

## As'ad Abukhalil: America's Hezbollah Propagandist

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There is much more to As'ad AbuKhalil than his faculty position at the California State University (CSU) Center for Public Policy Studies. The self-described "Marxist-Leninist"-turned-anarchist, "feminist" and "atheist secularist" is also an America-bashing, jihad-promoting, anti-Semite. As'ad Abukhalil is not your regular left wing, anti-American, pro-Jihadist, anti-Israel instructor who misinform students in the classrooms in which he lectures at a California college. Far worse than that, he is the top unofficial US-based propagandist for Hezbollah and its terrorist acolytes. The Lebanon-born militant is known in the Lebanese and Middle Eastern American communities as the mouthpiece of Hassan Nasrallah in the world of petrodollar-funded Middle East Studies of America. Abukhalil owns a blog called "The Angry Arab," dedicated to bashing the political enemies of Hezbollah in Lebanon, from US leaders such as George Bush and Joe Lieberman to Arab governments including the Saudi, Jordanian, Bahraini and Moroccan monarchies as well as Iraqi and Lebanese politicians opposed to Iran and Hezbollah, such as Sunni PM Saad Hariri.

But one favorite person Abukhalil targets systematically is American-Lebanese Professor Dr. Walid Phares. Abukhalil's Phares derangement syndrome is deeply rooted. Sheikh Hasan Nasrallah, the Secretary General of the terror group Hezbollah, named Phares during the Cedars Revolution of 2005 as one of the instigators of a 2004 UN resolution to end Syria's occupation of Lebanon and to disarm Hezbollah. Since then, the California-based blogger harasses Phares online and levels unfounded and untrue attacks against him.

Abukhalil's latest demonization of Phares was triggered as soon as Republican frontrunner Governor Mitt Romney released his elaborate foreign policy platform and the names of 25 prominent advisors on national security, including Professor Phares. Abukhalil, an "expert" in demonization over the years, published a long diatribe against Phares, filled with lies and fabrications and, most importantly, omissions. Both Middle Eastern communities in America and Middle East studies experts were shocked by the extent of Abukhalil's rampage.

The propagandist wrote that "Phares' first career began early in the Lebanese civil war of the [sic] 1975-1990 when he allied himself with the right-wing militias, armed and financed by Israel." In fact, Dr. Phares, a lawyer and writer since the early 1980s, was a law student when the civil war started in 1975. His first public action was when he published his well known book in Lebanon in 1979, titled "Pluralism in Lebanon". It was in Arabic, and in it he called for the recognition of the country's multi-ethnic society and called for a federal solution.

Abukhalil ignored Phares' book - and all other books he published between 1980 and 1987 including "Democratic Dialogue," "Thirteen Centuries of Struggle," "The Lebanese Christian Democratic Thought" as well as "The Iranian Islamic Revolution." Abukhalil also ignored the hundreds of articles Phares published in al Nahar, al Liwa, al Amal, al Ahrar and, in Phares' own publication Mashreq International, focusing on the identity of Lebanon, the minorities in the Middle East, Islamic Fundamentalism and other hot issues of the time. Abukhalil seems to dislike the fact that Phares "in his official curriculum vitae, describes himself as a writer and lawyer in Lebanon at this time." Is it because Abukhalil's record didn't even exist in Lebanon's debate in the 1980s?

Dr. Phares' literature and research were recognized in Lebanon throughout the 1980s, like it or not. Moreover, Dr. Phares headed a number of NGOs such as the "Gathering of the Christian intellectuals" and the "National Committee of writers" and helped launch a Labor Union in 1988. All that evaporates in "The Angry Arab" trash piece. What the Hezbollah propagandist is interested in doing is to insist that Dr. Phares "assumed a political position in the hierarchy of the militias and founded a small Christian party in the late 1970s and early 1980s." Again, Abukhalil is not well informed.

For Phares was a leading member of a small political movement promoting Christian-Democracy, headed by his brother in the early 1980s, before it was revamped as a "Christian Social Democratic Party" in 1987, a party which, by European political norms, would have been positioned in the center, politically. The micro-politics of Lebanon's Christian community escapes Abukhalil who never researched it or published anything about it, according to archives.

Distorting history at will, Abukhalil writes that

"after General Michel Aoun assumed the presidency of Lebanon in 1988, Phares joined the right-wing coalition known as the Lebanese Front, which consisted of various sectarian groupings and militia. The Front backed Gen. Aoun in his struggles against the Syrian regime of Hafez al-Assad and the Muslims of Lebanon."

Again, Abukhalil - who claims he is a Middle East scholar - blunders.

