

Response to Mother Jones article (Weekly Standard)

Contributed by THE SCRAPBOOK
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From the Scrapbook

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Pillar of the Intelligence Community

Mother Jones has published a long article about one of the foreign policy advisers with the Romney campaign, Walid Phares. The Beirut-born Phares has written a number of books in Arabic as well as English-language efforts like the provocatively titled *The Confrontation: Winning the War Against Future Jihad*. He launched his career as a commentator on counterterrorism and Middle Eastern affairs after emigrating to this country in 1990. As Mother Jones reports, Phares seems to have served before then as a member of the Lebanese Forces, a Christian militia that fought in the Lebanese civil wars, in a psychological warfare unit.

While the article acknowledges that atrocities were committed on all sides during Lebanon's 15-year-long conflict (1975-1990), it's hardly surprising that the Christians—with Phares serving as the part standing for the whole—should come under special scrutiny. The crimes that the Christians committed during the war, like the massacres at Tel al-Zaatar, Karantina, and Sabra and Shatila, are deservedly infamous, known by even the most casual student of the modern Middle East. However, the fact is that other parties and confessional sects have had their records scrubbed by local publicists and their Western associates, who for a variety of reasons do not want to challenge the account that, for instance, Hezbollah and the Palestine Liberation Organization have dictated for posterity.

Perhaps that's why former CIA employee Paul Pillar, a source for the article, has a blank spot. "I can't think of any earlier instance of a [possible presidential] adviser having held a comparable formal position with a foreign organization," Pillar told Mother Jones. "It should raise eyebrows any time someone in a position to exert behind-the-scenes influence on a U.S. leader has ties to a foreign entity that are strong enough for foreign interests, and not just U.S. interests, to determine the advice being given."

Pillar most recently distinguished himself by questioning the integrity and intelligence of his former colleagues in the U.S. law enforcement and intelligence communities when he openly doubted the government's account of the Iranian plot to kill the Saudi ambassador to the United States. But perhaps he's best known for using his perch at the CIA to campaign against the Bush administration. It's hardly surprising, then, that he's now using his intelligence community credentials to attack the Romney campaign since, as Thomas Joscelyn has written in these pages, Pillar "is a master of the art of politicizing intelligence."

Unlike Pillar, The Scrapbook has a very clear memory of someone who had "held a comparable formal -position with a foreign organization" and yet wound up quite close to a presidential candidate—indeed, the one who came out on top in the 2008 election.

Barack Obama and Columbia University professor Rashid Khalidi both taught at the University of Chicago in the '90s, and at a farewell dinner for Khalidi in 2003, Obama warmly praised Khalidi's advice, which took the form of "consistent reminders to me of my own blind spots and my own biases." Since the Los Angeles Times never released its videotape of the event, we may never know Obama's blind spots or the enlightenment on offer from his friend and colleague Khalidi—a PLO spokesman in Beirut during the Lebanese civil wars.

Khalidi has denied his role with the PLO, but Martin Kramer, the Wexler-Fromer fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, has him dead to rights. On his website, www.martinkramer.org, Kramer explains that between 1976 and 1982 Khalidi was consistently identified—by, among others, the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times—as a PLO spokesman, without once demanding a correction. Still, all Khalidi will admit today is that he was "deeply involved in politics in Beirut."

Perhaps it's understandable that Khalidi won't come clean about his role in the civil wars, for everyone came out of the conflict dripping with blood, not just the Christians and Israelis, but the Palestinians, too. Why the

Christians are typically censured for their brutality while the PLO seems to get a pass from so many U.S. analysts, journalists, and even former government employees like Pillar is strange, especially since PLO chairman Yasser Arafat showed that, unlike the Lebanese Forces, he was willing to kill Americans as well.