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Abstract: *Although the Lebanese diaspora has existed for generations, its members have maintained a strong identification with the land of their grandparents and great-grandparents and their homeland connection endures. The institutionalized, transnational political activism of Lebanese-Americans is almost always undertaken by individuals with high levels of education and social standing. The Lebanese-American political associations are generally organized on a sectarian basis and connected to a political party in Lebanon, while economic initiatives cut across Lebanese sectarian and political divides. This paper advances the argument that diaspora organizations can be the allies of policymakers not only in the homeland, as has been traditionally emphasized in the diaspora literature, but also in host countries that wish to promote stability and economic development.*

INTRODUCTION

The increasing importance of diasporas in the age of globalization has been discussed by many scholars (Shain 2008; Shain and Barth 2003; Conostas and Platias 1993; Anderson 1994, 1998) and has been the central focus of the transnationalism literature that focuses on how immigrant communities abroad are connected to their places of origin (Basch et al. 1994; Portes 1999; Østergaard-Nielsen 2002; Guarnizo et al. 2003; Itzigsohn and Villacres 2008). The transnational political involvement of the US-based Lebanese diaspora is extensive. Lebanese-Americans constitute approximately 32% of Americans from Arabic-speaking countries, according to U.S. Census data (Arab American Institute 2010) and over half of Lebanese-Americans today are descendants of the early, overwhelmingly Christian migrations from Lebanon to the United States between 1880 and 1940 (Naff 1993: 145-6). Later migrations of not only Christian, but also Muslim and Druze immigrants, took place after WWII, particularly following the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975 (Naff 1993:162). Lebanese emigration during the 1975-1990 Civil War was multi-sectarian and more family-based than earlier waves (Labaki 1992: 621 in Brand 2006: 137) and continued in the 1990s and 2000s at a high rate (Mouawad 2010). While conservative estimates based on Census data calculate that Lebanese-Americans number approximately 1.12 million, diaspora organizations cite figures as high as 2.5 million Lebanese in the U.S. alone.

Identity is a decisive factor in the political outlook and in the involvement of Lebanese-Americans in transnational activities related to Lebanon. The older-generations of the Lebanese

diaspora and some recent immigrants to the US tend to identify as Lebanese-American and as Christian (i.e. Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Syriac Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox (Gregorian), Assyrian (Nestorian) and Protestant) but not as Arab American, and tend to support the platform of Christian parties in Lebanon. Other Lebanese-Americans, including recent immigrants who may be Sunni or Shi'i Muslims, Druze or Christians, as well as some older-generations of Lebanese-Americans, identify as Arab and hold political outlooks characteristic to Arab Americans (Marinova 2010).

Three Lebanese-American Organizations

While a developed academic literature exists on Arab American organizations, there are no analyses of contemporary Lebanese-American organizations. This research focuses on three Lebanese-American organizations: the formerly politically active American Lebanese League, and two economically-driven organizations - the Lebanese American Renaissance Partnership and the American Lebanese Chamber of Commerce. These organizations are differentially connected to Lebanon and can be characterized by specific activities and types of diaspora representatives. From these examples, this paper concludes that transnational Lebanese-American political participation is along sectarian lines, while economic initiatives have a broader appeal and are multi-sectarian by nature. The leaders of both of these types of transnational, diaspora organizations also tend to possess high levels of socio-economic standing and education.

AMERICAN LEBANESE LEAGUE

The American Lebanese League (ALL) is an example of transnational diaspora politics that seeks to influence the politics of the host country, in this case, the U.S, towards the homeland. ALL was founded in 1974¹ in Ohio as a tax-exempt, non-profit organization and its stated goal was the preservation of the independence of Lebanon. It became active through membership and branches throughout the US after the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975 and remained active until the early 1990s. ALL members were generally wealthy and conservative individuals with ties to the Maronite clergy and Christian parties in Lebanon. ALL worked with Christian parties and militias and was the most prominent Lebanese-American organization to identify with the platform of the Christian Lebanese Front.² The Lebanese Front's official manifesto, written in 1980, praised the League stating, "On the occasion of the convening of the ... annual

¹ Some sources, such as Saadi (1998) list the year as 1974. In others, it is cited as 1976 (Basil before the US Senate 1983:377).

