

# Return of Israeli agent to Lebanon angers former Khiam prisoners

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BEIRUT: The return of Israeli agent Amer Elias Fakhouri to Lebanon has sparked off heated debate about the Lebanese who fled to Israel during and after the Israeli occupation of the south of the country.

The depth of feeling aroused was demonstrated in the social media exchanges and the protests that have been taking place.

Fakhouri, 56, was the commander of a military battalion guarding the notorious Israeli detention camp, Khiam, in southern Lebanon during the 22-year Israeli occupation.

In 1998, two years before the Israeli troops pulled out of Lebanon, Fakhouri left Lebanon, going via Israel to the United States after a disagreement with his superiors.

He was sentenced in absentia to 15 years' imprisonment with hard labor in 1998. He was convicted of working for Israel, as well as arresting and torturing Lebanese citizens by order of the Israeli occupation forces, which supervised and ran the detention camp through the South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia, led by Antoine Lahad.

Judicial sources told Arab News: "Fakhouri arrived at Rafic Hariri International Airport a few days ago and was received by a Lebanese officer. He used his American passport to enter, and the officer accompanying him facilitated his passage at the Lebanese General Security checkpoint."

According to a security source, "the security officer in charge of checking the passports of those arriving in Beirut noticed that Fakhouri was wanted for arrest. However, when the matter was looked into, it was found that the judicial arrest decision had been withdrawn, preventing the Lebanese General Security Directorate from arresting him, but the security checkpoint seized his passport for further scrutiny."

Social media buzzed with the news of Fakhouri's arrival, which was shared under the hashtag "Jazzar Al-Khiam"—the butcher of Khiam. Activists expressed outrage at Fakhouri being allowed to return to Lebanon without being arrested. This prompted the General Security to interrogate him and refer him to the military prosecutor.

The General Security Directorate declared that, after interrogation, Fakhouri confessed to working for Israel. He also confessed that after he had fled into occupied Palestine he obtained an Israeli identity card and an Israeli passport, under which he left the occupied Palestinian territory.

Two views prevailed in Lebanon regarding the arrest of Fakhouri, judicial expert Katia Toa told Arab News. "The first view is that the sentence in absentia is 20 years old, so it was dropped with time. Therefore, he has a right to return to Lebanon in a normal manner.

"The second view is that Fakhouri's offense is a persistent offense, and thus

it cannot be dropped with time. He must be tried again to determine his legal status in Lebanon."

On Friday, 34 lawyers and 10 freed prisoners filed a complaint with the Public Prosecution Office against Fakhouri.

Toa said: "The military court does not take into account individual complaints. This complaint is included in the original file, and if Fakhouri is to be tried, it would be for having acquired Israeli citizenship. But that offense is judicially classified as a misdemeanor, not a felony, and it has a reduced sentence."

An investigation is also being carried out to find out who requested the assistance of the officer who accompanied Fakhouri at the airport.

Dozens of former Khiam prisoners and their families gathered outside the military court building in Beirut to demand that Fakhouri be punished for his crimes.

MP Qassem Hashim, who participated in the protest, criticized the leniency in dealing with agents, arguing that "it may lead in the future to an easier view of treachery and communicating with Israel."

Jihad Hassan Hammoud, a former Khiam prisoner, said: "Fakhouri was responsible for torturing Lebanese citizens and he came up with many creative torture methods. He must be tried for his crimes."

The process of clearing Fakhouri's record reminded some of a statement by the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, Minister Gebran Bassil, who a few months ago talked of implementing a law for the return of Lebanese fugitives to Israel. However, this had aroused controversy among the political parties in Lebanon.

The Lebanese parliament approved a draft law submitted in 2011 by the Free Patriotic Movement to address the situation of Lebanese citizens in Israel, but no implementing decree was issued.

An estimated 7,500 Lebanese citizens, most of whom were from Christian villages, fled to Israel after the withdrawal of the occupying forces from southern Lebanon in 2000. The majority left for Europe and the United States, while 3,000 remained in Israel.

Those trying to return to Lebanon through the Naqoura border crossing in coordination with UNIFIL are subject to investigation. Some of them have received lenient sentences while others have been acquitted.

Toa pointed out that the fugitives known to the Lebanese judiciary have been sentenced in absentia to 10-15 years in prison. A new generation was born in Israel, and these are not affected by the sentences, except for the charge of obtaining Israeli citizenship.



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## [US to continue economic pressure on Iran and Hezbollah](#)

Fri, 2019-09-13 17:52

WASHINGTON: The US is to continue its economic pressure on Iran and its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah, the Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing Marshall Billingslea said on Friday.

Speaking at the Atlantic Council, Billingslea added that the drug trade in South America was financing the terrorist organization, and that other

sources of funding included money laundering. He also said that South America was starting to turn against Hezbollah, which is backed by Iran.

Billingslea said that the US Treasury will continue to exert economic pressure on Iran and Hezbollah, and that it considers the buying of Iranian oil as funding terrorism.

Due to Iraq's proximity to Iran, the Iraqi people "are victims," Billingslea said. However, any Iraqi party that colludes with Iran's Revolutionary Guards will have sanctions imposed on it.

He continued by saying that NATO countries supported the US and consider Iran a terrorist state.

The US Treasury has had no difficulty in convincing Europe that the regime in Iran is corrupt and that corruption is widespread, the Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing said. He added that the US has informed European countries that dealing with Iran will harm their trade with the country.

Shipping companies must know who they are dealing with, otherwise they will be sanctioned, Billingslea said.



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## **Russia asks Iran to refrain from action that could jeopardize saving nuclear pact**

Fri, 2019-09-13 16:42

MOSCOW: Russia has asked Iran to refrain from any action that could jeopardize saving its troubled nuclear pact after Washington pulled out if it, Yuri Ushakov, a senior Kremlin aide, said on Friday.

Ushakov added that the leaders of Russia, Turkey and Iran will discuss the difficult situation in Syria's Idlib province when they meet in Ankara early next week for a summit.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani are due to hold talks on Syria in Ankara on Monday.





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## [Six UAE troops killed in 'vehicle collision'](#)

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Fri, 2019-09-13 16:15

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates' Armed Forces said six of its troops have

been killed in a “vehicle collision” in a field of operations, the Emirates’ WAM news agency reported on Friday.  
The General Command of the UAE Armed Forces extended its condolences to the families of those killed.



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## [Tunisia's exiled Ben Ali can return if sick: PM](#)

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Fri, 2019-09-13 11:53

TUNIS: Tunisia's prime minister said exiled former autocrat Zine el Abidine Ben Ali would be allowed to return home if he was critically ill as reported by his lawyer.

"I will give my green light for his return. It's a humanitarian case. If he's ill as rumored, he can return to his country like any other Tunisian," Youssef Chahed said late Thursday on Hannibal TV.

"If he wants to return to be buried here, I give my green light," added Chahed, who is also a candidate in Tunisia's presidential election on Sunday. Ben Ali's lawyer, Mounir ben Salha, said hours earlier that Tunisia's leader who was ousted in a 2011 revolt when he fled to Saudi Arabia following two decades of iron-fisted rule, was "in critical condition."

"He's not dead but the condition of his health is bad. He has left hospital and is being treated at home. His condition is stable," the lawyer said on Oxygene FM radio.

Tunisian courts have condemned Ben Ali, 83, in absentia to several prison sentences, including life terms, for abuse of power, graft and involuntary homicide.



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