

YEHUDA ELKANA

June 11, 1975

Professor Joshua Lederberg
1431 Pittman Avenue
Palo Alto, California 94301
U. S. A.

Dear Josh,

It is not accidental that I am late with this letter. When papers and unanswered mail begin to pile up on our desks, which of us has not quoted, jokingly or otherwise, the proverbial professor who never answers a letter in less than half a year, since in six months' time most letters will not have to be answered at all. To some extent, this was a game I was playing. All interested M.E. watchers, friends and foes alike, have for months been asking, now why doesn't Israel come out with a plan for an overall settlement; what is our conception of peace; why don't we translate our vague wishes into at least clearly sounding slogans. Since I shared the puzzlement and I wished our government to come out with such a plan, I postponed and waited. But, unlike in the case of the proverbial professor, I seem to have been justified in my hope. A few days ago, Prime Minister Rabin outlined very clearly that he intends to discuss with President Ford the next steps of settlement as part of an overall peace plan which the two are going to talk about in detail. True, this is not yet a plan open to the public or to us at home either, but at least it is a decision with which I can identify. Therefore, today, before knowing the outcome of the Ford-Rabin talks, I should like to think aloud in front of you about the problems and difficulties of an overall peace plan.

The greatest problem is conceptual. There is no slogan comparable to "return to 1967 borders" and "restoration of the rights of the Palestinians" which Israel could invent with the same apparent clarity. There was an attempt for some years to make "internationally secure and recognized boundaries" into such a slogan, but the involvement of the 'big powers' and the vicissitudes of the detente make such a slogan ridiculous. Otherwise, what is it that we want? More than anything else, the disappearance of the pan-Arab dream of destroying us. Yes, we can return to the 1967 boundaries -- as you know, I belong to those who advocated this always -- yes, we could pay heavy reparations to Palestinians who were made to leave Israel

when it was founded (a small minority) and also to those who left of their own free will (the majority). I also think we should have made this offer long ago, even before Arab recognition of Israel. But, after all that, what could possibly convince us that there is a real change of mood and intensions in the Arab world? I, for one, am certainly not convinced. And, as to speeches, make your choice. On the very same day that Sadat's interview on the B. B. C. contained the reassuring conviction that the lesson from the October War is that the conflict cannot be solved by force, his foreign minister, Fahmi announced in Cairo that Israel must retreat much beyond the 1967 borders and that only a very small Israel, with an Arab corridor halving it into two, connecting Jerusalem and Gaza would satisfy the Arabs. A few weeks before that, friendly, urbane, Western-style King Hussein, also explained that a Palestinian state, comprising the West Bank and the Gaza strip is not enough by half. What I am saying amounts to the following: whatever peace plan an Israeli government could work out after bitter internal debates and whatever maximum concessions would be suggested by us, it would always be considered the minimum or less than a satisfactory starting point by the Arabs. From this point of view Rabin's avowed tacticts that it is premature to come out with a full-fledged peace plan is defensible.

Considering the vehemence of the Arab onslaught all over the world, political and economic, attempts to bring about Israel's expulsion from the international organizations, of suppressing non-Muslim minorities in Lebanon, Morocco and Sudan, the only feasible tactic again is a state-by-state approach, even if not necessarily a step-by-step approach. A general peace plan would only emphasize the Arabs' mutual dependence on each other and promote their own neglect of their legitimate, but not necessarily identical interests as separate states in favour of the highest common denominator of inflamed ideology and militant impracticality. Whether these and many other arguments which I could bring, but will not bore you with, in favour of the tactic of postponing an overall peace plan are satisfactory to a world which wants to live in peace and to be left in peace, is debatable. Probably it is not !

But then there is one more very striking argument to be remembered. Whatever the peace plan, whatever the boundaries, whatever form the reparations to, and recognition of, Palestinians will take, it will emphasize that we, most of us, want to live in a Jewish state, with a Jewish majority in our country. Perhaps one

day when nationalism will decline, the holocaust will become only history, and no new antisemitic waves will burst in, then, this dream too might fade away. In the meantime, this is what we want and it is directly contradictory to the seemingly tolerant Palestinian counter-dream of a multi-national, democratic state, where all races and all religions coexist peacefully. It seems to me that the only and the best reply to this, to us, unacceptable counter-dream, is a reminder that the Palestinians and even Arafat in his U.N. speech, repeatedly mentioned the Lebanon as an example of such peaceful coexistence. What more can one say ?

Your

Yehuda