² The Lebanese Front was created in 1977 by traditional Christian leaders who favored the political status quo in the country. The organization was committed to the defense of Christian interests in Lebanon and was opposed to the Lebanese National Movement, an alliance of Druze, Muslims and leftist parties (which included some Christians), and to Palestinian fighters. The Lebanese National Movement sought a modification in the state's power-sharing formula and social change. The Lebanese Front included political forces associated with the prominent Maronite families, such as the Gemayels (Pierre Gemayel led the Kataeb party), the Chamouns (including the former President Camille Chamoun, leader of the National Liberal Party), the Frangiehs (then-President Suleiman Frangieh headed the Marada), as well as militias associated with Maronite religious orders under Father Charbel Qassis (Zahar 2000:110). Subsequently, the Lebanese Forces was created as a military wing of the Lebanese Front to direct the armed operations of the Christian militias. Bashir Gemayel, son of Pierre Gemayel, was elected as the first head of the Lebanese Forces (Ibid). After 1982, when the conflict became even more narrowly sectarian, the Lebanese Forces emerged as the main Christian militia in Lebanon (Hudson 1997:111) and at the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990 they became a political party.

conference of the American Lebanese League in Washington... we commend the felicitous endeavors undertaken by the League with the United States Government and the public opinion of America. We also laud the constancy of its sound view of everything that pertains to the essence and destiny of Lebanon” (text quoted in Salmon 2006).³ In the 1980s, ALL worked with the Kataeb party, the Lebanese Forces, the National Liberal Party, and other Christian parties (Hourani 2010). The ALL leadership met with three important Christian leaders during their US visits, including the leader of the Lebanese Forces (and later President-Elect of Lebanon), Bashir Gemayel, the Head of the National Liberal Party, Dory Chamoun, as well as the former Lebanese Ambassador to the UN, Charles Malik, who had participated in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Saadi 1998,⁴ Gates 1978).

According to figures from the organization, ALL’s membership was approximately 10,000 individuals in 1978 (Gates 1978:18). In 1989, a Middle East Institute publication reported its membership at 5,000 (Wayne 1989: 7). ALL’s policy chairman, Robert Basil, stated before Congress that ALL is “not [as] a lobbying organization, but a humanitarian social and educational organization that represents the ideals of the 2.5 million Lebanese-Americans living in the US as model citizens” (C-SPAN 1989a). ALL’s official lobbying arm was called the Lebanese Information Center (Gates 1978), while the Lebanese Forces representation in the US was the Lebanese Information and Research Center (Irani 2005: 69). In the 1980s, ALL worked with the Lebanese Information and Research Center, based in Washington, DC and headed by Alfred Madi, Fady Hayek, Charbel Khoury, and Robert Farah (Hourani 2010).

ALL’s political positions were contrary to those of organizations such as the National Association of Arab-Americans, the Arab American Institute and the American- Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. The difference was not only one of identity, but also one of political outlook, with a major point of contention being the Palestinian community in Lebanon. ALL members were opposed to and viewed Palestinian refugee and PLO presence in Lebanon as a threat to the stability and security of the country, while Arab American organizations were supportive of the Palestinian cause. Ideologically, the position of the League reflected the principles of Lebanese nationalism or Lebanonism – the central worldview of Pierre Gemayel’s Kataeb party (Entelis 1973). Lebanonism sees Lebanese Christians as having a separate identity and history from that of Lebanese Muslims, and, in some cases, views Lebanese Christians as descendants of the ancient Phoenicians. Lebanese nationalism was positioned as an ideological counter to Arab nationalism (Entelis 1973), which considers the Arab world as a single homogenous entity, and Arab people as constituting a single nation bound by common ties of language, religion and history (Sharabi 1966 cited in Karsh and Karsh 1996: 367). A large number of scholars trace Arab nationalism’s ideological origins to nineteenth-century Islamic revivalism, while others consider it to have secular roots.⁵ In contrast, Lebanonism considers Muslims as representatives of Arab culture at odds with Maronite Christian identity (Entelis 1973). This stance was evident in the words of an ALL leader, Elias Saadi, who during a forum on Capitol Hill in 1989, called on those of Lebanese descent to “Identify yourselves...as what

³ “The Lebanon We Want To Build.” Manifesto issued by the Lebanese Front on the 23 December 1980 at Deir Aoukar.

⁴ See <http://maroniteinstitute.org/MARI/JMS/july98/rootsfig54.htm> for a photo of President-Elect Bashir Gemayel and ALL founding member and Chairman, Elias Saadi.

