

Mr. David Ignatius, foreign editor
The Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

7627 Old Receiver Road

Dear Mr. Ignatius,

Perhaps you may remember that several months ago, when the Middle East situation was getting a bit hotter and the Post was saying that Arafat had recognized the right of the State of Israel to live in peace and security I wrote and urged you, as earlier I had written others at the Post, to please examine Arafat's exact words and that he had and knew he had little chance of surviving if he had done so.

You may also remember that I've been around a long time, with varied experiences. My last government employment was as an analyst in intelligence. I was in the OSS component that was transferred to State. One of the jobs of analysts is to examine exactly what is said, not the interpretations of those words by others.

The Reagan administration, faced with its own problems, did interpret Arafat's words as meaning that he had indeed recognized the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security. Without examination of those words, all of the media accepted the Reagan administration's interpretation of them.

In reading the paperback edition of Thomas Friedman's From Beirut to Jerusalem I found them and enclose that page. I presume Friedman is correct and that from memory, when I wrote you, I had one word wrong. I remembered that he had said "peoples" where Friedman quotes him as using "parties." The quote is:

"... the right of all parties concerned in the Middle East conflict to exist in peace and security, and as I have mentioned, including the state of Palestine, Israel and other neighbors." (*my emphasis*)

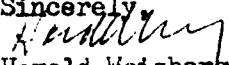
If Arafat had really intended to recognize the right of the state of Israel to exist he would not have used the word "parties" and he would have said "states." By using the word "parties" he told those who he knew would kill him, as they had Sadat and others, that he was not recognizing the right of the state of Israel to exist. The only state he mentions is Palestine.

But even if he had recognized the right of the state of Israel to exist that would have meant nothing because the PNC had just met in North Africa and had refused to do that. I have highlighted Friedman's interpretation in the preceding paragraph. Particularly given the context, if the PNC had intended recognition of Israel it would have said so and would have benefitted from it. Like Arafat, it did not mean to recognize the state of Israel. There is no other reasonable interpretation. If people mean something they say it and they do not fudge it over. and no "clarifying" would be necessary.

If any evaluation of how much credence can be given to what Arafat says he at the same time "totally and absolutely renounced all forms of terrorism." Then, when his own PLO was caught in it, he refused to "renounce" it in any way.

Whatever the PNC may have meant by not specifying the ^Sborders of the "state" of Palestine, this can be interpreted as meaning it intended to include Jordan, which is about three-quarters of the Palestine territory the British took from the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I and which the PLO was engaged in trying to take over when Hussein's army drove it out and into Lebanon, with the tragic results you may recall.

I do hope the Post will undertake to inform the country correctly now that the terrible situation has worsened - if only by asking Arafat to say he meant the state of Israel has the right to exist in peace and security.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

little American-Jew-meets-Palestinian encounters, where a few words of Arabic are exchanged with the native and everyone goes home smiling.

"When we got outside, he asked me where I was from and I said America," said Shapiro. "And then—this was really strange—he said to me, 'Do you know what is happening?' It was as if we were in some spy movie and we were the only two people in the world who knew this secret of the *intifada*, and all the Israelis in the restaurant and the bus station were frozen. He just kept whispering, 'Do you know what is happening?' So I said, 'Yes, yes, I know what is happening. And we both just nodded our heads at each other. I shook his hand, and as he walked away he kept saying, 'Please, please come back again.' When he walked off, I was shaking so much I spilled half the coffee on my shirt." Why were you so upset? I asked.

"Well, at first I had wanted to identify with him and say, 'Yes, yes, go on throwing stones, go on with your violence,'" Shapiro explained. "But then I started shaking because I realized that he didn't see me as I saw myself. He did not see me as a Jew but as an American, a non-Jewish American, as an ally. To put it crudely, he saw me as a pro-Arab American. I am a Jew and pro-Israeli, but I lived in an Arab village. I was angry with myself for not telling him that I was Jewish. Yet it was because he did not see me as I saw myself that we were able to talk at all. I could just see my mother watching this scene from high above me, shouting, 'These are not your people! What are you doing with that Arab?'

"The situation is so much more dangerous now for your identity," said Shapiro, in a voice riddled with anguish. "It is very easy to walk around with a button until the moment you have to make a choice. He thought I had already made a choice to come over to his side, but I hadn't. I was so angry with myself for not telling him, 'I am not who you think I am and that is very important for you to know.' The button said that I can identify with you and still feel strongly as a Jew, but the *intifada* said I couldn't. It said I had to make a choice. The P.S. to the story is that I have not gone into that cafeteria again. If I did, I would have to approach him as who I am, and I am not sure I want to do that."

* * *

It took Yasir Arafat several tries, but in December 1988, almost exactly one year after the *intifada* began, he finally publicly recognized Israel's right to exist. This process of getting Arafat to say the magic words began a month earlier, in November 1988, with a meeting of the Palestine National Council, the PLO's parliament-in-exile, in Algiers. During this PNC session, Arafat continued his traditional policy of trying to balance the interests of those West Bankers and Gazans who wanted the PLO to formally recognize Israel and create the conditions for real peace negotiations with those who still wanted to hold out for the dream of all of Palestine. What the PNC did, as a result, was to declare an independent Palestinian state, but without specifying its borders. At the same time, though, the PNC, in very convoluted language, conditionally accepted UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and the 1947 partition plan—thus implying a recognition of Israel within its pre-1967 boundaries. But when the PNC was over and Arafat was asked explicitly if he now recognized Israel, he ducked the question with his usual verbal fan dance.

The PNC meeting was then followed up by a series of statements by Arafat "clarifying" what the PNC resolutions "really" meant. Both moderate Arab leaders and West Bankers and Gazans urged the PLO chairman to be more specific about Israel. This clarification process culminated in Geneva. On December 13, 1988, Arafat addressed a special session of the UN General Assembly, gathered in Switzerland because the PLO chairman had been denied a visa to the United States by Secretary of State George Shultz on the grounds that he had not renounced terrorism. Arafat's UN speech fell an eyelash short of unconditional acceptance of Israel and renunciation of terrorism—which were Washington's preconditions for speaking with the PLO. Finally, the next day, in yet another clarification press conference, Arafat choked out his recognition of "the right of all parties concerned in the Middle East conflict to exist in peace and security, and, as I have mentioned, including the state of Palestine, Israel, and other neighbors." He added that the PLO "totally and absolutely renounced all forms of terrorism."

Secretary of State Shultz determined that Arafat's declaration finally satisfied American conditions for dealing with the PLO, and he immediately ordered U.S. diplomats in Tunis to open a