

(Written to Yashushi Akashi, Assistant to U.N. Secretary-General
Kurt Waldheim, and then reproduced and distributed to students
around the country by the American Zionist Youth Foundation (AZYF))

* * * * *

This letter has come to our attention and we want to bring it to yours. It was written by an American Zionist student studying law and international affairs at New York University to a member of the staff of the Secretary General of the United Nations after a lunch discussion on the subject. We are reprinting it with permission from the writer and eliminating irrelevant and personal passages.

December 2, 1973

Dear

After our lunch yesterday I think a number of issues deserve further comment. But for this letter I wish only to elaborate upon the Middle East and the policies of Israel. I would not be candid if I did not express to you how disturbed I was to learn that you believe the major issue and the current primary focus is that of Israeli return to approximately the 1967 boundaries (more precisely "cease-fire lines"). Needless to say, this is what the Arabs - who have become rather masterful (in comparison to the recent past) at playing to the gallery of public opinion and using rhetoric and smiles in addition to guns and oil--would like everyone to believe. No doubt the Russians have been giving the Arabs political lessons while encouraging them to test out their new weapons. Indeed, the Russians are doing a rather credible job manipulating tears and schisms in the Western world as well as between the Arab world and the Western world.

Since the issues in the Middle East are of world importance unparalleled since World War II except maybe earlier in Berlin and Cuba (and I think it could be argued that what was at stake in these earlier confrontations was not as crucial or historical as what is at stake in the Middle East), I want to try to be completely clear in expressing how I view the situation. As well, since the involvement of the U.N. in the Middle East is a crucial test of whether this institution is capable of the sophistication and impartiality necessary to earn the respect and more importantly the trust of those of us who believe strongly in internationalism and desperately in peace but who have been forced back to a modern version (a nuclear-world version) of "realpolitik" and a somewhat nationalist stance, I feel we must imperatively express our sincere and deeply felt viewpoints to each other.

I am not sure you really realize how trully and deeply Israelis desire peace. By "peace" we do not mean a few years without war. We mean a situation where our neighbors will recognize and accept our existence as a Jewish State and respect our borders (and as I have told you the Arab map of the Middle East (literally) includes an "Occupied Palestine" but not an "Israel"), a situation where the military arms race has its direction reversed so as to provide credible and tangible assurance of the acceptance of recognition and lasting peace, a situation where our neighbors will cooperate with us in terminating the wretched conditions under which over a million Palestinians now live, a situation in which over a period of time normal relations of personal contact, trade, and exchange can be resumed between the Arab peoples and the Jewish people, a situation in which trust, respect, and even friendship can seem at least a reasonable goal. Such an overall situation must of course be approached

(over)

in steps -- "peace" is a dynamic process and a continuing state of mind, not a static concept or a goal to be achieved at Kilometer 101 or at Geneva "Peace" Conference. It involves phases of territorial return and adjustment, defensible and accepted borders, military disarmament and weapons limitations, international arrangements and guarantees, aid to and resettlement of Palestinians -- in other words Resolution #242 is a reasonable basis for progress. But, most importantly it involves a realistic appraisal of the obstacles in front of us and a genuine sincerity to make progress -- only such an approach can gradually establish the basic elements of trust without which there will be no peace and no unraveling of the hatred and fear that has evolved over the past half century.

