

In Praise of Professor Walid Phares

It is unfortunate that a segment of our own academic and media elite has fallen for the games of Iranian and Islamist propagandists.

by Colonel Yair Ravid

Ben Lynfield, writing on November 16 in *The Jerusalem Post* ("Who is Walid Phares, Trump's Mideast adviser?"), sets out a series of absurd accusations against Dr. Walid Phares, who served as foreign policy adviser to presidential candidate Donald Trump and as national security adviser for Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney in 2011-2012.

Phares is a well-respected scholar and analyst in the US whose expertise in Middle East affairs is widely recognized and well received in US defense, intelligence and national security circles as well as in Congress, where he has testified and advised for two decades, as public archives show. A former chair of the subcommittee on intelligence in the US House of Representatives considers Phares one of the best strategic minds in the world on US national security.

As one who actually had the Lebanon file in his hands for many years, particularly in the 1970s and '80s, I do not remember anyone among those who have recently attacked Phares walking beside me on the paths of Southern Lebanon and in Beirut alleys in 1976, when I started working on relations with the Christians in South Lebanon and with the Phalangists in Beirut.

We know who did what for 15 years. Unfortunately, none of his recent critics have bothered to search the archives of the Lebanese press or interview those who, like me, were actually there at the time.

Naturally attacks have poured in against Phares from the various foes of the United States and the West, particularly from pro-Iranian and Muslim Brotherhood operatives, and at times far-leftist bloggers. Since 2011, the campaign against Phares has aimed consistently at keeping his advice as far as possible from influencing US policy in a way that could affect the interests of these parties, those who abhor Israel and the moderate Arabs in the region. Most use the same talking points and smear charges used by the pro-Hezbollah and Islamist propagandists in 2011 and 2016.

In general the attacks against Phares originate from a widely discredited hit piece published by far-left blogger and Iran deal supporter Adam Serwer in *Mother Jones*. The piece's fabrications about the scholar's life in Lebanon before he emigrated to the US 26 years ago have been fully discredited by several investigative articles already, but these charges keep circulating, especially the charge that Phares was an "ideologue of Lebanese militiamen during the civil war in the 1980s."

The sources of this charge are either Hezbollah- friendly or misquoted. One of the quoted persons, Toni Nissi, has himself slammed the far-left media for lying about him: "Regrettably Mother Jones selected three sentences from an almost four-hour... conversation with Serwer about the Lebanese resistance against Syrian occupation. Serwer maliciously distorted the form and core of what was discussed in a cheap and repulsive attempt to attack Professor Walid Phares and create an absurd and ludicrous connection between Professor Phares' academic, political and intellectual roles [as a] contribution to educate the high cadres of the Lebanese Christian resistance [is] deplorable and unacceptable."

A second unsubstantiated claim is that "Phares advocated that Lebanon's Christians work toward creating a separate, independent Christian enclave." This of a man who has published books since 1979 while he was at law school, and

hundreds of articles, all focusing on a federal solution to the crisis in Lebanon.

Lynfield quoted far-left *Mother Jones* stating “that he was a close adviser of Samir Geagea, a Lebanese- Christian warlord.” Toufic Hindi, a Lebanese politician today, has already crippled this charge in an interview where he wondered why Phares’ critics insist on this falsehood since Hindi himself was the adviser to Geagea, not Phares. The source for this allegation is a young woman who had a beef with Samir Geagea personally. A reminder of how the Communists attacked Vaclav Havel, not by citing his work, but by referring to an agent accusation against him.

The *Post* piece goes on to claim that in the 1990s, Phares tried “to lobby the Israeli government to carve out a state for Christians in the security zone Israel maintained in southern Lebanon, despite the fact that Israel had been burned badly when it allied with Lebanese Christians in 1982, that most of zone’s inhabitants were Shi’ite Muslims and that Israel already had its hands full dealing with an insurgency by Hezbollah.”

This is utterly false.

At the time Phares, along with his NGO colleagues, lodged a demand at the United Nations Security Council in New York to issue a resolution to establish international protection for a “free zone” in south Lebanon, to replace the Israeli military. The plan was that Christians, Muslims and Druse together would control their own destinies under a federal system. They wanted to see local police stations and municipalities act as a functioning local government until Syria had withdrawn and Hezbollah had been disarmed.

Phares’ views were prescient as another UN resolution, one he worked on later in 2004 (UNSCR 1559), forced Assad to pull his troops out of Lebanon in 2005.

Lynfield also cites a 1997 article authored by Phares to intimate that he was trying to drag the Israelis into Lebanon again. He quotes conversations where the scholar said: "Despite the 1982 episode, the Christians of Lebanon are the only potential ally against the advance of the northern Arabo-Islamic threat against Israel."

