

# The Daily Beast's McKay Coppins substitutes for CAIR and incites against Phares

Contributed by Jed Ipsen  
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McKay Coppins's article titled "Mitt's Muslim Problem" in the October 12th, 2011 edition of The Daily Beast included a number of personal attacks on Professor Walid Phares based on false allegations and incorrect facts. In this article, I will draw attention to these errors to correct the record.

Mr. Coppins and the editorial board of The Daily Beast, breaking the norms of journalistic principles, have refused our right to publish a response. Mr. Coppins's article is not isolated, but part of a string of attacks against Professor Phares, unleashed by a coalition of bloggers, who have been quoting a letter issued by Mr. Nihad Awad, the Executive Director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a group said to be an unindicted co-conspirator in the Holy Land Foundation terrorism trial. The letter levels unfounded and insulting charges against Professor Phares. CAIR's letter, sent to one of the leading Republican presidential contenders, asked the campaign to drop Phares in his role as a foreign policy advisor. But the CAIR move isn't related to the presidential campaign inasmuch as it is a nationwide, smear campaign against intellectuals, scholars, Government officials and citizens accused by the Islamist group of criticism of Islamism and Jihadism. More on this topic is being addressed by analysts and commentators and is being published.

My comments do not argue with any aspect of U.S. politics related to election campaigns, but focus solely on the points Mr. Coppins asserted about Professor Phares based on sources and reports provided by Islamist militant groups. Some of these statements could be considered libel.

The CAIR letter referred to in Coppins's article made a ridiculous and dangerous charge that Dr. Phares is "an associate to war crimes." He wrote that "to critics, Phares has long been a lightning rod for charges of Islamophobia and outright aggression toward Muslims." He described Phares as "an official in the Lebanese Forces, a Christian militia that reportedly took part in "the 1982 massacre of civilian men, women, and children at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps." And then, he added, without citing a source, that "in 1984, another Lebanese militia with which Phares was allegedly associated rounded up a group of men for questioning and then slaughtered them with guns and grenades, according to a news report."

The term "outright aggression toward Muslims" is offensive, dangerous and leads to wrong conclusions. Furthermore, it can generate violence by extremists and zealots. There are no books, statements or articles by Dr. Phares in which he has called for or advocated "aggression" against Muslims. In fact, from his first book published in 1979 titled "Pluralism in Lebanon" to his most recent book published last year titled "The Coming Revolution: Struggle for Freedom in the Middle East" and all his articles and books published in between and since, have called for mutual recognition of ethnic identities, federal systems, democratic culture and human rights. The Islamists fear Phares's books precisely because he calls for the support of civil societies in the Arab and Muslim world in their struggle against Jihadi and totalitarian regimes. To any reader of Phares's books and articles, Coppins's piece looks like propaganda, manipulated by the Islamist movements, who are upset by Phares's thirty years record of writing and publishing.

In the letter cited by Coppins, he mentions that Phares was "an official in the Lebanese Forces," but he neither explains that the Lebanese Forces were a federation of political forces overseeing the army of the Lebanese Christians, particularly as of 1980, nor does he give dates as to the stages and the various governing bodies of this coalition. Dr. Phares was invited to join the political council of the Lebanese Forces, along with other public figures, as a representative of his party, the Christian Social Democratic Party, in 1986. Dr. Phares was not a member or a commander in a militia. He was an author, publisher and a leader of a small, democratic party. The political council included parties from different political backgrounds within the area known as "East Beirut," including the Phalanges-Kataeb, National Liberal Party, Syriac League, Tanzim and others, as well as independent thinkers, judges and academics.

In his article, Coppin's mentions the September 1982 killings in Sabra and Chatila with an assumption that Dr. Phares, by joining the political coalition overseeing the Lebanese Christian defenses, was somehow linked to events that took place four years earlier at the hands of individuals who were said to have been wearing the uniforms of the Lebanese Forces at that time. Coppins sloppy article misses the points that 1) the report he mentions stated that

elements "wearing" Lebanese Forces uniforms, not the institution, perpetrated the shootings, and 2) that the leadership of the Lebanese Forces of that time was replaced and the council's composition changed three times since - in 1984, 1985 and 1986. But, more importantly, Dr. Phares's small political party joined the political coalition of the Lebanese Forces four years later, in 1986. Hence, hinting at links between Dr. Phares back to events that took place in 1982 is dangerous, offensive and libel.

Furthermore, Coppins added, without citing any source, that "in 1984, another Lebanese militia with which Phares was allegedly associated rounded up a group of men for questioning and then slaughtered them with guns and grenades, according to a news report." This fabrication is an outright lie and has no foundation. Dr. Phares was never associated with any militia in 1984. He was a publisher and a lawyer at that time. Such depictions are libel and should be removed and condemned immediately.

