Response to Daily Star Article – "American students tour Khiam, meet Hizbullah"

by Hareth Raad. *- June 02, 2004*

Dear Daily Star,

It is always after reading articles like this that I remind myself that sometimes one must count to ten with long deep breaths in between before answering. I also pride myself in never assuming that ignorance can be considered a sin as in the same vein I also understand that opinions vary as the hues of a setting sun on the glistening Mediterranean.

This brilliant view used to be mine from the terrace of my family's home in Byblos where I grew up. Today, living in political exile in Manhattan, I often wonder whether those who remain really see the iron clamps and black pall of the Syrian occupation that muzzles them for what it really is. Like millions of expatriates browsing the web in search of snatches of information about a place they still burn for as home, I find these articles in newspapers that purportedly tell the truth and opinions that are ostensibly based on freedom of speech.

Yet when one digs slightly beneath the surface and takes a moment to read between the lines, the ugliness of what has happened to Lebanon over the past 29 years cannot but raise its monstrous head.

One perfect example is your decision to allow this mockery of the truth to be published in your newspaper.

God rest his soul, my father, was a dear friend to Mr. Jamil Mrouwe the editor in chief of the Daily Star and his words still ring loudly in my ears "Jamil is a true believer in Lebanon". Today I read the daily star and I again come to the question "does he even have a choice?"

I like to think that the answer is NO and as many who read this response are aware, those who do not tow the line and keep their mouths shut will not so mysteriously find it shut for them.

Whether by some convenient government decree, or less visibly pleasing bludgeon to the skull and repose in the trunk of a car, we all know too well that freedom of speech has inconspicuously settled to become freedom to be speechless.

Yet here the quandary arises. Why praise Hizbullah too? I mean to what new low have we stooped that now, we must not only kiss the sisterly neighbors derriere, but we must also praise her demonic child begotten by the evil biological father in Iran.

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Did the someone who wrote this miserable attempt at painting a pretty picture forget that the Nazis also took care of their own people? Somehow the bandwagon that everyone has been forced onto at gunpoint is now visiting the wonderful social programs established by that very delightful charitable

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organization unfairly deemed a terrorist entity, our very own Hizbullah - Bravo. Ray Bradbury couldn't have written better science fiction.

Just like those reliable witnesses who spot UFO's always come from Wichita Kansas, the people interviewed in this article were convinced that those black ninja outfits and the katyusha rockets aimed at Israel were really just eager social workers trying to solve south Lebanon's woes. The flag burning and chanting of "America is the Great Satan" are also only passionately sung nursery rhymes for the entertainment of orphaned south Lebanese children.

God bless Mr. Kaouk for wanting one visitor to keep a fistful of sand from Palestine, that's just what a supposed Lebanese resistance leader should be worrying about whether or not Palestine is free or even rightly named. As far as my geography book states, Israel happens to be the neighboring country to Lebanon not Palestine.

280 Marines, Imad Mughniyyeh, Buenos Aires Embassy bombing, night vision goggles bought with smuggled American cigarettes, and countless hostages staying at the Hotel Shebaa-fornia. One need not even begin to touch on the scandals and treachery surrounding this A list player of world terrorists before you find some pitiful Lebanese reporter doing the undoable and regressing to be the peon of the puppet regime by praising them unabashedly.

To add infamy to insanity you then have a "Lebanese patriot" editing a Newspaper claiming ethical journalism giving the thumbs up to this propaganda.

I wish my father were alive today to see the beauty of a Lebanese sunset one more time, regrettably when it comes to his dear old friend and his rapid descent from the pedestal of patriotism… only death is the ignorance that can be excused.

Sincerely,
Hareth Raad

American students tour Khiam, meet Hizbullah - Qaouk welcomes visitors, condemns US president (Wednesday, June 02, 2004)
By Samer Wehbe, Special to ***The Daily Star***

KHIAM: Despite the fact that the US lists Hizbullah as a terrorist organization, a group of students from the School of Theology in San Francisco met with Hizbullah commander in the South, Sheikh Nabil Qaouk, and former detainees on a visit to the former Israeli detention center in Khiam on Tuesday.

Qaouk shook hands with male students and placed his hand on his chest to greet the female students, saying that Hizbullah distinguished between the US administration and the American people.

"We differentiate between the US administration and the US people and between Christianity and the US administration, which is acting wrongfully toward Christ, the Bible and the Vatican."

Qaouk told the students, who were accompanied by Secretary-General of the Middle East Council of Churches Reverend Nohad Tohme, that "Hizbullah and the people of the region call for the axis of

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good that unites Muslims and Christians who refuse US hegemony."

He added that the "US administration had harmed Christians and Christianity by allying itself with the gang of evil that occupied our land and attacked holy sites in Palestine."

Qaouk also accused US President George Bush of being the "most terrorist man in the world ... and the president who threatens holy sites most in the world."

The head of the student delegation, Charles Marks, said he was happy to be in the South, adding that the trip was aimed at "(getting) to know the nature of Christian-Muslim co-existence and preparing a study about it."

He added that Hizbullah was a political party and an association helping the poor and needy.

"I am certain that my positive image of Hizbullah is different from that pictured in the West," Marks asserted, "I am happy to meet Hizbullah officials and listen to what they have to say."

Marks added that the delegation would also visit Syria and Jordan.

Student Alex Klaushofer said she came here to try to understand Hizbullah better and convey her impressions to people back home, providing them with a clearer image of the party.

"When people in England hear about Hizbullah, they quickly remember the hostages taken by Hizbullah in the early eighties," she said. "I came ... to prove to them that their ideas are not true."

Marc Saliba, a Palestinian living in Canada since 1972, thanked Hizbullah for its role in liberating the South and said the party was "not a terrorist organization."

Qaouk asked Saliba to keep a handful of sand from Palestine when he passed along the fence at the border.

The students watched a 20-minute documentary with English subtitles on the liberation of prisoners in May 2000 before visiting the former detention center where a former detainee explained the methods of torture used against them by the Israelis and their collaborators.

Harold Armstrong said he was very touched by what he heard about the torture.

"It is important for us to know such facts so that we can convey them to the American people," Armstrong said.

The group also visited the Fatima Gate and took pictures of the Israeli settlement of Metulla before going to the Abbad post and Naqoura.

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