

Response to Politico Article

Contributed by Politico
Monday, 31 October 2011

Regarding Mitt Romney's selection of Walid Phares.

To: Ben Smith
Writer, Politico

I read your piece "Romney's Foreign Policy Hints" in the October 6th, 2011 edition of Politico about Governor Mitt Romney's Foreign Policy and National Security Board of Advisors. In this note, I do not intend on debating your views on Mr. Romney's selection or his policies. I do respect your views, even though I may not agree with many of them.

However, in your article, you wrote: "Another name that carries some symbolic weight: That of Walid Phares, a scholar whose personal roots are on the Christian side of the brutal Lebanese civil conflict, and who is among the harshest critics of Islam in America."

This statement is factually inaccurate and could be considered libel. First, Professor Phares' personal ancestry and ethnic religious affiliation cannot be targeted in the context of political disagreement with his views. The so-called "Lebanese civil conflict" started in 1975 and became a Lebanese-Syrian conflict in 1978. Following Israel's invasion in 1982, it became a regional conflict in Lebanon. There were Christians in different political camps and Muslims in different political camps, as historians and research clearly shows. Dr. Phares started his public activities in 1979 by publishing a well-known book "Pluralism in Lebanon," in which he called for a multiethnic society and federal solution where Christians and Muslims would have their rights recognized by a new secular and federal constitution. Dr. Phares published several books since, including "Democratic Dialogue" (1981), calling for debates among all ideological factions in the country and the "Iranian Islamic Revolution" (1987), projecting future strategies of the Khomeinist regime. Dr. Phares' public lectures, statements and other booklets, as well as his representation of NGOs and political parties and coalitions, including a social democratic group he founded in 1987, have demonstrated his unwavering commitment to pluralism, federalism and to counter-terrorism, including by Syria and Hezbollah. Such a volume of publications and activities can hardly be described as "on the Christian side of the brutal Lebanese civil conflict." Such statements can lead readers to false conclusions.

Secondly, you wrote that Dr. Phares "is among the harshest critics of Islam in America." This statement is baseless. If anything, Dr. Phares is known to have been the scholar who carefully made the distinction between Islam and Islamism and Islam and Jihadism - a distinction well established in the Arab debate - where Dr. Phares appears regularly, in addition to his media appearances in Western media. One can read Dr. Phares' books since 1979, and particularly after 9/11, including his famous book "Future Jihad: Terrorist Strategies against America" (2005), as well as "The War of Ideas: Jihadism against Democracy" (2007) and listen to his interviews and read his articles, and yet find not a single attack on or criticism of the religion of Islam. Furthermore, Dr. Phares is the leading scholar who has been calling for the support of reformers and democrats in the Middle East and Muslim world. His book "The Coming Revolution: Struggle for Freedom in the Middle East" (2010) was the only book that predicted the Arab Spring and called for helping Arab and Muslim peoples to free themselves from authoritarian regimes and fundamentalists.

In fact, Dr. Phares, aside from having been a promoter of social democratic change in the region for decades, has been at the forefront of supporting the regions' liberals, as recognized by dozens of NGOs representing democracy groups and ethnic minorities.

It is unfortunate that you may have based your judgment on press releases initially issued by lobby groups who are opposed to Dr. Phares' views on the region. I wished you'd have reached out to Dr. Phares to compare notes.

I urge you to learn more about Dr. Phares' research by reading his books. I also ask you to please publish this letter below your article and wish you the best in your journalistic career.

Regards,