

'Waldheiming' means minimizing Nazi viciousness

"If Simon Wiesenthal does not think the evidence yet proves that Waldheim was a Nazi war criminal, who are we to say that he was?"

That question, asked by a San Francisco Jew, misses the mark by a country mile. For the time being, leave aside the matter of whether Waldheim was a certifiable Nazi war criminal. His current crimes have been enough to warrant the world's serious attention and condemnation.

Waldheim's current crime is his effort to minimize Nazism by "normalizing" it. This effort is now so closely identified with the new president of Austria that it should be called "waldheiming." To fight against waldheiming today is fully

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as important as to expose former Nazi war criminals.

Kurt Waldheim begins by "failing to remember" what happened, as though it were not very important. For example, Waldheim was a top German intelligence officer in Salonika from July 1942 through August 1943, from the first *Juden-musterung* through the deadly deportation of Jews on Wehrmacht trains. But he claimed he remembered nothing about it!

"I swear I did not know about the deportation of the Jews," Waldheim has declared. But the former head of the secret police there said: "He didn't know about that? That was known to everybody." And the German historian, Hagen Fleischer said: "Waldheim was the best-informed officer of the Wehrmacht in Greece..."

Don't be misled into seeing this as a simple cover-up. Add this direct quote from Waldheim: "Who can remember everything from the war period?" The implication is that the mass murder of Jews was not such a big deal. It was just another one of the many things that "normally" happens in wartime.

Further dismissing the special Nazi atrocities that took place, Waldheim has said: "There were atrocities from both sides." He was equating the activities of the Greek underground against the occupying German forces, with such Nazi activities as the deportation of Jews to the gas chambers.

Waldheiming represents the most serious effort yet to revise Nazi history. It does not say, "the Holocaust didn't happen," as less successful revisionists have tried to say. Rather, to waldheim is to say, "yes, it happened, but it was just another normal aspect of the war it is time to forget." Kurt Waldheim capped this process by the manner in which he conducted his defense during the Austrian presidential campaign. He kept saying that he had not been a Nazi — but he did not spend any time substantively denouncing the nature of Nazism. He did not say, as did the president of West Germany, "Whoever refuses to remember the [Nazi] inhumanity is prone to new risks of infection."

Austria, occupied by German troops in 1938, was considered a victim rather than a perpetrator of Nazism. Some find that ironic. Austria was a vicious fountainhead of anti-Semitism even before it gave Hitler to the world. An anti-Jewish constitution was enacted, and anti-Jewish riots took place in Austria before the Germans ever arrived. But because it was technically a "victim," Austria was never subjected to a de-Nazification program.

It is all the more important for moral and political leaders in Austria to its younger generations what the president

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of West Germany said, that Nazism had intolerably violated all normal boundaries of behavior. But to waldheim is to say exactly the opposite.

There should be a further investigation into Kurt Waldheim's wartime activities — and an investigation into why the United Nations and others did not pursue such an investigation earlier. But whatever that investigation turns up, Waldheim's evil waldheiming to-

day totally discredits and dishonors him. We will not be silent about that, in San Francisco or elsewhere. We may not be able to do much about Austria under the circumstances, but it is clear that we must use this as an "educable moment" and redouble our efforts to prevent the world from becoming waldheimed.

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