Quite possibly outsiders do not realize how truly Israel desires "Peace" because it has been and remains extremely difficult for us to admit to fear and apprehension and self-doubt either to ourselves or to our enemies. Psychologically we are not sure we can allow ourselves the luxury of self-doubt and the honesty of fear. We are afraid to fear, afraid that our enemies will interpret weakness and will persist in a struggle that will be without end until we have been destroyed. Israeli military strategy has to some extent used this psychology of the big invincible sword punishing acts against us and making clear our superiority and depth of conviction. Internally we have had and continue to have quite a debate -- to the outside world and especially to the Arabs we have not been able, through sublimated fear, to bring ourselves to be seen as less than arrogant and self-assured. All groups form an identity based upon past history and perceived necessities. Yet, in my opinion, this first generation of Israeli native-born (Sabras) is amazing for its openness, its spirited culture, and its realization of the ironies of Israel's existence. If pragmatism has overtaken ideology it is mainly because Israel exists in the 20th century and the sabra generation especially wants to live not as "The Chosen People," but as, after so long, a "normal" people. The real danger in Israel comes not from aggressive militarists or fanatical expansionists pushing for a return to Biblical Greater Israel. Rather, the danger comes from too pragmatic and maybe too historical a psychology which leads people to believe that the conflict between Jew and Arab cannot be ended and that the destiny for these two Middle Eastern cultures is hostility and periodic war. I know quite moderate Israelis who calmly admit that if they were Palestinians they might be members of El Fatah. This very sensitivity, ironically, leads many on the right-wing of Israeli politics to believe that any real "Peace" is for the foreseeable future only an illusion or a trap and that only Israeli strength can prevent the termination for the second time of a Jewish nation. The left on the other hand remains hopeful yet wary, is willing to take greater risks, remains idealistic and principled in terms of the linkage between socialism and Zionism, and pushes for concessions and compromises in hopes that one of the doors that might be opened may be the beginning to "Peace." The difference between left and right in Israel is more one of optimism versus pessimism. Unfortunately, in much of the rest of the Middle East the difference seems to be between that of fanaticism and moderation.

Our arrogance and military pride come directly from our feeling and belief that our survival is based upon realities like tanks and impressions like invincibility. Witness the Arab joy in finding out that they can launch a surprise attack on Yom Kippur with the full support of the USSR and for two days not be completely wiped out or condemned for such treachery. Witness the Arab joy at finding out that they can kill 2000 Israelis and only suffer maybe 20,000 losses. They have broken through this invincibility with which we had maybe too comfortably surrounded ourselves -- anyway the weapons of war have now made invincibility beyond humans. And witness as well the "trauma" now within Israel and persons

(over)

within Israeli politics in realizing that a surprise attack was actually launched against us and we are apparently being faced with the dilemma of perpetual conflict (now with the pressure of negative world public opinion) or territorial compromises without a real peace which will mean increasingly more militarist policies since we would be forced to exist within a less acceptable and more fearful environment. To the Arabs on the other hand, does the recent war really mean that they have recovered part of their pride and now will be willing to make peace? Or, as is more likely and my regrettable conclusion, does it mean that they will now have renewed hope that strategy and tactics can lead them to the achievement of their perpetually stated goal which is the elimination of the Jewish State which they have now at times come to phase as the full restoration of the national rights of the Palestinians. History has become our only guide. U.N. resolutions, peace-keeping forces, international principles and "guarantees" -- all things that not too long ago were the focus of much Jewish intellectual energies -- have seemed to fail us and many others as well and we have apparently decided that maybe "realpolitik" offers more hope for peace, security and survival than does reliance on others who view the world in less dangerous and more idealistic terms. When you look at the world from Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, when you read the history of Arab attitudes toward Zionism, when you visit Arab capitals, when you view the tortured and mutilated bodies of defenseless Israeli prisoners-of-war, when you listen to the chants of the masses in Arab streets, the only rational conclusion that you can reach is that you cannot afford to accept vague promises based upon new theories of international affairs as the guarantees for your existence. From Israeli cities the world takes on dimensions far different than when your environment is like my charming vicinity of Princeton or when like you, you are burdened with the gigantic responsibilities of upholding the ideals and principles of internationalism as an officer of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. You and I have similar values and dreams, and I believe we have similar ends in mind in the Middle East -- but we have to understand better not only our similar dreams and desires but also our different fears and outlooks.

The issue in the Middle East is not 1967 boundaries. The issue is Zionism -- make no mistake about that. The conflict is between civilizations, ways-of-life, nationalisms, and psychological outlooks. The only possible resolution at a level less than war is tolerance and gradual acceptance and trust. Words like "peace" when thought of statically are nearly useless just as is the view that the matter can be dealt with by insisting upon territorial withdrawal by the Israelis -- even #242 goes significantly further than this territorial panacea. "Peace" will be a process or the sincerity of those who preach it will remain questionable and unconvincing. And the only reason I have any hope for this "process" is that rationally it has become apparent that war itself has outlived its usefulness through man's inventiveness. In earlier times, like the White Man in America wiped out the Indian, it would have probably been impossible for Jews to have survived in the Middle East. Now the world must realize that it is simply too dangerous to allow this logic to be fulfilled -- in a sense this is the trump card guaranteeing Israel's existence.

