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4/13/90

Mr. Stephen S. Rosenfeld  
The Washington Post  
1150 15 St., NW  
Washington, D.C. 20071

Dear Mr. Rosenfeld,

In your today's "The Zionist Card" column you say, "... the PLO itself has already formally accepted the idea of a two-state solution." I fear this is wishful thinking. If you can cite a formal and official act by the PLO, rather than an evasive and deceptive statement by Arafat, I'll appreciate it very much.

I believe that what you have in mind is a statement Arafat finally evolved under pressure that the administration and the press interpreted as you do and in which he said no such thing. He did pretend to be recognizing the right of the State of Israel to live in peace within secure boundaries. But he was careful not to refer to the State of Israel. If you can refer to his actual words you'll find that he referred only to the "people" of Israel. I do not recall whether the Post carried his exact words but I do recall quite clearly that I saw and heard him on TV and was shocked that the administration and the press grabbed for the meaning that was not there.

Do you know of a single arab leader who has survived acknowledging the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and within secure borders? I don't.

No long before this Arafat statement the PLO did hold a meeting in North Africa and it refused to change the charter or to make any formal statement having any resemblance to what the administration says Arafat said.

I do not have your sources but I've followed this situation as closely as is possible for me and with the single exception of the reluctant Mubarek I do not know of a single arab leader or government that has recognized the right of the State of Israel to exist as a state. Except for Egypt all remain in a state of war with Israel, hardly an indication of peaceful intent. You know what happened to Abdullah, Sadat and many Arabs who favored peace with Israel or just talked to Israelis about peace and recognition.

But even if the PLO did "formally" accept the existence of the State of Israel and even if this led to some kind of a formal agreement between the PLO and the State of Israel, how can that assure peace for the State of Israel with the entire Muslim world except Egypt perpetuating the state of war? Can you see Iraq or Syria giving formal recognition to the existence of the State of Israel? Or Iran? Saudi Arabia? I cannot.

*Harold Weisberg*

Sincerely,  
Harold Weisberg

*Stephen S. Rosenfeld*

## The Zionism Card

4/13/90

If there was ever to be any redeeming quality to the United Nations' Zionism-is-racism resolution of 1975, it lay in undoing this little emblem of political antisemitism at a moment when the reversal might make its own contribution to Middle East peace.

Not that the grim mischief of 15 years can be whited out: the self-blinding of Arab minds to the requirement of coming to terms with Israel, the hardening of Israeli hearts against the requirement of coming to terms with Palestinian nationalism, the wasting of the United Nations as a forum where serious people would bring serious problems and the continuing incapacity of the U.N. to deal with the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Nonetheless, it was worth hoping, once the current international thaw started touching the edges of the still largely frozen Mideast, that the principal keepers of the anti-Zionist flame would find some ways to limit the damage.

The answer so far is that it isn't happening. Collectively, the Arab states and the bureaucrats and intellectuals who have invested some part of their careers in waging the struggle against Zionism have shrunk from their evident responsibility to help the PLO negotiate a settlement with Israel.

More Catholic than the pope, they have allowed a gap to develop between their positions and those of the PLO. In the case of the Zionism resolution, for instance, the PLO itself has already formally accepted the idea of a two-state solution. This is a result obviously inconsistent with the ideological rejection of the Jewish state that is the essence of this unhappy resolution. But its makers refuse to let it go.

The Israelis have their own mistakes to answer for. In this matter, however, it is notable that so much of the Arab establishment seems caught in a 1970s time warp. To signs of gathering American interest in reversing the resolution, representatives of this establishment respond 1) with abuse for the motives of interested Americans and 2) with threats to rehearse and update the whole dreary litany of complaints of 1975. Rather than review their own position, they attempt to put the onus on those in Congress and the Bush administration who want to set matters straight.

Right now the United States is consulting with other governments to see if the votes are there to overhaul the resolution

in the General Assembly next fall. Some help is expected in the countries of the old Soviet bloc, although the Soviet Union itself, notwithstanding its smiles and promises, has yet to take a forthright stand against the resolution—a particularly reprehensible lapse when you consider the Kremlin's responsibility for giving this resolution currency and political thrust 15 years ago.

In the Third World, some governments, especially in Latin America, are now embarrassed by their contribution to the anti-Israeli frenzy of the 1970s but hesitate to concede they acted foolishly. Many of the 40-odd African states are still allowing themselves to be manipulated by '70s-style Arab pleadings and blandishments. Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan has sent a useful chill through some of these precincts by raising the question of the continuance of American aid.

Discreet to an extent that practically invites Arab huff and puff, the Americans don't want to charge into battle unless they're sure of a comfortable victory. Ditto the Israelis. In the U.N. Secretariat can be heard the quiet suggestion that an effort to waken this particular sleeping dog could end up simply rousing an excitable American public to start bashing the U.N. again.

But why should the Palestinians, who are otherwise in the historic process of taking their destiny into their own hands, leave this particular U.N. issue in the hands of others? If they applied a little imagination, they would realize that they had a pretty good card to play—certainly a card too important to be left in the hands of ostensible patrons who have their own fish to fry. They could hold this card for a prospective negotiating endgame with the Israelis, in which case its value would considerably diminish. Better, I think, to play it now.

These months of global, regional and national transition constitute a moment of truth for Israelis. Can they pull themselves together and join the Palestinians in seeking a compromise way? This is one of those occasions where adversaries must see their interest in reaching out to build confidence in each other.

The Zionism resolution has symbolized Israel's rejection, abandonment and isolation by the full community of nations. To be ushered back into that community, by the Palestinians no less, could be a gesture of peace for which they could expect to be repaid many times.