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CONFLICT ANALYSIS
Khalde

Armed presence during the funeral procession of the 13-year-old Hasan Ghosn who was killed during armed clashes between Ghosn family members (Al Arab) and Shiite members of Al Chebli family & Saraya Al Mokawame, in August 2020. Image courtesy of: Al Modon.

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Content

Methodology

Mixed-method secondary and primary data collection was used to produce both national and local-level Lebanon Conflict Analyses. COAR analysts first relied on desk research to screen and collate secondary data relevant to past and present conflict dynamics. COAR field researchers collected primary data by means of semi-structured interviews with key informants including community leaders, CSOs, and security experts based in several regions. Data was reviewed and analysed by COAR programming and analytical experts. Evidently, the scenario plans presented here are speculative, and the events discussed may ultimately transpire differently.

Note, the Khalde conflict analysis presented here forms part of a series. The National Level conflict analysis should be considered as foundational to subsequent conflict analyses and scenario plans developed for selected localities. Local-level reports in this series are therefore informed by the issues and findings identified in the national level analysis.

Khalde

Background

Khalde constitutes a strategic location as it presents a gateway to the capital, Beirut, as well as to the South and to the Druze stronghold of Jabal-Aley; the southern part of Beirut's international airport is also located in Khalde. The population of the area is estimated at 350,000 individuals — predominantly Sunni, at 85 percent, with a Shiite minority (15 percent). The socio-economic structure of the area is split geographically: the western seaside, where the financially capable and upper-middle class reside, most of whom are wealthy Sunnis from Beirut who have summer houses in Khalde; and the eastern side, which is considered poorer and has been hit hard by the economic crisis.

A focus on Al Arab Sunni tribes and the Shiite residents of Khalde is necessary to understand the likelihood of the following scenarios. The Al Arab tribes constitute around 10,000 individuals, concentrated on the eastern side of Khalde. These Sunni Arabs can be split into three groups, according to origin: The first group contains the oldest and biggest tribes, such as Al Ghosn, which have been residing in the area for more than 80 years and were granted the Lebanese nationality by the Druze Emir Majid Toufic Arslan. The second group contains tribes displaced from Karantina during 1976 massacres; these tribes are known as Arab Al Maslakh, due to their work in the slaughterhouse of Karantina. They were naturalised as citizens by former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri but have their origins in the Syrian Al Zreikat tribe. The third group is composed of the formerly nomadic tribes known as Al Nawar, who reside in Khalde as well as other areas of the southern coast.

The Al Arab have a historic relationship with the Druze community, and many are politically affiliated with them. During the civil war they also sided with the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) given their historic relationship with Kamal Jumblat; they even formed the Al Maslakh Forces brigade, under the PSP's military wing.[1] Through the nineties, their relationship with the Hariri family grew, and many have become affiliated with the Sunni Future Party.

The relationship of Al Arab with their Druze and Sunni surrounding communities is very good. Conflict dynamics are defined by the Sunni Shiite schism. Historically, and as confirmed by several key informants, the Al Arab tribes enjoyed a good relationship with the Shiites and with Hezbollah, specifically. Tensions rose in the late 2000s when rich Shiites (such as Al Chebli and Al Diab) started buying land and property in Khalde. Later, Hezbollah established the Saraya Mokawame in the area. However, tensions have grown dramatically in the past decade. Tensions initially started as personal disputes between Al Arab youth and those affiliated with Saraya Al Mokawame — particularly after May 2008.[2] From 2015 to 2017, armed clashes regularly took place between Al Arab, specifically the Ghosn family, and the Al Chebli Shiite family — a member of whom, Ali Chebli, is chief of the Saraya Mokawame. These clashes took place over religious, sectarian, and political differences.

In August 2020, a turning point in the violence occurred when Ali Chebli prominently displayed on the Chebli Shopping Centre a picture of Salim Ayyash and a banner commemorating Achoura.[3] Sheikh Omar Ghosn and his supporters tore down the picture and banner, trig-

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1   "Arab Al Maslakh: The Heart is With Jumblat But the Mind is With Hariri," Al Modon, January 2017. Available at: https://www.almodon.com/politics/2017/1/25

2   In May 2008, Hezbollah and affiliated parties launched an offensive on the capital and took over much of West Beirut, following the government's decision to shut down Hezbollah's telecommunication network and remove the Beirut Airport head of security.

