic loyalties among the refugees to these Islamic organizations, particularly as they are in daily personal contact with the refugees.

6. In certain areas, reluctance of some communities members to host Syrian refugees, particularly if of a different sect.
7. In some sub-regions, Lebanese voiced complaints of what they described as the Syrian refugees' "different life style" to the Lebanese one, criticizing practices like polygamy and relatively little importance given to children's education, reflecting discriminatory attitudes towards them
8. Syrian refugee youth who have been in Lebanon for many years now, know little about Syria and feel a sense of belonging to Lebanon despite feeling discriminated against. The limited horizon available for these youth who have been mostly outside of formal education and pushed to be part of the labour force at an early age. Because of limited job opportunities, this makes them vulnerable to exploitation and negative coping mechanisms, and can fuel resentment later on.

## VI. Recommendations

A conciliatory attitude among local socio-political actors, effective local conflict mitigation mechanisms and security control by the Lebanese army support stability in the area. Nevertheless, the geographical location of the region at the intersection of regional conflicts necessitates investment of long term processes to safeguard the area from the ramifications of regional and national changes.

1. The Lebanese Government should take on the recommendations from human rights organizations on the procedures governing the residency of Syrian refugees, including waiving entry and residency renewal fees as well as required pledges and proof of housing or sponsorship. In addition, humanitarian and stabilization actors and civil society organizations need to continue advocating for the human rights of refugees, hold government accountable, and highlight the ramifications of the policy and resulting exploitation of refugees.
2. Humanitarian and stabilization actors and civil society organizations should support existing local mechanisms for conflict mitigation by building stronger relationships and regular consultation with the local government and key figures locally. Local civil society organizations and municipalities should support the involvement of women, youth and Syrian refugees in local conflict mitigation mechanisms and provide them with appropriate protection so as to allow them to use such mechanisms to report or resolve disputes.
3. Humanitarian and stabilization actors need to invest in impact driven local development projects, particularly in agriculture and food industries, to decrease dependence on the growing war economy and to limit the possible impact of religiously motivated humanitarian aid.
4. International assistance needs to take into account the particular vulnerability of residents of border areas in terms of insecurity and possible recruitment by armed groups. The areas adjacent to conflict areas in Syria therefore need to be prioritized in the distribution of aid. While this is the case for part of the humanitarian assistance through the provision of mobile services to such areas, this needs to be take into account across the board.
5. Further investment needs to be made in monitoring distribution of all type of aid. This is important to ensure aid is not used to impact political action or facilitate recruitment of members the refugee population and host community alike.

## Case Study: Diverging Narratives

Written by: Marianna Altabbaa

On 11 August 2015, eleven tents in the Informal Settlement (IS) of Majidieh (Hasbaya Qaza) were set on fire by residents of the close by Al-Mari village. The IS was inhabited by Syrian refugees from Deir Azzour, working mostly in agriculture. The attack did not only involve the burning of the tents and one car, and the subsequent displacement of the refugees, but also included physical and verbal assaults on both Syrian men and women, several of whom had to be hospitalized.

The details of the incident, its causes and the number of injuries all remain disputed. In addition to brief reporting in the local papers<sup>21</sup>, in the course of field work we collected six narratives of the attack - including the land owner, one of the Syrian refugees, members of local and international NGOs, and through municipal boards, which each presented a different perspective.

The dispute was first instigated by an interpersonal disagreement. According to the Lebanese Shawish and land owner, the dispute started over the harassment by one Syrian residing outside of the area of one of the girls living in the settlement. This has further escalated to involve the Lebanese employer of that same Syrian man, who sought to defend his employee, and his family members. A member of a local NGO claims that the initial dispute was over irrigation water, reflecting the general competition over natural resources and economic opportunities between the different communities.

According to another Syrian active in a joint Syrian-Lebanese committee, the dispute was only a pretext to justify the attack, which actually meant to send a message to the Syrians in the settlement that they were not welcome. This general resentment was fueled by the increase in the number of refugees and the difference in sectarian belonging between the Syrians and the people of al-Mari. He further explained that no political groups or security apparatuses intervened to prevent the damage to the tents. One of the Syrians who was physically assaulted in the attack, a man in his sixties, further complicates the issue by claiming that the municipality had not paid wages owed to many of the workers in the settlement; and asserts that it will not be paid anymore now that they have left the village.

According to some of the interviewees, the security forces did eventually intervene, and arrested several of the Syrians for three days, including some of those who were injured, but promptly released the Lebanese offenders. The refugees and the Lebanese land owner did press charges, the latter requesting compensation for the cost of tents that he says he has paid for and the price of his vehicle which was set ablaze. Several of the key figures in Al-Mari tried to convince the land owner to drop the charges, which he refused - not only to be compensated, but also to deter other such acts in the future.

On the part of the Syrian refugees, many find little value in pressing charges or even in an intervention from international organizations. While one international organization working locally for example was informed of the attack while it was happening, they could not get involved on the spot for security reasons. Another local NGO tried to support reconciliatory efforts but feel that the impact of a possible intervention is limited.

While the narratives vary and illustrate the multiple layers that can lead to violence, key local actors emphasize in their analysis of the incident that although the original personal dispute was minor and did involve Syrians and Lebanese on both sides, it was also used by some as a pretext to drive the Syrian refugees away from the village and send a message that they are not wanted in that vicinity. A checkpoint at the entrance of the village now deters the Syrians from going, and perpetrators have not been held accountable for the attack.

<sup>20</sup> See coverage in the National News Agency <http://nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/173756/nna-leb.gov.lb/ar> and Assafir <http://assafir.com/Article/8/436734> on 11/2015 (in Arabic, both accessed 6/3/2016).





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