The current Algiers Declaration has again put forth the Arab viewpoint -- "The Arab world is passing through a decisive stage in its history. The struggle against Zionist invasion is a long-haul, historic responsibility that will require still further trials and sacrifices." As long as the Arab mind sees Zionism as an imperialist, colonialist, oppressive phenomena there will be and can be no peace, and as I have implied above, World War III will be more possible than otherwise. As long as "Zionism thus appears as a serious resurgence of the colonial system and its methods of domination and economic

(over)

exploitation" the situation will be one of conflict and hostility and it would be madness bordering on suicide for Israel to accept, hoping history has been misread, the the now famous 2-step Arab plan to liquidate Zionism and the Jewish State. Now, of course, many of us are intelligent enough to understand and sensitive enough to appreciate the Arab hostility toward Zionism and the linkage of Zionism theoretically with imperialism and colonialism. Yet, world history is not as simple so as to fit everything neatly into these terms. Zionism is itself the manifestation of a successful movement for national liberation. Its origins are in anti-colonial and anti-imperialist theories and concepts. Of course we have made our mistakes and in certain areas gone astray. of course we are willing to make compromises and to try to understand the other side. But we cannot compromise our existence. And if the choice is between historical reality and "realpolitik" or paper agreements based upon illusory principles we really have no choice at all. Today's NEW YORK TIMES has articles about Western Europe's fears, especially those of France, that within 5 or 10 years Russian military and psychological pressures upon all of Europe could result in the Finlandization of Europe -- especially if U.S. troops are substantially withdrawn. The French have felt it necessary to revise strategies for nuclear war and have begun again to publicly discuss the unthinkable, a possible Russian invasion of Europe leading either to full surrender or full nuclear war. Such stark alternatives are seen as making such Russian designs less thinkable to the new Czars. How much more justified are our legitimate fears -- not for Finlandization but for existence. Who came to our aid in those first days of the war and what reason is there to think the Arabs were planning to stop at the 1967 boundaries? The realities, a la Hans Morgenthau, deserve our fears as well as our courage; and our insistence upon real and lasting peace, not a peace whose overall aim is the creation of a more vulnerable, more fearful, and less viable Israel (and thus our unwillingness to confine our concerns to June 1967 or Oct. 22, 1973 boundaries), is in my opinion completely justified and deserving of the support of intelligent people of good will.

Where was the U.N. on October 6th and in the following few days? U Thant's seriously deficient and unsophisticated moves in 1967 come to mind. How can the Security Council be taken seriously when it adopts a role of military participant through its hypocritical decision to apply principles only to one side after 17 days and then to pretend that the important issue is whether the hour and minute of its cease-fire demand is observed? When the next round of fighting breaks out should we wait until the U.N. decides that enough Israelis have been killed knowing damn well that the Security Council will not respond until then or until we are destroying the forces that attacked us? I remain an internationalist. But the cloak of authority and power under the title "U.N." doesn't hide the fact that this organization continues to allow itself to become a participant in the struggle -- not an impartial high-principled arbiter acting independently and justly. A politicized U.N. unable to apply internationalism or think transnationally will become the enemy of its professed ideals. If war should break out again can we expect the U.N. to act against the aggressor -- or are we always the aggressors be it by striking to preempt or by striking to defend? Maybe the Israeli decision to wait and take it this time was a mistake, too big a concession to world opinion versus learned realities. One truly wonders where the U.N. would be if Israel's existence were again really immediately at stake. Even in 1948, with a favorable U.N. politically, only guns and our own struggle made Israel's existence a viable reality -- the U.N. helplessly watched and ignored the pleas of the State it had just help create.

