



New England Americans for Lebanon

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Is Issam Fares, Deputy Prime Minister of Lebanon, a “Zionist Agent”?

I am reading the latest issue of Pharos, the newsletter published by the Tufts University Fares Center here in Boston. The Center is funded by an endowment of millions of dollars given to the university by Issam Fares, the Deputy Prime Minister of Lebanon. The Center sponsors such activities as the newsletter, a lecture series, and a “Chair for Lebanese and Eastern Mediterranean Studies” at the Fletcher School of Diplomacy at Tufts University.

On reading the newsletter or visiting the Center’s web site (<http://farescenter.tufts.edu/>), one notices a preponderance in the Center’s programs, guests and professors of Jewish names and Jewish studies programs, including professors and researchers from Israeli universities. For example, the Center’s lecture series this past year included History Professor S. Ilan Troen of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel. The Center’s focus is described as being on “...the countries of Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, along with the neighboring countries of Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Israel, and Turkey....”. Among the Faculty to the Center, I note Prof. Gloria Ascher who specializes in Judeo-Spanish literature and who is a frequent visitor to Israel where she has numerous collaborations, Prof. Joel Rosenberg who specializes in Jewish Literary History, and many others. Of course, there is nothing unusual to the presence of Jewish Americans in every walk of life of American institutions, including the US Congress. What is unusual, however, is that Issam Fares is personally funding Jewish and Israeli professors and studies of Jewish and Israeli societies at the same time that his own government has made it illegal under Lebanese law for Lebanese citizens to talk to Jewish Americans or Israelis. In the Baathist jargon of the regime in Beirut, this is referred to as “dealing with the Zionist enemy”, and Issam Fares’s top dog, Prosecutor General Adnan Addoum, is actively investigating and prosecuting members of the opposition and dissidents under that law.

In fact, many Lebanese have been indicted, jailed, tortured, killed, or exiled by Issam Fares’s own government for just that, talking to Jews or Israelis, sometimes even under a fabricated pretense. Some of us ordinary Lebanese Americans who try to raise the cause of a free, sovereign, and independent Lebanon to the forefront of American foreign policy, are under investigation by Adnan Addoum for being “vile Zionist agents” who spoke with American Jewish Senators and Congressmen. Mr. Addoum went so far as to threaten to try us for “high treason” because we supported President Bush’s war on terrorism and the Syria Accountability Act, and got the support of prominent US Congressmen like Eliot Engel and Barbara Boxer.

Just a step back to consider who Mr. Fares really is under his cloak of philanthropy, and the breadth of his reach in buying political influence and connections with his billions. In Lebanon, Issam Fares is, by necessity, a close partner of Major General Ghazi Kanaan, head of the Syrian Intelligence Services (The Mukhabaraat) in Syrian-occupied Lebanon. Kanaan is the “king maker” in Syrian-occupied Lebanon, runs a very lucrative drug business from Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley, and his Mukhabaraat protects and provides logistics support for Hezbollah in Lebanon. Together, the Mukhabaraat and Hezbollah are second only to Al-Qaeda in the number of Americans they have killed over the past two decades. On the hands of this Syrian regime-Hezbollah joint venture is the blood of countless Western and Lebanese diplomats, journalists, political leaders and dissidents, and Lebanese patriots of the opposition who are fighting to end the Syrian occupation of Lebanon. Hezbollah is the organization that kidnapped several American and European professors, clergymen, and journalists from the streets of

Beirut in the 1980s, and held them in chains for several years hoping to negotiate their exchange with Shiite terrorists held by Kuwait. Hezbollah's record for just 1983 in Syrian-controlled Beirut includes blowing up the US Marines barracks, twice the US Embassy, the French paratroopers compound, and the French Embassy. Hezbollah is the terror group that kidnapped retired US Lt. Col. William Higgins in 1988 from Beirut as he worked for the UN in south Lebanon, tortured and killed him by hanging in 1989. Yet, this is how Issam Fares defends Hezbollah in an interview this past year to Agence France-Presse:

“It is a mistake to compare Al-Qaeda network and Hezbollah. Hezbollah did not carry out any resistance operation against American interests in Lebanon or abroad and did not target civilians in its resistance activities as happened on Sept. 11 at the WTC.”

For the record, one needs only to consider Hezbollah's responsibility in just two of its “resistance activities” that completely debunk Mr. Fares's assertions. One targeted American interests inside Lebanon, and the other targeted civilians abroad: The bombing of the US Marines barracks in Beirut that killed 241 Marines, and the terrorist bombing of the Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It gets even more interesting when one looks at Mr. Fares's connections inside the American body politic. On the democrats side, and according to Joseph Farah writing in the World Net Daily (December 2002), Mr. Fares's US business holdings include the Houston-based Wedge Group (an oil services concern) which is headed by William White, a former No. 2 official at the Energy Department in the Clinton administration. On the republican side, the connection between the Fares and the Bush families dates back to the senior Bush administration. Both former President George H. W. Bush and his Secretary of State James Baker received each a \$100,000 speaking fee from Fares, and the former President was treated in 1993 to a trip to the Persian Gulf with Mr. Fares in the latter's private jet.

