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Attacks on dissenting journalists show how scared Hezbollah really is

Media Mention of Hussein Ibish in NOW Lebanon - May 19, 2014 - 11:00pm

<http://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/commentaryanalysis/548020-attacks-on-dissenting-journ...> [1]

Attacks on dissenting journalists show how scared Hezbollah really is

The vicious lies about NOW editor Hanin Ghaddar are a symptom of Hezbollah's panic

I suppose it's completely pointless to expect gangsters to have any regard for free speech, or, for that matter, the truth. After all, their stock in trade is brute force. It's always set up on a sliding scale: first comes "friendly advice," then a "word to the wise" warning. Then the bullying. Then blatant threats. And the logical culmination is some sort of physical attack. Nowhere has this progressive logic of the political hoodlum been in greater evidence than in Lebanon in recent decades.

So when a nationally- and internationally-noted Lebanese journalist has clearly been dragged into the bullying and borderline blatant threat stage of attack by thugs and their henchmen in the public press, it's essential to raise the loudest possible outcry. The only reasonable collective response is: back off and don't you dare think about going a step further.

As it happens, Hanin Ghaddar, managing editor of this website, is facing precisely such a campaign of threats and intimidation by Hezbollah, its Lebanese allies, and the hacks and propagandists they employ. Hezbollah front or fellow traveler publications like Al-Akhbar, Al-Manar, and Tayyar all piled onto the lies that she had broken Lebanese law by appearing with Israeli officials at a conference in Washington.

The record is clear: she did no such thing. On the contrary, she stipulated that the conference she attended was structured to enable her to scrupulously abide by Lebanese law. This is confirmed by the hosting organization, all attendees, and the published schedule.

So Hanin is completely innocent of the charges leveled against her. But let's imagine, counter-factually, that she had actually shared a stage with an Israeli. That might've been a violation of Lebanese law. But how would it have compared to the grossly unlawful conduct, on the daily basis, by Hezbollah and its allies?

What would that have been compared to blowing up former prime ministers in the middle of crowded streets? Assassinating journalists or rival politicians on a routine basis? Maintaining a large, well-supplied,

and foreign-funded and -dominated private army? Dragging Lebanon into a devastating and pointless war with Israel in 2006?

Or how about Hezbollah's unilateral intervention in the Syrian conflict, in direct contravention of the Baabda Declaration? And what have they done in Syria except, in effect, help 'Amo Bashar wipe out scores of thousands of his own people, and drop sarin gas, barrel bombs, and, most recently, chlorine weapons on innocent Syrians?

The idea of such people and their propagandists concocting a campaign of vitriol and hatred against someone based on false accusations of having spoken on a stage with an Israeli, given their own conduct, is the height of effrontery. They even sank to the level of having some of her relatives issue public "denunciations" of her, a familiar tactic Hezbollah has used in the past to try to intimidate Lebanese Shiites who don't toe the party line.

There's no doubt why Ghaddar is being targeted so viciously. Hezbollah is sinking into a profound crisis in Lebanon generally, and within the Shiite community in particular, because of its disastrous intervention in Syria. The organization is finding it very difficult to explain to ordinary Lebanese Shiites why their sons should be dying for towns they've never heard of, and for a vicious dictator who has nothing to do with their daily lives.

Everything Hezbollah ever claimed about why other Lebanese, including Shiites, should find it somehow acceptable that the organization maintains a huge private army and a foreign policy that has allowed them to drag the country into calamitous conflicts with both of its immediate neighbors has been totally exposed in recent years for the lies they are. Ostensibly Hezbollah's state-within-a-state is for "resistance" and to protect Lebanon from Israel. In reality, of course, its weapons are used mainly to enforce its domestic political agenda on other Lebanese, and in the service of its Iranian and Syrian patrons, most notably through the intervention in the Syrian conflict.

This is becoming increasingly obvious to even the most credulous of Lebanese. Hezbollah therefore feels particularly vulnerable. Cue the attack on Ghaddar, along with other vicious efforts to fend off its critics, particularly within the Shiite community. There has been a significant push-back in Lebanon against the attacks on her, but so far it's insufficient.

And what of the media organizations that have led the charge against her? Well, the odious Ibrahim al-Amin, editor-in-chief of Al-Akhbar, has been accused of obstruction of justice for refusing to appear at a hearing of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon investigating the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. Amin is the same charmer who recently opined that the suffering of the Palestinian refugees in the Yarmouk refugee camp outside Damascus was entirely the fault of the refugees themselves.

Al-Akhbar also regularly features the gurglings of one Assad AbuKhalil, who "teaches" unfortunate students at a school called California State University, Stanislaus (no, I've never heard of it either). AbuKhalil is quick to condemn anyone and everyone of being a traitor, Zionist, imperialist stooge, or lackey, and every other epithet imaginable.

Yet it was recently revealed that, some years ago, the US Central Intelligence Agency may have paid him to do something. He issued a denial, in which he asserted that he had never been an employee of the CIA. One plausible explanation, given what's known and what can be inferred from his own statements, is that some while back the CIA may have paid him to give one or two unclassified briefings. There is no reason to be embarrassed about that, except given what he and his newspaper would have said about anybody else

who had done that makes admitting a simple and otherwise banal and straightforward truth quite impossible.

AbuKhalil threatened to sue everyone in sight, but of course he didn't. And he won't. Because he would have to submit to discovery and there may be something there, even though no one thinks he was a staff employee of the CIA. But given the attitudes he and Al-Akhbar peddle, is this not the very height of hypocrisy? These are the people who put themselves in the vanguard of the attack on Hanin Ghaddar for giving a public talk at an established Washington think tank on a serious topic, and carefully arranging things to remain within the confines of Lebanese law?

So everybody involved in this campaign of bullying and intimidation against Ghaddar should be on notice. First, she has an extensive national and international base of support. The world is watching. Second, she has bravely vowed to continue her journalism and commentary undaunted by these outrageous scare tactics and abuses. Third, those who are attacking Ghaddar – who did not in fact violate any laws or norms – are skills for mobsters and murderers of the first order, who are guilty of some of the worst crimes imaginable.

And fourth, and most importantly, it's obvious that this entire outrageous attack on Ghaddar is prompted by a sense of desperation on the part of Hezbollah and its lackeys, and an intensified impulse to try to squash any dissent within the Shiite community. That's because such dissent is growing, and the reputation of the organization, even in its main constituency, is rocked to the core for dragging the Lebanese Shiites, and the rest of the country, into its reckless intervention in Syria.

Hezbollah is clearly scared, and with good reason. The cowardly bullying of an independent-minded and serious journalist – who, thankfully, refuses to be intimidated – could not provide a clearer sign of incipient panic in the self-appointed "Party of God." So, back off and don't you dare think about going a step further.

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