Aoun didn't assume the Presidency but was appointed as a Prime Minister in 1988. The Lebanese Front headed by Danny Chamoun wasn't formed when Aoun became a Prime Minister in 1988, but in 1990 when the Christian areas of Lebanon split between Aoun and the Lebanese Forces of Samir Geagea. The Lebanese Front of Danny Chamoun, which invited Phares's social democratic party, later called the "Labor Party", to join the coalition, was precisely the one that called for disbanding the militias, and obviously didn't include militias. The Lebanese Front which had Dr. Phares serving as Foreign Affairs director included the National Liberal Party and a number of independent political personalities such as MP and publisher Gebran Tueni (later assassinated by the Syrians), at the exclusion of the Phalanges and of the Lebanese Forces. The latter, towards the end of the Lebanese conflict, were in disagreement with the Lebanese Front. Dr. Phares left Lebanon the year the Syrian army invaded the last free enclave and as the Lebanese Front was disbanded. Abukhalil has no clue of this world of Lebanese politics that ended in 1990. He definitely is no expert in Lebanon's political history, let alone the Middle East. He simply doesn't read, but proceeds only with hearsay.

He continues by referring to what he called Beirut newspaper accounts, two clippings he photographed and claimed as research, to state that Dr. Phares "served as vice chair of another front's political leadership committee, headed by a man named Etienne Saqr." Again, the so-called instructor of Middle East studies in California is confused.

Phares' statements and lectures in the Lebanese press and his appearances on TV and his radio interviews are in the hundreds and available in archives. The "propagandist" is no researcher at all. For the Lebanese Front seized from existence in 1990 with the assassination of his president Danny Chamoun, head of the Liberal Party. Abukhalil was fooled by a clipping from the daily al Nahar stating that former members of that political coalition, then in exile, were planning to re-launch the coalition overseas in 1991, one year after the end of the Lebanese conflict. It never materialized. But the "propagandist" instead goes on to claim that there was a slogan that appeared on Beirut's walls a decade and a half earlier, during the real civil war of 1975 and quoted it wrongly. There was no slogan by the the Guardians of Cedar militia stating "Kill a Palestinian and you shall enter Heaven," but rather graffiti appeared on Beirut's walls in 1976, among thousands of other similar ones, that every "Lebanese (fighter) should kill a Palestinian (fighter)" - a slogan rejected anyway by the first Lebanese Front launched in 1977. Abukhalil then enters the chaos by claiming that "the Front was also backed by Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, a bitter foe of the Syrians." He meant the Lebanese Forces and General Aoun as well during 1988, which was true, but this has nothing to do with Dr. Phares who blasted the Iraqi Baathist regime in his writings of the 1980s, for massacring the Kurds and Assyrians of Iraq.

Commenting on the departure of Phares from Lebanon and his emigration to the United States, Abukhalil describes it as "resurfacing in Florida where he began a second career as an academic 'expert on terrorism.' He obtained a PhD at the University of Miami and seemed to model himself after conservative writer Fouad Ajami, but without Ajami's claims to scholarship." This bashing of an eminent scholar who projected the rise of urban Jihadism in the West in three books and of the coming revolts in the Arab world, unmatched by any other book, is indicative of Abukhalil's obsession with Phares' successful career.

He goes on to say, "I remember attending the founding meeting for the Lebanese Studies Association in the 1990s, Phares entered the room hoping to become a member. Once people knew who he was, the hostile glances were sufficient to drive him out." This episode as described never happened, for Dr. Phares was a member of the Middle East Studies Association for years and attended and spoke at many of its panels and had received an invitation to join the Lebanese Studies Association. This could be Abukhalil's angry imagination, easily detectable from his blog's name "The Angry Arab."

Abukhalil rages against Phares' career and successes showing significant personal jealousy, perhaps. Abukhalil's problem - he may not realize yet - is that he is anti-American to the core, while the scholar he criticizes is unashamedly a proud American. Most Americans would prefer the latter to the rabid anti-Americanism of the Hezbollah apologist. He fumigates at Walid Phares's "Arabic name" that gave him "an indigenous aspect", as if As'ad had eaten more Hummos or Tabbuli in his life, or looks more Middle Eastern than Walid Phares. Abukhalil hates it when Phares uses Arabic words, because perhaps the San Francisco-based expert feels he owns the exclusive use of that language and only anti-Americans can enjoy the use of Arabic.

But ridiculous statements aside, Abukhalil leaps into an obvious lie by claiming that Dr. Phares "articulated Israeli definitions of 'terrorism,' in which indiscriminate violence against civilians, even the killing of children, when perpetrated by Israel, do not qualify." On this charge, a good lawyer (even a bad one) can take this reprobate to court for libel. Not only nowhere does Dr. Phares ever use such sentences, but he devoted 30 years to expose genocide and mass abuses from Sudan to Kurdistan to Iran. Abukhalil lost it right there and will probably feel the heat of public questioning about this fabrication.