3   The Special Tribunal for Lebanon convicted Salim Ayyach of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri.

People are evacuated as the Lebanese Armed Forces deploy in armored vehicles amid clashes in Khalde area between Hezbollah members and members of the Sunni Arab Al Ghosn tribe, August 1, 2021. Image courtesy of AFP.

gering violent armed clashes that resulted in the death of the 13-year-old Hasan Ghosn and the burning down of the Chebli Centre. Parties — including Hezbollah and Amal, on the one hand, and the PSP, LDP, and Future Party, on the other — were quick to contain the situation and restore calm. The absence of the rule of law, however, exacerbated grievances, as the Ghosn family demanded that Ali Chebli be arrested and charged with Hasan's murder. This never took place, so the Ghosn family accused Hezbollah of covering for Chebli and vowed to take vengeance. On 31 July 2021, at a wedding party at a resort in Jiye, the brother of Sheikh Omar Ghosn shot Ali Chebli, killing him. Tensions escalated the day after the shooting, when members of the Ghosn family ambushed Chebli's funeral procession in Khalde, killing five Hezbollah members and injuring three others in an hours-long firefight. Though revenge was taken, conflict dynamics are expected to escalate further, because the LAF arrested several members of the Ghosn family, including Sheikh Omar Ghosn. Given that Ali Chebli had never been brought to trial, this action by the state's security apparatus only fuelled the grievances of Al Arab.

Stakeholders

Type	Name/Role		Impact on Programme	Recommendations
AL ARAB SUNNI TRIBES	Al Ghosn tribe	Of the several tribes in the area, Al Ghosn has the most tense relationship with Hezbollah.	Potential Spoiler: exacerbate Sunni/Shiite tensions as well as Sunni/Sunni tensions (between different tribes) Potential Stabilizer: tribal leaders can diffuse tensions and push for reconciliation of differences	Engage and build relationships with the major tribes in the area
	Sheikh Omar Ghosn	Though currently detained, Sheikh Omar has a significant influence on other tribes, and on youth specifically. He has a notorious reputation for being a arms trader and was arrested in 2014 on suspicion of transporting a suicide bomber. He was later released. Sheikh Omar controls the road blockages in Khalde, mainly aiming to provoke Hezbollah (for whom the road is vital, as the gateway to the Shiite-held South).		
	Sheikh Abou Zeidan Daher	An avid supporter of Sheikh Omar Ghosn and is widely believed to have assisted in the plan to kill Ali Chebli.		
TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES	Lebanese Resistance Brigades (Saraya Al Mokawame)	The brigades are made up of local non-Shiite strongmen who support and are supported by Hezbollah in areas where there is no Shiite population. Headed by Ali Chebli before he was killed. The brigades have managed to recruit a couple of hundred Al Arab youth.	Potential spoilers: • exacerbate social tensions: between Lebanese (Sunni/Sunni and Sunni/Shiite) & between host/refugee communities • hold economic interests and seek to control resources in the area (possibility of aid diversion)	• Mitigation, avoidance; • occasional engagement or coordination (only in certain communities and/or certain projects when required) >> maintain neutrality • Ensure projects do not overlap with interests of parties • Monitor impact throughout the project cycle
	Hezbollah	Mediates the relationship between Saraya Al Mokawame and Al Arab.		
	Lebanese Democratic Party	Talal Arslan maintains a good relationship with Al Arab, building on the successes of his father with them. He also reportedly supplies them with weapons.		
	Progressive Socialist Party	Similar to Talal Arslan, Walid Jumblat maintains the good relationship his father, Kamal, built with Al Arab. He also reportedly supplies them with weapons and training.		
	Future Party	Former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri built relationships with Al Arab for electoral purposes. His son, former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, failed to strengthen the relationship with them, while Saad's brother Bahaa Hariri and aunt Bahia Hariri have both formed strong relationships with the tribes in recent years. Bahaa and Bahia reportedly also supply Al Arab with weapons and order them to block the roads at times.		