(over)

The Arab two-step plan is clear for all to see and understand if they are willing. Hitlers MEIN KAMPF was available as well. The latest Declaration from Algiers again makes the basic Arab position crystal clear: ". . . the process of Arab liberation. . . . 1. Evacuation by Israel of the occupied Arab territories, and first of all Jerusalem. 2. Re-establishment of the full national rights for the Palestinian people. So long as these two positions have not been met, it will be illusory to expect in the Middle East anything but a continuation of unstable and explosive situations and new confrontations."

How long can anyone compare Jerusalem under pre-1967 Arab rule (and from Jordan more could have been expected) with the free, open, and progressive situation of post-1967? How can you compare the use of the Wailing Wall for a latrine with the Israeli respect for holy shrines of all faiths? How can the use of Jewish grave stones for roads be compared with a thriving city open to the world?

How can those who refuse their own "brothers" any hope of settlement within the vast "Arab nation" talk of the rights of the Palestinians. "Full" rights for either Jews or Arabs is only the cover for no rights for one of these groups. How can the treatment of Jews in Egypt and Syria be compared with the treatment of Arabs in Israel? How can Arab handling of prisoners be compared with Israeli concern for each human life?

Please do not mistake my words or ideas. We in Israel have a long way to go in terminating discrimination and psychological racism. We in Israel have to recognize our obligations to the displaced Palestinians -- Golda Meir is wrong on this point. We in Israel have to deal better and more fairly with the inherent dual-class nature of a Jewish State administering a population of a Jewish majority and Arab minority. And I, as an "outsider" myself, and as an American Jew think we in Israel must strike a better balance between pragmatism and ideals. The social and humanitarian concerns of the Jewish people and the creation of a just society carry lasting importance. Just glance at the political landscape of Israel if you think we aren't aware of our problems and responsibilities. But if our existence is terminated our problems and responsibilities will not exist and if we are forced to the wall as Amos Kenon writes we can only respond by escaping from such a perilous situation. Both sides must mean about the same thing when they use the word "peace" and any lasting peace must be built upon a lasting foundation. Pressure from those who do not know the realities of the Middle East and from those who have idealistic notions and well-meaning ideas cannot be allowed to persuade us in the absence of tangible progress and concrete developments. Isolation can only increase our awareness that right now the only guarantee of our existence is our strength. Rather than helping the cause of peace the recent actions of such governments as Japan and the European Community (however understandable) will only fuel the Arab drive for eventual victory while causing an even greater inwardness and reluctance to compromise within Israel. The dynamics of peace require resoluteness and continuing alliances. Current developments are not in that direction. Yet, I assure you, it is we who will be the first to travel the road toward lasting peace when it exists and it is we who will fight as hard for progress along that road as we have fought along the Cairo-Suez road in time of war.

The conditions now put forward by the Arabs are nothing more than the quarter-century-old plan to eventually eliminate Israel from the Middle East. These two conditions are only the current version, and I admit a more sophisticated
(over)

version, of unchanged Arab policies. Men of good will are now supposed to think that the Arabs simply and justly want some territories back while making it continually clear that only the intransigence and belligerence of Israel stands in the way of peace. Meanwhile within the Arab world condition number two receives the greatest attention as the Arabs outdo each other to assure everyone that the new two-step strategy will mean that condition two can be imposed by forces at some future date. Such policies are familiar. For over a quarter-century as well the Arab peoples through their governments have proclaimed to the outside world how concerned they are for the Palestinian people, yet they have let their "brothers" rot in filth refusing to better their conditions or allow them access to the larger society of the mythical "Arab nation". The oil riches flow to the feudal aristocracies but the Palestinians lie in the mud having no alternative but to turn to the gun and to the radicalism of leftist dreams. A policy of words and principles for the world gallery of public opinion and a policy of brutal inhumanity and complacency for the Middle East. I know Israelis who wept for the human suffering in 1970 when Jordan wiped out the Palestinians from its territories and in 1972 when the Lebanese army battles the Palestinian forces. I wonder if Arabs wept as well. Is there something about the Arab and Moslem psyche that can be described in our terms as "bloodthirsty?" Is there a psychological dimension to the concept of Holy War that accounts for what has been going on in the Middle East? I have been in Egypt and I have marveled at the civilization and at the culture. I have friends in Cairo whose sons and husbands are killing my Israeli friends. I do not in any way hate the Arabs -- but when the battle is raging I do wonder if they hate me. Cross-cultural understanding is the only key to peace in the Middle East but what do we do in the meantime and is it possible?