⁵ For an overview of historical scholarship on Arab nationalism, see Khalidi (1991), Dawn (1993) and Karsh and Karsh (1996).

most of you are – you are Lebanese-American; you are not Arab Americans... don't cover it by Americans of Middle East background – first and foremost, from this day forward, identify yourselves as Lebanese-American” (C-SPAN 1989b).

ALL sought to promote positions and policies favorable to Lebanese Christians before the White House and Congress. ALL lobbied in meetings with President Jimmy Carter, and later Vice-President George H.W. Bush.⁶ In an indication of the high profile of the League, in 1978 President Carter invited its leaders, together with other American officials of Lebanese descent, to a White House ceremony of planting the Cedar of Lebanon, as ALL Chairman Saadi delivered a speech alongside President Carter (Saadi 1998; Carter 1978: 794). In the 1980s ALL had an anti-Syrian platform – a position that matched that of the Christian Lebanese Forces during that period in the Lebanese Civil War.⁷ During the April 1981 siege of Zahle, when the Lebanese Forces inflicted casualties on the Syrian army and Syrians began shelling both militias and civilians, ALL carried out a public relations campaign in the U.S. media and before President Reagan in order to present their viewpoint on the events (Toaldo 2008: 102). In newspaper advertisements, such as in the *Washington Post*, ALL condemned what they called the “systematic extermination of the Christian community in Lebanon by the Syrian army and the PLO” (Toaldo 2008: 102). In the ad, ALL asked Reagan to pressure the Syrians to pull their troops out of Lebanon. In a letter to Vice President Bush in May 1981, ALL also utilized the political saliency of Cold War tensions and argued that Syria was an extension of Soviet influence in the region and the Syrian army should be removed from Lebanon (Ibid: 95).⁸

In the 1982 US elections, ALL became more involved with U.S. domestic political players and its political action committee, AL-PAC, contributed to five Congressional races (Rubenberg 1984: 12-13). ALL testified on numerous occasions before Congress seeking to influence foreign aid appropriations to Lebanon. For instance, ALL official Robert Basil testified and delivered statements before Congressional sub-committees, including testimonies before the House Committee on Appropriations in 1979, 1980, 1982, and 1983 (US House 1979; 1980: 132-3; 1982: 492; 1983a: 962-6), the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in 1983 and 1987 (US House 1983b: 153-6; 1983c: 252, 1987: 406-8), the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in 1980 and 1983 (US Senate 1980a: 124-5; 1983: 377) and the Senate Committee on Appropriations in 1980, 1987 and 1990 (US Senate 1980b: 781; 1987: 270; 1990: 2).

Testimonies before U.S. House of Representatives committees in 1989 indicate that ALL was in contact with and supported General Michel Aoun's anti-Syrian position. In a 1989 ALL's former president, Elias Saadi, identified Syrian President Hafez al-Assad's regime as “the evil in

⁶ <http://maroniteinstitute.org/MARI/JMS/july98/rootsfig52.htm>

⁷ Syria initially intervened in Lebanon in June 1976 with 40,000 troops at the request of and siding with Lebanese Christians because Syria wanted to prevent a PLO-influenced regime in Beirut (Kandil 2008: 440). Syria gradually turned against the Christian militias in 1977-1979, which then were fighting each other as well as Muslims (Hudson 1997: 110). After the 1982 alliance between Lebanese Forces leader Bashir Gemayel and Israel, Syria switched sides and allied with the Palestinians. After Gemayel was assassinated, and Israel moved to the South, Syrians changed sides again and sided with the Shi'a against Lebanese leftists, Palestinians and Druze. In 1989, the Arab League helped negotiate the terms of the Ta'if Agreement, which marked the end of the Civil War in Lebanon. Syria was given the task of its implementation. General Aoun refused the terms of this agreement in the so-called “War of Liberation” against Damascus and he was forced into exile by the Syrians in October 1990 (Kandil 2008: 440).

⁸ Letter to Vice President Bush from ALL, May 12 1981, Donald Gregg Files. Bush Presidential Library, cited in Toaldo (2008:95).

Lebanon” (C-SPAN 1989b) and ALL policy chairman, Robert Basil, referred to the Syrians as the main problem facing Lebanon, praising Aoun as “head of the provisional government” and the Lebanese Forces for “energetically pursuing social, economic, educational and other initiatives “(C-SPAN 1989a).