Next, Abukhalil reveals more of his personal antipathy for Dr. Phares when the darling of al Jazeera and Iran-funded al Manar is frustrated that Dr. Phares "became a regular on Arabic news channels, mostly on Lebanese right-wing news channels, but also on channels controlled by the Saudis." The man doesn't have his math right. For Professor Phares didn't appear on Lebanese TV, (let alone on right wing ones if they exist at all in Lebanon) for 19 years. But he certainly was sought by Arab TV across the region including al Arabiya, the national channels in Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Emirates, Algeria, Tunisia, Iraq and more, in addition to the Arabic services of BBC, France 24, Russia al Yom

and, of course, al Hurra TV out of the US. In the Arab media sphere, Abukhalil is known as the anti-American clown ranting against everything the US does, and slamming any enemy of Iran's regime, including the Saudis and the Lebanese, Iraqi and other Sunni leaders; while Phares is sought constantly as a calm analyst explaining, with precision, US policies even though Arab anchors and producers know very well where Dr. Phares stands on issues. Abukhalil is a rabid talker, not very much liked in the Arab media, precisely because he doesn't explain the issue well while Dr. Phares explains it articulately, in context, and when needed, provides his opinion.

Abukhalil moves to his next frustration as he conceded that Dr. Phares

"has even made appearances on Aljazeera" and claims that "there is a curious difference in Phares's commentary for the Arab media. On Arab TV, he speaks cautiously and does not make outlandish claims about Islamic terrorism. For all his pro-Israeli statements in English, he never articulates them in Arabic."

Abukhalil makes at least one factual blunder in each one of his statements.

For by visiting al Jazeera's web site, one can easily view Phares' many appearances on cross fire shows where he strikes back with strength against propagandists who are both Salafists and Khomeinists. On al Jazeera, Phares predicted an Iranian uprising and an Arab spring years before his book *The Coming Revolution* was published. Abukhalil and his acolytes in the anti-American propaganda machine know that all too well, as do the anti-Jihadist liberals who speak the language. Dr. Phares has received mail from as far away as Iran's Ahwaz Arabs, Sudan, the Berbers and women's groups in support to his calls for a rise against authoritarianism and Jihadism. Abukhalil serves the interests of the Iranian regime; therefore, he isn't popular with the democracy forces in the region.

But it seems that deep below the surface of frustration with Phares's achievements, Abukhalil has a personal beef. For Phares has refused to be on the same panel with him, several times over the years, despite the fact that he faced off with other authentic radical commentators. As early as a few weeks ago, al Jazeera invited Phares to a panel with Islamist leaders who oppose his views. He agreed to being on the panel but not with Abukhalil, precisely because of the latter's unprofessional behavior and his disrespectful blogging style.

Abukhalil - and some in the Blogosphere - are light analysts. They don't see the nuances in an academic analysis. He claims for example that Phares's writings "switched to a new argument: that Islam was the real threat to Western civilization." He adds "that toward that end, Phares can find—or concoct—links between very different Islamic groups. In his analysis, Hezbollah, Hamas, and Al-Qaeda amount to one global organization." This last blunder on substance is inexcusable.

If Abukhalil is indeed a professor of Political Science as he claims, he can surely grasp what Professor Phares is stating, that precisely, it is a Jihadi Islamist movement that is confronting the West, not Islam as a religion. In his book *The War of Ideas: Jihadism against Democracy*. Phares masterfully introduced the notion that the Islamists and the non-Islamist Muslims are in a confrontation inside the Muslim world. Abukhalil and his brand avoid this debate, which would turn immediately to their disadvantage.

Last, consider Abukhalil's cheap shot against his target. He writes that Dr. Phares is not a "scholar" because he "has not been seen in Middle East Studies conferences for many years." As if the petrodollars-funded Middle East Studies Association are the measurement of scholarship. Professor Phares is absolutely right not to waste his time in the company of those compliant scholars who thrive from Gulf or Iranian money gifted to their programs. Luckily a new petrodollars-free association is now up and running, The Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa, headed by Professor Bernard Lewis, where Professor Phares delivers his addresses.

In the end we must disclose why we qualify Abukhalil, and his ilk, as "Hezbollah propagandists." He appears constantly on Hezbollah-manned, Iranian-funded al Manar TV, banned by the US Government for incitement to violence and anti-Semitism. He also appears on Press TV, owned by the Pasdaran Iranian revolutionary Guards - but not to defend the US, rather to bash it. In addition he writes columns for the daily al Akhbar, funded by the Iranians in Beirut. And to top it off, by his own words and broadcast on US radio, he meets with the leader of a terrorist organization that killed hundreds of Americans in the Middle East, the man he calls "Sheikh Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah." It is ironic that, when Hezbollah guides terrorists in Iraq to kill US military, let alone been involved per the UN tribunal in the assassination of Rafiq Hariri, As'ad Abukhalil is in the business of meeting with the head of a terrorist organization and bragging about it in public.

And speaking of the Arab Spring, ask Syrian protesters about their frustration with the Hezbollah propagandist who, out of the US, blasts the Syrian opposition in the media, while Hezbollah kills innocent Syrians on the streets of Syrian cities. While Congress and the Obama Administration have committed to bring down Assad the dictator, US citizen As'ad Abukhalil blames the demonstrators rising against Iran's ally Bashar Assad.

As'ad Abukhalil, we know him, and the youth of the Arab spring know his advocacy of Hezbollah. What puzzled us was the fact that Salon.com would open its pages to a propagandist of this objectionable sort without even verifying the facts of his story. As Abukhalil sinks in credibility, he takes the ship of Salon.com and its parent company with him, down.

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