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October 1, 2003

Rabbi Aryeh Azriel
7023 Cass Street
Omaha, Nebraska 68132

Dear Rabbi Azriel:

Thank you for your telephone call with its mixture of positive and negative comments. I'm always glad to hear from a reader, particularly one who seems to follow my columns as closely as you.

You say you are waiting for me to find a Palestinian who will criticize Palestinian behavior—something perhaps comparable to what was said about Israeli policy by the former speaker of the Israeli Parliament, Avraham Burg.

I am open to your suggestions as to where I might find such statements by a Palestinian. I would hope that someone like you, so closely involved with the Israeli/Palestinian issue, would be in position to point me to a source where I might find such statements. I would be pleased to be able to quote a credible Palestinian deploring Palestinian actions which are properly subject to criticism—criticism consistent, for example, with what I wrote in my column March 31, 2002:

"Wednesday's suicide bombing—condemned by President Bush as 'cold-blooded killing'—not only killed 21 Israelis and wounded some 130 others as they prepared to sit down for a Passover dinner. It was also self-defeating, a wound inflicted by Palestinian terrorists on the Palestinian cause and any hope for an early peaceful settlement of the conflict."

Or comparable to what wrote in my January 27, 2002 column: "Palestinian murder of Israelis, including suicide attacks which kill or injure so many innocent civilians, are outrageous and indefensible." (In that column, I did include criticism of Israeli razing what United Nation's officials said were a total of 54 houses. The column carried the headline "Both Israel and Palestinians deserve equal shares of blame.")

Or what I wrote in my column October 4, 2001: "Certainly the Arab world must adjust, peacefully, to the reality that Israel is entitled to continue its existence as an independent nation. The Arabs may not like it, but they must accept that reality."

Or what I wrote in my column of September 20, 2001, suggesting some elements of a specific blueprint for a course of effective action:

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--"Continued strong support of Israel, demonstrating that we stand by a democratic ally despite, in the words of The Wall Street Journal, the efforts of 'Arab despots and fanatics' to frighten us off. (At the same time, I believe, we should continue to encourage an Israeli/Palestinian peace settlement that assures both the Palestinians and the Israelis of a secure, autonomous state of their own.)

--"An appeal to the relatively moderate Arab elements in Middle Eastern governments to join us in the war on terrorism. (Winning the support of democratic countries all around the world is, of course, also of primary importance.)

--"Taking the shackles off our intelligence agencies and considering very seriously following the Israeli counter-terrorism tactic of preemptive strikes—taking out the terrorist before he tries to take you out. (A memorable example of the preemptive strike was the Israeli incursion into Iraq to destroy a nuclear reactor site that could have helped give Iraq nuclear weapons.)"

Or what I wrote in my column September 13, 2001 in regard to the September 11 terrorist skyliner hijackings and the subsequent deaths:

"Those deaths and the pictures of those Palestinians celebrating them have buried, at least for the indeterminate future, any prospect for creation of a Palestinian state not dominated by the Israeli military. Buried also is any hope that Israeli-occupied Jerusalem will—in the foreseeable future, if ever—become an international city, with a sector designated for the capital of a Palestinian state...

"In short, those joyous Palestinians and the terrorists whom they applaud have, in my opinion, caused serious if not irreparable damage to the Palestinian cause."

Or what I wrote in my May 25, 2003 column:

"A friend in Omaha's Jewish community called to say that Omaha Jewish readers and other Omahans would be expecting me to condemn a recent series of bombings by the Palestinian Hamas group. He indicated I should include Palestinian Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat in my criticism.

"I do indeed condemn the continuing terrorist tactics by Palestinian militants, and I continue to believe that the Palestinian cause deserves a better leader than Arafat. Continuing Palestinian violence demonstrates again Arafat's failure to do anything effective to stop the killing."

Or what I wrote in my September 29, 2002 column:

"Incidentally, the United States proposal, quite appropriately, would require that two Palestinian groups—Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas—be treated as terrorists

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under a Security Council resolution passed last year to condemn the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon."

I have also from time to time criticized the policies of Ariel Sharon and said that I think Israel deserves better leadership. But I have also on more than one occasion expressed sentiments to the effect that there is a good deal of support in America for the principle that the Jewish people, who have suffered so much through so many centuries, are entitled to a secure homeland.

I offer those quotes as examples of the fact that, contrary to the impression which your letters and phone calls so often leave, I do write positive things about Israel and on occasion very critical things about Palestinians.

Apparently my comments critical of Palestinians and supportive of the principle that the Jewish people are entitled to a secure homeland in Israel are forgotten when you react to my quoting three paragraphs of a former Jewish prime minister's 21-paragraph criticism of Israeli policy and actions.

You suggest that if I find a Palestinian critical of Palestinian policy and actions, it may "deflect" some of the feeling which is being expressed about me in Omaha's Jewish community.

If you are interested in spreading the truth, you might help "deflect" some of those feelings by sharing with others in the Jewish community some of what I have pointed out to you in this letter, including the quotes from previous columns, and the fact of my willingness to quote Palestinian criticism of Palestinian policy and actions if I encounter such or can be steered in the direction of finding such comments. (Incidentally, I regularly read The New York Times and the locally-edited Jewish Press. In neither of those publications have I seen any Palestinian quoted as criticizing Palestinian policy and actions.)

You might also point out to others in the Jewish community that I did not quote at length from what was a very long article of criticism by Avraham Burg, all of which was quoted in the widely-circulated international Herald Tribune. Among Burg's comments which I did not quote were these words from the former Israeli prime minister:

"Israel, having ceased to care about the children of the Palestinians, should not be surprised when they come washed in hatred and blow themselves up in the centers of Israeli escapism. They consign themselves to Allah in our places of recreation, because their own lives are torture. They spill their own blood in our restaurants in order to ruin our appetites, because they have children and parents at home who are hungry and humiliated.

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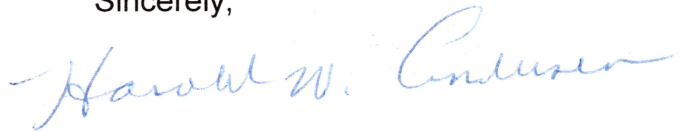
"We could kill a thousand ringleaders and engineers a day and nothing will be solved, because the leaders come up from below—from the wells of hatred and anger, from the 'infrastructures' of injustice and moral corruption."

If I had an anti-Israeli animus and/or pro-Palestinian prejudice, I surely would have quoted those two paragraphs. You might share the fact of my restraint as you talk with people who you indicate are talking about me in your community. You might share with them the exact language of those two paragraphs which I did not quote in my column. This might help "deflect" some of the misconceptions about my views.

Frankly, I'm getting tired of the repeated implication that I'm anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian. I believe that the quotes from my columns and the fact I chose not to quote those two explosively-worded paragraphs are effective rebuttals to that absolutely unjustified implication.

Thank you for calling. I look forward to hearing from you with any suggestions as to a reasonably available source of comments from a Palestinian of some stature criticizing Palestinian policy and performance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Harold W. Andersen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Harold W. Andersen