Type	Name/Role		Impact on Programme	Recommendations
GOVERNMENT SECURITY FORCES	Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF)	The LAF has been heavily involved in de-escalating armed clashes between Al Arab and Shiites, mainly Al Chebli family members. Following the incident of Chebli's murder, the LAF erected a permanent checkpoint near the Chebli Centre, where clashes typically take place.	Potential Stabilizer: upholding security, preventing escalations and diffusing tensions Potential Spoiler: exacerbates Sunni grievances as actions seen one-sided	Potential coordination required if conflict escalated and LAF restricts access to contain tensions
ACTIVISTS	N/A	Several sources have confirmed that activist individuals and groups are nearly absent in the area. Road blockages are always politically motivated and dictated by parties.		
MUNICIPALITY	Chweifat	Controlled and led by Arslan's party (Lebanese Democratic Party); provides services better than other municipalities as it is funded by several parties that have a strong presence in the area	Potential Stabilizers: • primary entry point to communities • legitimate localized body of authority • representative of the community Potential Spoilers: • extension of the current political system • Not reported to place restrictions or hinder the work of NGOs but is increasingly stressing on the larger inclusion of vulnerable Lebanese • Has a reputation for low level local corruption	• Engagement, information sharing, project design, coordination for implementation • Mitigate: • conduct own needs assessment to confirm needs stated by the municipality • Develop and abide by own targeting criteria • restrict procurement and provision of in-kind and cash aid to organization's staff (mitigating aid diversion and the possible channeling of funds to feed the extended corrupt system)

Scenarios

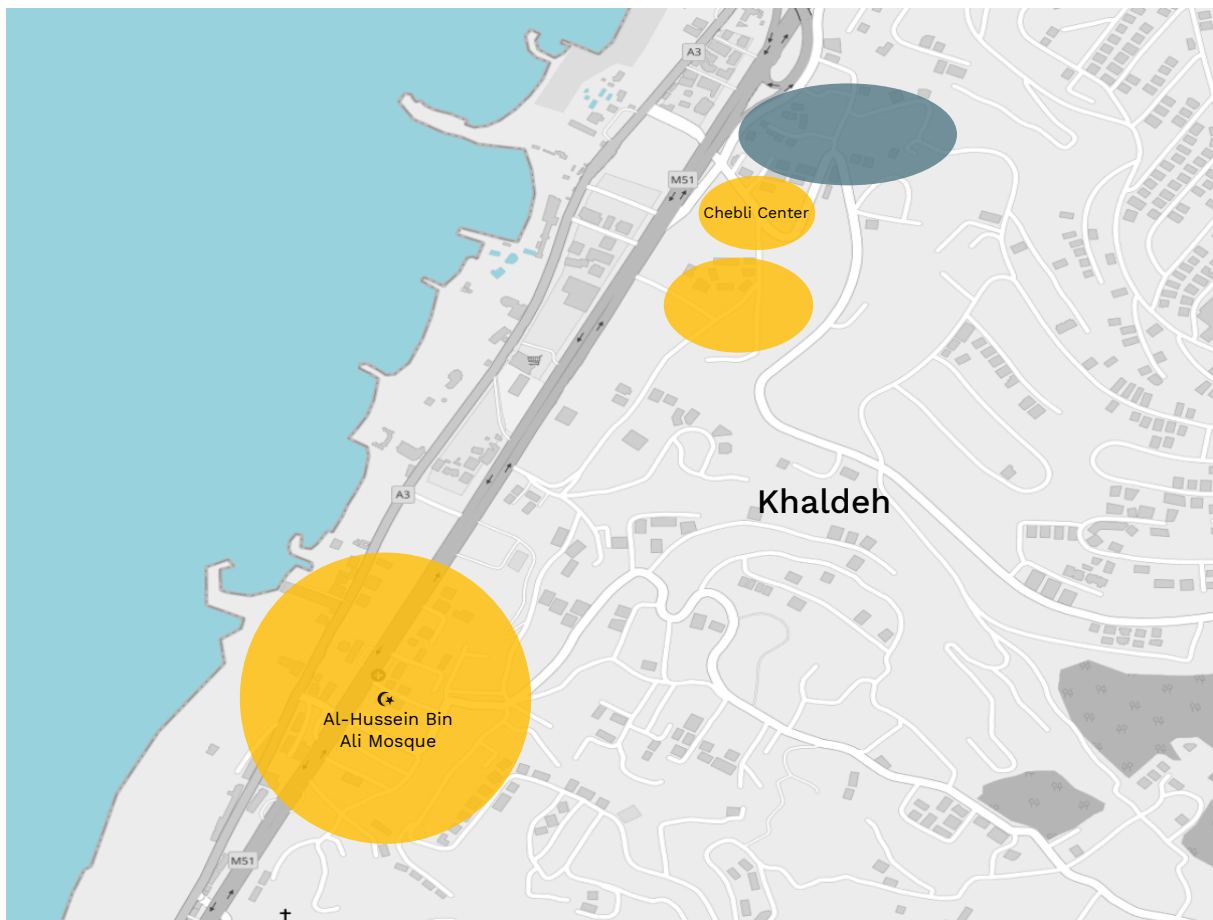**1** | **Worsened Status Quo – Increased Frequency and Intensity of Armed Clashes**