The splits and divisions between Christian parties in Lebanon following the 1989 Ta’if Agreement were reflected in diaspora organizations and led to the dissolution of ALL and the end of its political activity. When ALL became inactive in the early 1990s, some of its members, including Saadi (US House 2002: 71) joined the newly created Council of Lebanese American Organizations, which supported General Aoun (Hitti 2008), while others remained loyal to the Lebanese Forces of Geagea. The Lebanese Forces is represented in Washington, DC today by the Lebanese Information Center.

Through ALL’s transnational political connectivity and activism, Lebanese-Americans sought to influence the policies of the host country government towards the homeland. As the largest organization of Lebanese-Americans sympathetic to the Christian side in the Civil War, ALL maintained connections with party leaders in Lebanon and lobbied the US government, seeking to influence US policy toward the homeland. As Østergaard-Nielsen (2002: 128) argued, the transnational political involvement of diasporas includes participation in homeland politics within the host country and is not necessarily limited to moves back and forth between home and host country, or to direct participation in homeland politics (such as through voting or candidacy in political parties). ALL’s lobbying and advocacy in the US in the 1970s and 1980s was an instance of transnational political involvement and reveals a strong connection to the country of origin not only of Lebanese-born, but also US-born Lebanese-Americans, such as ALL Chairman Elias Saadi and Executive Director Philip Peters (Saadi 1998; *South Coast Today* 1998). This diaspora participation of individuals who are not of the immigrant generation but are generations removed from the act of migration represents a phenomenon that has not been addressed by diaspora or transnationalism scholars.

LEBANESE AMERICAN RENAISSANCE PARTNERSHIP

The Lebanese American Renaissance Partnership (LARP) is the initiative of a group of approximately 30 prominent Lebanese-American entrepreneurs and professionals who met with members of Lebanon’s political and business élite in Beirut in an effort to promote business relations and strengthen ties between Lebanon and its émigré community. LARP’s mission statement is

to support the civil society and civic institutions of Lebanon, lift the spirit of the Lebanese people and assist the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and other US agencies in promoting economic growth in Lebanon and fostering peace, sovereignty, stability and democratic institutions (LARP 2010).

LARP’s goals are to increase international trade, create jobs, invest in youth, and provide humanitarian assistance through supporting non-profit organizations and U.S.-Lebanese government initiatives in Lebanon.

Established in 2006, LARP enjoys high-levels of support from both the US and the Lebanese governments due to its multi-sectarian approach and focus on transnational investment and economic development. Inspired, but not directly created, by President George W. Bush's appeal to the U.S. private sector to help rebuild Lebanon after the July 2006 war, the founding circumstances are related to its mission and successes. LARP strives to reconnect Lebanese-Americans with their roots in Lebanon by strengthening the network of contacts between entrepreneurs and the government to foster international trade relationships and further US interests in the region, thus boosting the Lebanese economy. LARP's activities and networks also benefit USAID's goal of long-term development in Lebanon (Kaufman 2007).

Although membership in LARP is open to people of all nationalities and religious sects, prospective members have to be invited and recommended by current members. LARP attracts influential members, leaders and speakers at its conferences. The first LARP conference took place in November 2006, the second (called LARP II) in November 2008 with a third planned for the fall of 2011. The speaker at the inaugural LARP conference was then-US ambassador to Lebanon, Jeffrey Feltman. The current LARP president, Walid Maalouf, served as Director of Public Diplomacy for Middle Eastern & MEPI Affairs at USAID during the George W. Bush Administration and is a prominent Lebanese-American banker who was previously involved with numerous Lebanese diaspora organizations in the US, including ALL.⁹ The Secretary-General of LARP, Anis Garabet, served as president of one of the largest worldwide Lebanese diaspora organizations, the World Lebanese Cultural Union¹⁰ from 2005-2007 (Garabet 2008; LARP 2010). The LARP II conference, organized in collaboration with the American Lebanese Chamber of Commerce, was held in Lebanon under the patronage of Lebanese President, General Michel Sleiman and included many high-profile government representatives. Attendees included high-profile speakers such as U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon, Michele Sison, President of the American Lebanese Chamber of Commerce, Salim Zeenni, Governor of the Central Bank of Lebanon, Riad Salameh, and Lebanese Minister of the Economy, Mohammad Safadi and a LARP delegation visited then-Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. Participants in LARP conferences have included Nayla Moawad, former Minister of Social Affairs, Boutros Harb, Member of Parliament, as well as Nadim Gemayel, elected to Parliament in 2009 and son of former President-Elect Bashir Gemayel. The LARP II corporate leader was Ghassan Saab, an Arab American Institute board member and former Chairman of the American Druze Foundation.¹¹