And, if as some people still insist, the real issue is really that of the post-1967 boundaries and the "occupied territories," how does one explain the 1967 war itself, which took place obviously before there were such territories, and the blood-curdling threats that emanated from every Arab capital in the weeks preceding the war when it was thought Israel was being strangled? Surely the nonsense of who fired the first shot and of "Israeli aggression" in the face of the 1967 developments cannot blind one to the fact that the issue then was the slow strangulation by capitulation or military response. I will even agree that Nasser did not want war -- but this was precisely because he knew he would be destroyed and couldn't possibly win. He did want Israel's destruction. If things have really changed then there must be an affirmation in deed as well as word. Instead we get the Algiers Declaration and talk about nuclear weapons!

I began this letter by explaining how we in Israel fear to fear. We will have to learn, if and when a real dynamic peace "process" begins, that the Arab Middle East is our home and we will have to accommodate ourselves to this reality as well as to our heritage. But we cannot under present circumstances make such progress in this task when our enemies have forced us to perpetuate the self-fulfilling battles of hostility and irresolvable conflict. And I strongly believe that we will be less and less able to deal with the issues and priorities that could lead to a de-escalation of this hatred and fear if those men of good will throughout the world isolate us and turn us either out of their own selfish self-interest or because they allow themselves to believe that it is we the Israelis who are the enemy of a true peace, that it is we who have in our hands the keys to turning Arab-Jewish hostility along the paths of cooperation, that it is we who will not meet the reasonable Arab demands by returning to earlier cease-fire lines from which we were earlier forced by threats to our existence. Would you, if you were the Prime Minister of Israel, return to lines, within the context of today's military technology and present world political

(over)

conditions, which would place Arab guns at the very hearts of your major cities, Arab guns over the hills controlling your kibbutzim, and Arab armies along indefensible borders? Would you accept and rely upon U.N. "guarantees" and U.S. pledges in view of historical developments and current political conditions? Is it not the process rather by necessity a gradual one and is not the willingness to accept a gradual approach the real test of sincerity? Is it not real peace by necessity a dynamic process: territories for signs of acceptance, military demilitarizations and disarmament, secure borders plus guarantees; deescalation of hatred and hostility internally as well as externally (domestically in what the Arab leaders tell their own people as well as what is said for international public opinion) for cooperation as regards Palestinian refugees; etc. Only a dynamic and a gradual peace is possible and meaningful. The explosive possibilities otherwise make any other approach to peace not only unlikely to succeed but possibly the road to even more devastating conflict and the future involvement of other states in the Middle East quagmire.

We have just lost 1356 men and thousands of others will be scared for their lifetimes. With our population we have suffered a tremendous catastrophe. We have just been forced to kill thousands of young Arabs sent to kill us by their fanatical leaders and the passions instilled in them since they were born. We have just allowed ourselves to be maneuvered into the position where we feared more the reactions of our friends if we struck preemptively or even if we mobilized then we feared an Arab strike. Remember those guarantees of 1970 when the War of Attrition ended? Remember how the very moment the agreement began the Arabs moved their forces and their Russian missiles up to the canal in direct violation of the agreement? Those were the missiles and forces that drew our blood less than three years later. Now, we are asked to let the Arab armies de facto or de jure along with the Russian bear move again closer to our borders without a real "process" of peace. What can possibly be our answer?

Come to Israel and see the reaction to our dead and hear and see the reaction of young Israelis who have been forced to kill young Arabs. Read THE SEVENTH DAY written by Kibbutz soldiers after the last war in 1967. Then go to Cairo and Damascus and see if the talk is of mourning and the horror of war -- rather I am afraid you will hear questioning of why the war wasn't continued and the glory of fighting for the sake of fighting.

I hope you will find this letter responsive to the discussion we had on the Middle East. I believe that we share most goals and outlooks and that you could give me and possibly I deserve a good lecture on internationalism and the absolute necessity to move toward world peace. Till we have the chance to further discuss these issues, I send you my best and warmest regards.

Most sincerely,