

MID~EAST REALITIES

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QUOTE of the Week

**"ISRAEL IS SOMETHING I
MUST SERVE AND HELP, BUT NOT
CRITICIZE. I WILL NOT SAY BAD
THINGS ABOUT JEWS."**

Elie Wiesel

THE JEWISH WEEK (NYC) - 11/17/95

As one American Jew, herself from a family decimated by the Holocaust, writes when sending in this quote: "SEEMS TO ME LIKE HE DIDN'T LEARN A THING FROM THE HOLOCAUST. 'SERVE AND HELP' HAS THAT OMINOUS RING TO IT: 'JUST FOLLOWING ORDERS' -- THE EVER-OBEDIENT LOYAL GOOD GERMAN SOLDIER."

Actually, Wiesel's hypocrisy over the years has in some ways been even worse. He is a free man living in a free country with information, over many years, of Israeli atrocities and duplicity easily available to him -- unlike a soldier in an army. And yet he has freely chosen, repeatedly, to be quiet, to accept, and to "serve...but not criticize."

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The LIFE & DEATH of CNI

It was to be the counter-weight to the infamous Israeli/Jewish lobby in Washington. They seductively named it THE COUNCIL FOR THE NATIONAL INTEREST - CNI.

Using this enticing promise Paul Findley and Pete McCloskey -- two liberal Republican former Congressmen with rich Arab friends because of their opposition to Israeli policies -- started CNI and used it as their vehicle for making an occasional speech as well as their ticket to book sales and overseas trips.

Unfortunately, they started it in a totally fallacious manner which in a sense forecast CNI's fate. To launch CNI they got a brother of the King of Saudi Arabia, eager to celebrate his birthday in style, to spend nearly a half-million dollars flying people from all over the country (and their families as well) down to Orlando -- all expenses paid of course, and first-class all the way. Ironically, in retrospect, Disney World was indeed a fitting setting for this organizational launch -- for CNI always has been far more illusion than reality.

During the next few years after the Orlando extravaganza Paul and Pete used their former Congressmen credentials to convince a variety of mostly unknowing persons -- many Arab Americans desperate to simply do something along with a few wealthy Anglo-Saxon Americans (plus one long departed Jewish American) looking for justice in the Middle East -- to send them what became a great deal of money.

They bought up mailings lists and widely advertised their promises in the pages of the associated magazine whose offices they initially shared -- *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, itself substantially supported by wealthy establishment Arabs, at a political price of course. At times people concerned with ending Israel's occupation and bringing about a Palestinian State were deluged with slick and expensive mail filled with all sorts of misleading and deceptive pitches. All the while, of course, the other serious problems in the Arab world -- the corruption, the despotism, the police-state tyrannies, the Gulf War, the escalating repression -- all went untouched by CNI.

But now, just a few years and all that money later, the entire effort has all but collapsed. Worse, in the process there has been a further burning out and a further demoralizing of many who were initially enthusiastic and desperate.

There has been no official CNI funeral as yet. But at the recent CNI "annual conference" there was more morbidity than energy. Only 20 to 30 persons attended the few sessions (most of them gray and retired), and the few speakers largely applauded and back-slapped each other. As for the media, no one even bothered to take any notice.

Without any admission of having lead people to this political disaster, CNI is on its death-bed with many of its few remaining members close to their own. The attempt to create a real and serious alternative to the powerful Israeli/Jewish lobby has collapsed in catastrophe, still presided over by an always fawning Paul Findley even though most of those he initially convinced to begin CNI with him long ago jumped ship.

Shared responsibility for the CNI disintegration goes to former foreign service officer Eugene Bird who has escalated CNI's downhill pace in recent years. Actually Bird only became CNI President when everyone else turned it down and it was thought someone on pension and wanting an office to go to could at least maintain the CNI illusion a bit longer.

In itself the demise of but one more impotent and still-born Middle-East-oriented group is not very important in the larger scheme of things. But in the particular case of CNI, by building up such hopes and then dashing them so severely CNI's fate deserves both comment and explanation. By so squandering time, energy and money; by once more deceiving many good people who hoped a new organization could seriously represent them; by once more demoralizing those who gave of their goodwill and funds; CNI has brought more harm than good to the causes it always claimed to be promoting.

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