

Elie Wiesel the paradox of Caesar “The evil that men do is always interred with them but the little good live forever.”

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## Elie Wiesel: Poser for Peace

by [Joseph Grosso](#)



An obvious and oft-sighted criticism of the Nobel Peace Prize is just how many of its recipients have virtually no connection to the cause of peace or its advancement. If anything, often it seems a reward for its negation. Henry Kissinger, recipient in 1973, would have to be the gold standard here. That very year saw Kissinger orchestrate the destruction of democracy in Chile, and that was only after the secret bombing of Cambodia was concluded. Of course, stretch it forward and

backward a couple of years and Kissinger's trail of destruction extends from Bangladesh to East Timor.

A few years later, Mother Theresa made an odd choice given the extra pain deliberately inflicted on the poor in her clinics and her support for Indira Gandhi's suspension of civil liberties. And in 1994 the triumvirate of Yasser Arafat, Shimon Peres, and Yitzhak Rabin can hardly be deemed inspiring. Barack Obama got the nod less than a year into his presidency. It's a good bet there are many in Pakistan, Yemen, and Honduras that would question the wisdom of that selection.

The year 1986 saw the Nobel go to recently deceased Elie Wiesel. Wiesel was famous for his novel/memoir *Night* and for being, according to the Nobel Prize's webpage, 'the leading spokesman on the Holocaust', therefore seemingly by definition an alleged spokesman on human rights. A quick scan through many of the obituaries written for Wiesel the past couple of days show this quote from his Nobel acceptance speech given prominent status:

I swore never to be silent whenever human beings

Endure suffering and humiliation. We must always

Take side. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim.

Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.

A noble sentiment indeed but not one that seemed to inspire Wiesel to live up to his peace prize, in fact evidence suggests Wiesel had a soft spot for war, at least war in the Middle East. Four years before giving his acceptance speech of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, where even an Israel commission found the Israeli military indirectly responsible for the Sabra and Shatila massacre, "I support Israel-period. I identify with Israel-period." When asked to comment of the massacre: 'I don't think we should even comment', then commenting he felt 'sadness with Israel, not against Israel' with nary a peep about the actual victims. Some years later Wiesel would be wheeled into the spotlight by the Bush administration to endorse the forthcoming invasion of Iraq. His statement at the time read: 'Isn't war forever cruel, the ultimate form of violence....And yet, this time I support President Bush's policy of intervention when, as is this case because of Hussein's equivocations and procrastinations, no other option remains'.

In the midst of another Israeli operation in Lebanon, this one in 2006, Wiesel stood in front of a crowd in Manhattan (along with then Senator Hillary Clinton) and declared "Israel defends herself, and we must say to Israel 'Go on defending yourself.'" His final years didn't slow him down. Wiesel took out a full page ad in newspapers across the country during the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict fully supporting Israel's effort (Human Rights Watch went on to document several instances of war crimes by the Israeli military) without a syllable about diplomacy except that 'before diplomats can begin in earnest the crucial business of rebuilding dialogue...the Hamas death cult must be confronted for what it is'. That ad was criticized by a large group of Nazi holocaust survivors in a subsequent ad in the *New York Times* which stated 'Furthermore we are disgusted and outraged by Elie Wiesel's abuse of our history in these pages to justify the

unjustifiable: Israel's wholesale effort to destroy Gaza and murder more than 2000 Palestinians, including hundreds of children.'

If being consistently hawkish on matters in the Middle East wasn't enough for the press and governing elites to question Wiesel's peace credentials, after all there aren't too many wars the estates don't get behind, it is hard to believe Wiesel wasn't pushing his luck with some of his pieces in the *Times* over the years. Consider his 2001 piece Jerusalem in My Heart. Wiesel began with the following:

As a Jew living in the United States, I have long denied myself the right to intervene in Israel's internal debates. I consider Israel's destiny as mine as well, since my memory is bound up with its history. But the politics of Israel concern me only indirectly.

Strange as it was to be claiming neutrality not only in the face of his constant support for wars involving Israel and in light of his famous stand of neutrality as evil, Wiesel goes on in the same essay to renounce any such neutrality on the question of Jerusalem.