Pessimistic – Most Likely

This scenario presumes that the conflict between Al Arab and Shiites will intensify but that the situation will be contained and will not spread to other areas. So far, one or two clashes per year have been taking place, but this scenario presumes that at least one clash will happen on a bimonthly basis. Increased confrontations are expected for several reasons:

The Politicisation of the Judicial System: As stated above, several members of the Ghosn family were arrested following recent confrontations, whereas Ali Chebli was never brought to court or arrested. This has already exacerbated existing grievances and will continue to do so in the near to medium term.

Deteriorating Economic Situation: All over Lebanon, worsening economic conditions are heightening tensions between individuals and communities, who are increasingly fighting over limited resources. Khalde is no exception; a spontaneous clash between a Shiite and an Al Arab Sunni over fuel, for instance, can quickly take on a sectarian cast and expand to include tribes and groups.

Provocations: Clashes could easily be sparked by road blockages or Ashura banners or even a picture of a certain political or religious figure, and quickly escalate.

Areas of Shiite Concentration

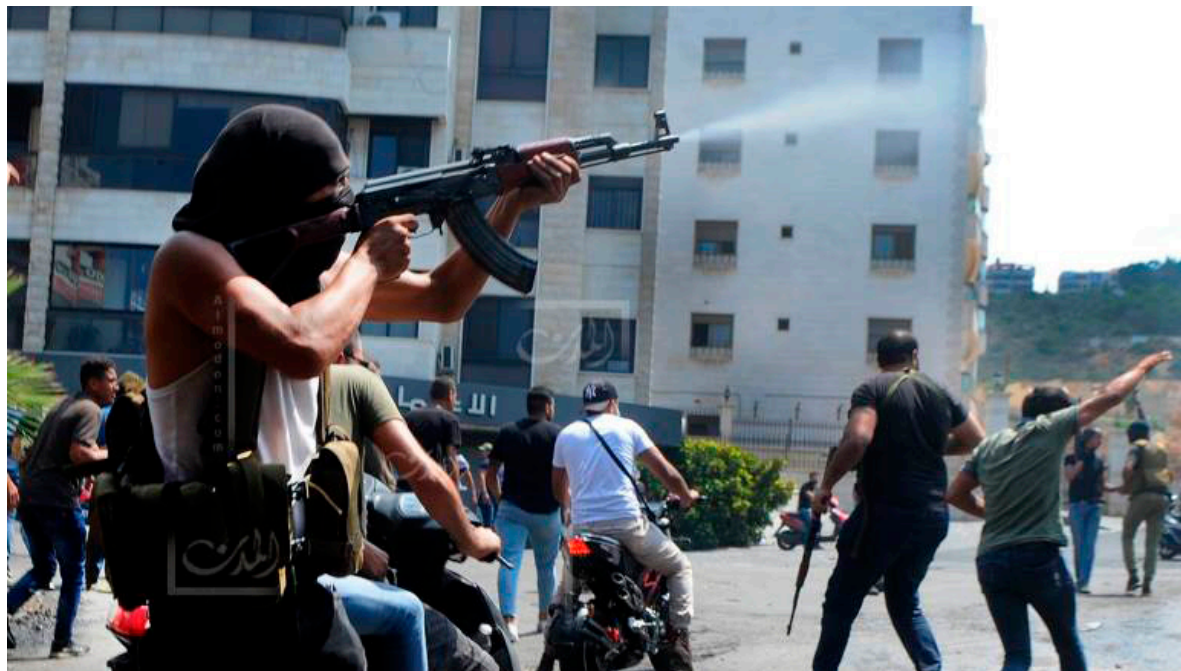Areas of Al Arab Sunni Concentration

Conflict Dynamics

Clashes are likely to be initiated by Al Chebli family members, engaging Al Ghosn tribe members. The latter have exacted revenge, so the Chebli family may want to retaliate — as might Hezbollah, which lost five of its members during the last round of confrontations. Heavy armed clashes will most likely take place in the eastern area of Khalde, where Al Arab reside in the northern section and Shiites reside in the southern section. These frequent incidents will involve supporters of both sides, leading to the extension of clashes between other families and tribes. Nonetheless, in order to avoid the spillover of clashes to other areas and regions of the country (see below), relevant parties and stakeholders will intervene to calm and contain the situation.

Impact: Refer to the "General impact" section in the national scenario. Note the following specific impact for Khalde:

Increase in casualties: The past round of confrontations resulted in five fatalities and three injuries; increased frequency of armed clashes will inevitably lead to a higher number of casualties.