Unlike politically-focused organizations such as ALL, LARP is an organization that cuts across sectarian divides and Lebanese political parties. While coming from different backgrounds, LARP members have a common interest in the economic well-being of Lebanon – a principle that is at the core of the organization. However, as the biographical information of some of LARP's leading members indicates, LARP is multi-sectarian, including Sunni Muslims, Druze as well as Maronite Christians. Indeed, sectarian diversity and past experience in other

⁹ Maalouf was also a founding member of the National Alliance of Lebanese Americans and served as national Executive Director of the ALL in 1987-1988 (*New Lebanese-American Journal* 1988). He was also one of the founders of the American Lebanese Coalition in 2004. For details, please see www.validmaalouf.com.

¹⁰ The World Lebanese Cultural Union was established in 1960 although today, there are officially two World Lebanese Cultural Unions that reflect the political divisions in Lebanon. The intra-organizational divisions began in the 1980s and led to the effective splitting of the organization in the 1990s. For a detailed overview of the history and politics of the WLCU and the split, please see the chapter on Lebanon in Brand (2006:133-175).

¹¹ <http://larpmmission.org/larpii/corporate-leader.html>.

Lebanese organizations was sought out and valued. For example, Maalouf, a Bush administration appointee who led both LARP delegations, was involved in ALL and the National Alliance of Lebanese Americans and co-founded the American Lebanese Coalition. Saab is a supporter of the American Arab Heritage Council and the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn and a leader in both Druze and Arab American organizations (Arab Detroit 2010). Garabet served as president of the World Lebanese Cultural Union (WLCU) between 2005 and 2007 when the organization emphasized cultural activities and diversified its largely Christian membership through outreach to include Sunni Lebanese residing in North America.

LARP has, however, engaged in the political arena through supporting US reconstruction aid to Lebanon after the 2006 war. In 2007, a LARP delegation met with the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Biden, and several Congressmen and expressed support for the \$770 million aid package proposed by the Bush administration (LARP 2007). In October 2007, LARP members also met with Zalmay Khalilzad, the US Ambassador to the UN, and discussed issues pertaining to the territorial neutrality of Lebanon, the plight of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and the election of a president of the Republic.

However, despite meetings at the highest levels of government in both the US and Lebanon, LARP activities are not institutionally linked to a specific Lebanese political party. LARP's main goal is to strengthen US-Lebanese relations in the economic realm through opening up avenues for investment and creating economic partnerships. LARP has made a limited number of political statements, including calling for a presidential election in Lebanon in 2007 and advocating the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1559 that calls for the disarmament of all Lebanese militias. Although LARP invited government ministers to its conferences, it is not a "political" organization, at least to the extent that the business and political realms can be separated. In contrast with "political" Lebanese-American diaspora organizations that maintain transnational alliances with specific political parties, explicitly espousing positions along sectarian party lines, LARP institutionally does not advocate a narrow party-specific platform in Lebanon, generally focusing on the business aspects in its relations with US policymakers. LARP's focus on investment and the development of business partnerships drew LARP members together into one organization and accounts for the maintenance of its multi-sectarian character.

AMERICAN LEBANESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The American Lebanese Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) was founded in January 2000 and is headed by Salim Zeenni. AmCham¹² is one of the 113 Chambers of Commerce formally affiliated with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce that serve to promote US economic interests abroad (U.S. Chamber of Commerce 2010). One of the primary objectives of the Chamber is to provide information and a contact network for American investors in Lebanon, as well as for Lebanese investors in the US. Membership in the Chamber is open to companies and individuals

¹² The term "AmCham" in this text is used to refer specifically to the American Lebanese Chamber of Commerce, and not to the other American Chambers of Commerce worldwide.

with direct business dealings in the U.S., and to U.S. citizens in Lebanon with businesses either in the U.S. or in Lebanon (AmCham 2010).