Now, though the topic is Jerusalem. Its fate affects not only Israelis, but also Diaspora Jews like myself. The fact that I do not live in Jerusalem is secondary; Jerusalem lives in me... That Muslims might wish to maintain close ties with this city unlike any other is understandable.

But for Jews it remains the first. Not just the first; the only.

This ode to fundamentalist thought, enhanced further by Wiesel pointing out that Jerusalem is mentioned more than 600 times in the Bible (a statement that ignores the fact that up to a fifth of Palestinians are Christians, and it's worth asking how many times Jerusalem is mentioned in the Torah if this line of thought is to be pursued), is followed by the blatant lie, long universally known to be false, that "incited by their leaders 600,000 Palestinians left the country (in 1948) convinced that, once Israel was vanquished, they would be able to return home".

Wiesel then ended with a call to defer the question of Jerusalem until all other pending questions are resolved, perhaps for 20 years to allow "human bridges" to be built between the two communities- which would figure to leave the city completely in Israeli hands until these bridges are built or at least until the rest of the world accepts that it belonged there all along.

About five years later (August 21, 2005) Wiesel was at it again with a bizarre piece titled *The Dispossessed*. It was another putrid effort that spoke of peace while covertly praising the worst of Zionist mythology. The title referred to the last holdouts of Israeli settlements in Gaza and reading between the lines Wiesel hints that the evacuation, where the settlers received generous compensation packages from the government, had the aura of a pogrom.

The images of the evacuation itself are heart-rending. Some of them unbearable. Angry men, crying women. Children led away on foot or in the arms of soldiers who are sobbing themselves.

Those "dispossessed" by Israeli soldiers were the hardcore remnant of a Greater Israel ideology more committed to fleeting territorial dreams than individual homes- most of the Gaza settlers

saw the writing on the wall of left prior to the events Wiesel describes with such anguish. Of course Israel has long subsidized its settlements that have been declared illegal by the international community (including the U.S.). But of this remnant Wiesel reminds his readers: “Let’s not forget: these men and woman lived in Gaza for 38 years in the eyes of their families they were pioneers, whose idealism was to be celebrated”. Given the complete lack of interest Wiesel displays to Palestinian feelings on the same issue can it be reasonably assumed that Wiesel shares that same sentiment?

And here they are, obliged to uproot themselves, to take their holy and precious belongings, their memories and their prayers, their dreams and their dead, to go off in search of a bed to sleep in, a table to eat on, a new home, a future among strangers.

When Wiesel does turn to the Palestinians it is to criticize a lack of gratefulness in the face of noble Israeli concessions:

And here I am obliged to step back. In the tradition I claim, the Jew is ordered by King Solomon “not to rejoice when the enemy falls”. I don’t know whether the Koran suggests the same...I will perhaps be told that when the Palestinians cried at the loss of their homes, few Israelis were moved. That’s possible. But how many Israelis rejoiced?

After this demonization, ‘perhaps be told’ of ‘possible’ Palestinian suffering (and King Solomon may have been correct about not rejoicing when enemies fall but that isn’t quite how one recalls the conquering of the Canaanites as recorded by scripture), Wiesel again ends his essay with a call for a “lull” to allow “wounds to heal”- during which time Israel can presumably redraw the borders of the West Bank making a functional Palestinian state impossible. Again, like in the previous, essay he mentions the sadness he feels over Palestinian hatred of Jews; so much for neutrality.

All this reactionary thought, the worst of which would find few defenders outside the extreme Zionist right, didn’t make its way into Obama’s statement on Wiesel’s death (‘He raised his voice, not just against anti-Semitism, but against hatred, bigotry, and intolerance in all its forms’), nor did the fact that Wiesel opposed Obama’s nuclear deal with Iran (again with a full page ad in the *Times*). The *Times* itself conveniently overlooked the words Wiesel wrote for the paper in its very long obituary. If it is a timeless truism that the greatest gift modern marketing can bestow on anyone in its graces is the luxury of being judged by reputation and not by actual words and deeds, is it ever truer than for another Nobel ‘Peace’ prize winner?

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