Paralysis of Movement: Apart from road blockages, the threat of stray bullets will paralyse the streets and limit mobility. Organizations should expect activities to be hindered and schedule accordingly.

Minor Displacements: Due to the increased frequency and intensity of clashes, a small number of civilians are expected to leave the area for calmer places.

An armed member of Al Arab shooting towards Centre Chebli during the armed clashes in August 2020. Image courtesy of Al Modon.

2 | An Open Armed Conflict - And a Possible Civil War
Worst Case-Scenario – Least Likely

This scenario presumes that clashes in Khalde extend to other regions and drag several parts of the country into an open armed confrontation. The premise of this scenario is that parties are unwilling or unable to contain local clashes. There is precedent for events in Khalde to cause sympathetic actions in other parts of the country. For example, following Chebli's murder, Al Arab tribes across Lebanon staged their own protests; moreover, other Sunnis groups blocked the street in support of the Ghosn tribe in Tripoli, Tabbaneh, Akkar, and El Beddaoui. These protests were more of an act of resentment toward Hezbollah rather than expressing actual support for Khalde's Al Arab tribes; however, should armed confrontations intensify in Khalde, this could cause Sunni-Shiite schism to dramatically worsen across the country.

In this scenario, Armed clashes are expected to extend first to Tripoli district, given the intense hostility there towards Hezbollah and the Shiites in general. Clashes will also likely erupt in Saida, between Jiye (Shiite) and Barja (Sunni), and in Beirut — most probably in Tariq El Jdide, Aicha Bakkar, and Mazraa. In short, numerous other parts of the country could be dragged into the Khalde conflict, with escalating clashes creating a ripple effect throughout the whole of Lebanon.

In this scenario, the impact on operations is much greater than in the most likely scenario. The number of casualties is expected to significantly increase, as more than one area is involved in armed confrontations. The LAF will most probably opt to encircle Khalde in an attempt to contain the situation, which means that access will be completely cut off. The highway connecting the South to Beirut will witness prolonged closures and be rendered risky due to stray bullets- a key point of consideration, as this would effectively separate much of Beirut from the international airport. Mass displacements should be expected, especially in areas with prolonged clashes.

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