AmCham activities are supported by both the U.S. and Lebanese governments, and include regular visits with Lebanese ministers as well as the Lebanese President and Prime Minister. U.S.-based events have provided forums for AmCham members and Lebanese diaspora businessmen to meet and carry out a variety of transnational economic initiatives. After the 2006 July war between Israel and Lebanon, President George W. Bush launched the U.S. Partnership for Lebanon, which sought to engage U.S. corporations such as Intel, Cisco Systems, Ghafari, Microsoft, and Occidental Petroleum in the reconstruction. AmCham held a dinner for the initiative's corporate partners and coordinated meetings with representatives from the U.S. Department of Commerce, the National Security Council, the office of the U.S. Trade Representative, the Export-Import Bank, the Trade and Development Agency, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, and the National Retail Federation. AmCham has held meetings with former Governor John Sununu, US Secretary of Transportation, Ray LaHood, and Congressmen Joe Wilson and Gary Ackerman and collaborated with the National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce and the Arab Bankers Association of North America (AmCham 2009: 5).

AmCham co-organizes an annual Capital Market Day at the New York Stock Exchange with the Bank of New York Mellon. The event has included Audi, BLOM and Byblos Banks, Middle East Airlines and Solidere and is attended by New York bankers and members of the Lebanese business elite, the US Ambassador to Lebanon, the Lebanese Ambassador to the US, the Lebanese Minister of Finance and the Governor of the Central Bank of Lebanon. AmCham event attendees include former US ambassadors Vincent Battle, Jeffrey Feltman and Michele Sison, the Lebanese Ministers of Finance, Economy and Trade, and Tourism, and the chairmen of the Social and Economic Council and the Industrialists Association of Lebanon (AmCham 2008). After Capital Market Day, the AmCham delegation generally holds discussions with the Lebanese Prime Minister (formerly Fouad Siniora) and, in 2008, with President Michel Sleiman.

Due to their similar missions and goals, AmCham and LARP often support each other's activities. LARP conferences are co-sponsored by AmCham, signifying the Chamber's direct involvement with Lebanese-Americans and the connected nature of these diasporic organizations (*Daily Star* 2008). For example, during the LARP II opening ceremony, the AmCham chairman expressed his strong support for the LARP initiatives and for future AmCham/LARP collaboration, and invited the attendees to support AmCham's "Made in America" annual fair (Zeenni 2009). Since 2004, this fair has featured approximately 260 US companies that conduct business in Lebanon. Participation in the exhibit tripled between 2003 and 2008, underscoring AmCham's importance in promoting US-Lebanese trade, which increased 130 percent from 2003 to 2007 (AmCham 2008).

AmCham also serves as a networking platform between Lebanon and the U.S. at a national level and with other countries at the regional level. AmCham has collaborated with the American Chambers of Commerce in Jordan and Egypt and strengthened relations with Gulf businesses, such as the American Business Group in Abu Dhabi (AmCham Newsletters 2007 and 2010: 7-8). It initiated the 2006 U.S.-Lebanon Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, which emphasizes bilateral trade and a stronger commercial regulatory regime, setting the

foundation for a US-Lebanon free trade agreement (Zeenni 2009). In June 2010, AmCham co-sponsored a forum with the Economist Group and supported “MENA Power 2010”, a Cairo energy forum organized by the US Trade and Development Agency and the US Departments of State and Commerce that was attended by US Ambassadors, high-level government officials and corporate representatives. The chamber continues to be active in promoting economic cooperation between the US and Lebanon.

CONCLUSION

Lebanese-American transnational activism indicates that Lebanese diaspora members, some of whom have lived outside Lebanon for generations maintain a strong identification with their country of origin. While economic and political organizational leaders possess high levels of education and socio-economic standing in the U.S, the diaspora initiatives vary in characteristics and profiles. The enduring homeland connections, however, are evident in LARP’s economic and philanthropic initiatives, AmCham networking forums and the ALL’s lobbying efforts. Political organizations generally have specific platforms and linkages to parties in Lebanon, tending to transfer and replicate the sectarian divisions of Lebanese politics in a diaspora setting. Economic initiatives tend to bridge Lebanese political divides and are multi-sectarian in nature and in membership.

Diaspora initiatives advance the policies of the host and the home country, both within one country and in the larger region. Diaspora members can be unofficial ambassadors to their countries of origin, serving out of their own commitment to their homelands. However, as the examples of LARP and AmCham show, fostering economic initiatives is a less controversial and perhaps a more effective way to advance stability and democracy in multi-sectarian country such as Lebanon, whereas outright support for diaspora political initiatives may favor a specific party or alliance. Policymakers should become more aware of the benefits and complexities of engaging the diaspora to strengthen bilateral and multilateral economic relations and foster governmental stability.

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