Back to the Fares Center at Tufts University. The double standard is flagrant. On the one hand, ordinary Lebanese who happen to be Lebanese Americans cannot speak to Jewish Americans or Israelis under Lebanese law. On the other hand, Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and his Deputy Issam Fares, who are only Lebanese - not American - citizens (although Mr. Fares's son holds an American Green Card), can break that law by speaking with and financially sponsoring Jewish and Israeli academics. We, as American citizens of Lebanese ancestry deal with our fellow Jewish-Americans like we deal with anyone else, be they Arab-Americans, Japanese-Americans, or African-Americans because that is the tapestry of American society. However, Fares and Hariri are Lebanese individuals who are “dealing” with Jewish Americans and Israelis for the sole motive of their own self-promotion and to peddle money and gain influence. Worse yet, Fares and Hariri are responsible for the collapse of Lebanon's economy over the past decade. And yet they are pouring money into America's institutions and having their names attached to academic chairs and carved on campus buildings (Boston University for Mr. Hariri and Tufts University for Mr. Fares). A tiny fraction of that money would make a big difference in rehabilitating Lebanon's educational system, from teachers' salaries, dilapidated school buildings, decaying academic programs, etc. The universities of the Boston area are already wealthy and affluent, and do not need that money. Lebanon's schools and universities, their students and teachers, and their administrators and employees have a desperate need for it.

There is a common denominator to all of this: The depth of Fares or Hariri's pockets and the depravation of American institutions like Tufts to dip into them. It is not their academic brains or their intellectual contributions that earn Hariri and Fares the recognition, but simply their ability to buy it, and with it the honorary degrees and access to influence and connections. Incidentally, Mr. Fares's chair at the Fletcher School at Tufts is entitled the “Chair for Lebanese and Eastern Mediterranean Studies”. Last spring, I was invited to attend the guest lecture by former President Bill Clinton at the dedication ceremony of the Center (now that I am writing this opinion, I will not wait for the next invitation). I expected some discussion or

reference to the economic and political misery of Lebanon. Instead Lebanon's name or subject never came up, not even once, neither during Issam Fares's introductory remarks nor during Bill Clinton's speech. The entire ceremony revolved around Israel and how peace in that country would help the entire region. I kept looking at the brand new name of the Chair to make sure the word "Lebanese" was in there. The disconnect was clear, and I thought perhaps the Center should have been more appropriately called "The Fares Center for Israeli Studies", in which case Mr. Fares would not need to worry if his name suddenly showed up on Adnan Addoum's list of "Zionist agents who are dealing with the Zionist enemy". You see, his friend Ghazi Kanaan of the Syrian Mukhabaraat would quickly rescue him from Mr. Addoum's death claws.

And so it goes, in the tradition of Lebanese tribal politics you can literally get away with murder if you hail from the rich and politically connected families of Lebanon who run the country. You can assassinate your political enemies, get automatically appointed to office at your father's death, rob the treasury and the Lebanese people blind and kill their hopes for a better future, monopolize the cell phone business, shut down television stations and downtown bars that do not agree with you, send your security forces to terrorize the families of political dissidents and members of the opposition, collaborate to the hilt with the Syrian occupation, fund Israeli academics and Israeli universities, talk to Israelis and Jewish Americans, get money from Jacques Chirac and Tony Blair to keep solvent the Lebanese treasury you are pilfering, support terrorist groups like Hezbollah, and still make friends in American political and academic circles. But if you are just like me, an ordinary Lebanese whose life was forever altered by the bloody wars of the Palestinians, Iranians, Syrians, and Israelis against my country, then you are a suspect. If you immigrated to this new country to escape the Syrian destruction of Lebanon and rebuild a life, you are a suspect. And if you became an average Lebanese American trying to tell the truth about Lebanon to anyone willing to listen, you are a suspect. You are a vile suspect and are put under a death threat because you're telling the truth about your old country so you, like most immigrants to America, can one day fulfill the dream of returning to the village. You lost something important and you want it back: An ordinary life, the lazy coffee breaks, Sunday church, the patch of parsley and tomatoes in the yard, and the daily arack and backgammon game on the veranda. You stand accused of treason because you speak to people of the Jewish faith on behalf of your decimated country, while Issam Fares issues decrees to make it illegal to speak to Jewish people, then goes around his own edict and sponsors speeches by Jewish and Israeli professors.

To Tufts University, its students, faculty, and administrators, I say that Issam Fares's money is money tainted with the blood of Americans. What Mr. Fares sponsors in the US, he bans in Lebanon. What he decries in the US, he supports in Lebanon. His socialite joviality during visits to Boston turns into repression of human rights by his police state in Beirut. The peace he talks about in the US becomes the *de jure* rejection by his puppet regime and Hezbollah friends of any peace whatsoever with the Jewish State. To remain true to its academic values, Tufts President Lawrence Bacow ought to emulate Rudy Giuliani and return Mr. Fares's money. At the very least attach conditions to it. Ask Mr. Fares to repudiate the Lebanese law that forbids speaking with Israelis and Jews, to publicly denounce the Syrian occupation of his country, to abide by UN resolutions and send the Lebanese army to pacify Lebanon's border with Israel, to hold free and fair elections in which Lebanese Americans émigrés are allowed to vote at Lebanon's consulates in this country, to stop supporting Hezbollah and unambiguously declare that the group is the terrorist organization that murdered 241 marines, twice bombed the US Embassy in Beirut in 1983, and dragged the honor of this country in the mud of blind hatred and fundamentalist ideologies.

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