Lastly, Coppins added that "there is no indication that Phares was directly involved in the violence; his roles in the organizations are reported to have been administrative." There are no indications simply because Dr. Phares never had administrative roles in any of the so-called organizations until 1986, when he joined the political council of the Lebanese Forces coalition and assumed responsibilities in foreign affairs and emigres issues.

What Coppins didn't disclose is that Dr. Phares's main political identity was his occupation and achievements since 1979, when he published his first book ("Pluralism in Lebanon") at a Lebanese university, followed by four more books, some translated in French, English and Spanish. Dr. Phares was a defense lawyer since 1982 and a publisher of a weekly and then a monthly magazine until 1988. He authored hundreds of articles and delivered more than a thousand lectures and interviews in ten years. It was based on his record and his representation of a group of intellectuals and university students that he was invited to join the political council of the Lebanese Forces coalition. Furthermore, Dr. Phares was elected Secretary General of the World Maronite Union (WMU) in 1986. In that role, he represented seven million Maronites and their institutions in Lebanon and around the world, including in the U.S., Brazil and Australia. As Secretary General of WMU, he was in touch with political parties and personalities from the entire spectrum in East Beirut and worldwide. In addition, among the many activities he undertook, he founded a labor union in 1988 and became its advisor.

Dr. Phares's record in Lebanon is one of honor, sacrifice and courage during a conflict filled with dangers. His books and articles can be debated and criticized at will, but his service to his community must be reviewed with accurate facts and without false accusations.

Moving to the charge of so-called "Islamophobia," it has been concocted by Islamist lobbies in the U.S. who oppose Dr. Phares's ideas and the content of his books and articles. Critics are free to describe their opponents as "conspiracy theorists," but alleging that Dr. Phares "has warned that some Muslims are plotting a secret takeover of American institutions with the end goal of imposing Sharia," is simply false. In his last four books and hundreds of articles and interviews, Dr. Phares never used the term "Muslims" when he addressed national security issues, let alone "Muslims plotting a secret takeover of American institutions." Rather, as his writings are very clear, he charges that the Jihadists are attempting to penetrate U.S. institutions, a matter which can be debated, but under no circumstances can be twisted into "Muslims." Dr. Phares's literature doesn't focus on, or even cite, the Sharia imposition, as other literatures do. It is simply not his narrative.

Coppins concludes that "this history of inflammatory rhetoric has drawn scorn from many corners of the American Muslim community, and CAIR's concerns were echoed by a chorus of Islamic scholars reached by The Daily Beast." But, if Mr. Coppins hasn't read Phares's books, particularly the last four, including "The War of Ideas" and the prescient "The Coming Revolution," how can he describe it as inflammatory? Had he read his books, he would have realized that Dr. Phares calls for the support of secular, democratic and humanist Muslims around the world. He is the advisor to half a dozen organizations of ethnic Muslims in the U.S. Mr. Coppin's statements do not match Dr. Phares's record.

Then, to confirm the insults leveled by lobby group CAIR on Phares, which will eventually be addressed properly and in time, he cites individuals who are opposed to his views and subscribe to CAIR's. He cites Ebrahim Moosa from Duke University, who claims Phares "is hostile to Muslims" without any evidence for such a statement. He cites Omid Safi of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, who leveled another insult at Dr. Phares, stating that "it would be akin to turning to [former KKK member] David Duke to get advice on race relations." Moosa and Safi are supporters of opposing views to Phares's, but Coppins didn't seek views from scholars or NGOs who share his views. Moosa and Safi dodged Phares's impressive and sustained record since the early 1990s against Slavery in Sudan and Mauritania and in defense of minorities in the Middle East, Christians and Muslim alike. Ignoring this record makes Moosa and Safi accomplices in CAIR's suppressive campaign against scholars and lecturers.

Coppins based his accusations on false presumptions and on inaccurate facts, leading readers to believe that Dr. Phares was an official involved in military activities and linked to violence in the 1980s. Coppins neglected to accurately describe Dr. Phares's career and achievements, regardless of the substance of his writings, and described him as

&ldquo;anti-Muslim,&rdquo; while he is not. Coppins should apologize for this irresponsible and libelous article so that his readers can have a balanced perspective, untainted by lobbying efforts. Until then, readers have all the reasons to believe that Mr. Coppins, far from being a credible journalist, is an associate to militant group CAIR and serves as a propagandist for Jihadi agenda in this country.

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