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## Top Muslim preacher urges Sunnis to join Syria war

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Egyptian Muslim scholar Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi addresses Muslims at Al-Azhar mosque during the weekly Friday prayer in Cairo on December 28, 2012.

DOHA: Influential Muslim cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi has called on Sunni Muslims to join the rebels fighting the Syrian regime, as he lashed out at Shiite group Hezbollah for sending its men to fight the mostly-Sunni insurgents in Syria.

Qaradawi, a controversial figure in the West but who has millions of supporters, mostly from the Muslim Brotherhood, also hit out at Iran for backing the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

"Every Muslim trained to fight and capable of doing that (must) make himself available" to support the Syrian rebels, the cleric said at a rally in Doha late Friday.

"Iran is pushing forward arms and men (to back the Syrian regime), so why do we stand idle?" he said, branding Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, which means the party of God in Arabic, as the "party of Satan".

Hezbollah, a close ally of Iran and the Syrian regime, is openly engaged in the fight against the rebels in Syria. It has also fought for years against Israel, arch rival of Iran and Syria.

"The leader of the party of the Satan comes to fight the Sunnis... Now we know what the Iranians want... They want continued massacres to kill Sunnis," Qaradawi said.

"How could 100 million Shiites (worldwide) defeat 1.7 billion (Sunnis)?" he exclaimed, "only because (Sunni) Muslims are weak".

The cleric blamed himself for previously backing Hezbollah and its leader Hassan Nasrallah who gained popularity after steadfastly leading his group in the fight against Israel in 2006.

"I defended the so-called Nasrallah and his party, the party of tyranny... in front of clerics in Saudi Arabia," which is wary of neighbouring Shiite Iran and its allies.

"It seems that the clerics of Saudi Arabia were more mature than me," Qaradawi said.

But the cleric insisted that his call to fight Hezbollah is "not against all Shiites".

Fighters of Hezbollah are engaged in fierce battles against the rebels to capture the Syrian town of Qusayr near the Lebanese borders.

The militant group has already lost dozens of its men in the battle for Qusayr.

Qaradawi hosts a popular show on Al-Jazeera satellite television and has backed the Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria.