

Lebanon: Fatah Al-Islam Militants Returning To Refugee Camps

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Syria preparing for massive destabilization in Lebanon

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A source in Lebanon told Stratfor that Fatah al-Islam militants are regrouping in the Biddawi Palestinian refugee camp in northern Lebanon. Fatah al-Islam militants have also been sighted in the Burj al-Barajinah Palestinian refugee camp in the southern suburbs of Beirut. The source said officials in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) and Fatah al-Intifada are facilitating the return of the Fatah al-Islam militants into Lebanon. The source also said more than 40 armed Palestinians have arrived from the Yarmuk refugee camp into the PFLP-GC's positions in Qusaya in the central Biqaa. These militants operate under the leadership of a Fatah al-Islam official named Muhammad al-Awad. It is believed these militants eventually will be transferred to Akkar in northern Lebanon.

Syria, meanwhile, is busy preparing for a massive destabilization effort in Lebanon. From the information we are receiving on Syrian covert activity in Lebanon, it appears that the tenuous deal struck by Syrian and U.S. officials at the peace conference in Annapolis, Md., in late November has broken down, and we cannot help but suspect that the Iranians had something to do with it. Syria is dead set on ensuring that its demands for influence in Lebanon's new government are met, and Damascus is prepared to engage in a variety of intimidation tactics in order to see those goals through.

According to a source, Syrian intelligence has a hit list of six individuals in Siniora's March 14 coalition — parliamentary deputies Samir Franjeh, Wael Abu Faour, Nayla Mouawad and Akram Shuhayyib; former parliamentary deputy Faris Said; and Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea. These Syrian targets already have taken precautionary measures, such as changing their places of residence and their mobile phone numbers.

Syrian intelligence officers who previously operated in Lebanon also are sending threatening mail to members of the March 14 coalition. The messages are being delivered by pro-Syrian Lebanese agents who receive their orders from the Syrian intelligence office in Rif Dimashq, and they tell the March 14 leaders and activists that Syrian intelligence knows all the details of their moves, actions and whereabouts. These messages are meant to demoralize the leaders and activists of the March 14 coalition.

The Syrians also have stepped up training for militant proxies in Lebanon. Syrian officers are directly involved in training members of the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP), as well as members of the al-Mirada militia of Suleiman Franjeh in the Qaryatayn area, near the city of Homs in northern Syria. The training cycle includes range firing, the use of anti-armor missiles, setting up explosive devices and booby-trapping. Hezbollah has assisted in this effort by providing SSNP leaders with M-16 rifles fitted with sniping gear from its warehouses in the northern Bekaa Valley.

The Syrians also are deeply involved in supplying militants in Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps, where jihadist factions are getting funneled. Plans reportedly call for Syria to instigate clashes between rival Palestinian factions — specifically between the Fatah movement and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command. Syrian officers have instructed their local allies to start a major protest movement against rising prices and runaway inflation.

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