In fact, many on both sides of the border were watching Hezbollah and the jihadists advancing and taking over in Lebanon. This advance, which was completed in 2000, had in fact, according to his own account, encouraged Osama bin Laden to strike New York and Washington in 2001. By this time, Phares was examining the global terrorist threat, not only an ethnic conflict within his motherland.

Nevertheless, former Mossad director Efraim Halevy opines on Phares' mischaracterized position: "To think in 1997 of creating a Christian enclave in the South, an area of preponderant Shi'ite presence, is esoteric bordering on the ridiculous."

Yossi Alpher, former director of the Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies (now the Institute for National Security Studies), wrote: "Even in Israeli terms, he represents an attempt to subvert our good intentions and exploit us militarily so that we spill our blood for the Maronites. This ended very badly and he is a reminder of this."

None of that was found in Phares' arguments at the time. Precisely the opposite: the Lebanese-American scholar argued that Israeli forces should withdraw but surrender the area not to Hezbollah and Assad, but to local municipalities' forces protected by the UN. In fact his plans then are the same as what is being discussed today for areas in Iraq and Syria.

Alpher continues: "His association with the Lebanese Forces is very problematic... He was a prominent ideologue indoctrinating people who went out and murdered people and he has never

accounted for that.”

Alpher’s ignorance is abysmal. Walid Phares was never a combatant and never headed a Lebanese Forces military command.

He wrote books and articles and offered lectures. Sadly, Hezbollah propaganda has now been able to manipulate Israeli expertise.

Neither the young Phares nor any other Lebanese person at the time was responsible for Israel’s entanglement in Lebanon. Rather, the megalomania of some in the Israeli defense establishment, who thought they could establish a new order in Lebanon, were responsible for that imbroglio – members of the political wing of the Mossad, who did not recognize the Lebanese arena and acted unprofessionally.

The critical article also quotes anti-Israel Abed Ayoub, the national legal and policy director for the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, libeling Phares: “If you look at his history, he was a warmonger and he shouldn’t be near the White House.

He was part of a militia that committed war crimes and, if anything, he should be tried for war crimes.”

Ayoub and his group are the ones who should answer for backing the murdering jihadists who really do commit war crimes, not an author of 14 books on pluralism and democracy.

There is an assertion that “Phares appeared to flirt with the idea that Israel could use nuclear weapons to deal with its threat from the North, but then ruled this out as a possibility.”

It quotes Phares as saying, “The only military strategic option remaining to the Jewish state in the medium and long term, if it is to maintain its balance of power with the northern threat, is obviously the nuclear deterrent. But

Lebanese and Israelis alike know all too well the consequences of a blast anywhere in Lebanon....”

These were parts of conversations that anyone in the field of defense and military studies has had, but to use a discussion about Iran’s military advance in the region, select half a sentence and paint Phares as developing a nuclear doctrine is not just silly, but low.

No one knows the Arab world and Lebanon better than Phares. When he and others were part of conversations about establishing a so-called mini-entity alongside Israel, like the Kurds actually did in northern Iraq and in Syria, they wanted to express their belief at the time that minorities in the region could count on each other.

After he ended his patriotic efforts for his motherland and emigrated, these were ideas he advanced to resolve the conflict, not to create more tensions. He was proven right in every single prediction he made for America in his book *Future Jihad* and for the free world in his other books. His peak prescience came with his book *The Coming Revolution* where he predicted, in 2010, the forthcoming Arab Spring of 2011. Walid Phares, as American Jewish leader Sarah Stern wrote, has become a US “national treasure” and has been working hard for more than a quarter of a century to defend his adoptive homeland, the United States.

He was faithful to his ancestral home Lebanon, and he has been a loyal citizen to his adoptive land since he emigrated.

What concerns me in *The Jerusalem Post* piece is historical veracity. We cannot as Israelis rewrite the history of our northern neighbor to please the terrorist network that dominates it at this point in time. Phares is a public figure in the US with most of his adult life dedicated to public service. His work during his 20s in his ancestral homeland is to be praised, not condemned, and above all described

accurately. For demonizing is a prelude to ostracizing and we in this country know exactly what that means.

It is unfortunate that a segment of our own academic and media elite has fallen for the games of Iranian and Islamist propagandists.

Most of those who were associated with smearing Phares have no real understanding of Lebanon's history and politics, certainly not of the complexity of the issues. In my book *Window to the Backyard*, which was published in English in May 2016, I describe the establishment of relations between the State of Israel and the Christians in Southern Lebanon and the Phalangists and other groups in Beirut, and later the partnership between Israel and the South Lebanon Army.

I do so as the person that was in charge of the ties between our country and these communities.

What we know and what we saw are very different from the vapid and erroneous writing of critics and the comments they quoted. When it comes to history let's be serious and not reproduce chimeric tales concocted by Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood in order to meddle in US politics.

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