MEMORANDUM

To: Foreign Affairs Department
From: Nives Fox
Subj: Press Reactions on UN General Assembly Resolution Zionism/Racism

The Assembly vote on the Zionism/racism resolution made a tremendous splash in the European press we have seen so far, and but for the Communist and one leftist paper in France, it raised a wave of outrage, shock and distaste. Not for a long time has there been such a quasi-unanimity in favor of Israel.

Starting with the exceptions then:

--- Liberation, the leftist daily, which entitles its very long article "Against an Ideology Not Against a People." The writer feels it is important to differentiate this resolution from past efforts to exclude and condemn Israel, and to note that it makes no specific recommendations. Author Yehiel Shabbazi is also convinced that it was Egypt who first understood this basic difference and it was Egypt who orchestrated the campaign leading to this resolution, in spite of US and Israeli hopes that the Sinai accord had at least neutralized the Egyptian position.

Mr. Shabbazi fully believes the inherent racism of Zionism. This racist potential, included in its founders' earliest premises and ideology, was most clearly manifest even in the 1920's, when Zionism sought to build a Jewish working class by systematically expelling Arab workers from the job market; to conquer the land and create a class of Jewish peasants by the systematic expulsion of Arab peasants through acquisition of land from absentee owners. All this under cover of 'socialism' and a desire 'not to exploit local workers,' the author maintains. It was after the establishment of the state, however, that Zionism showed its true racist colors: with the law of return and the granting of automatic citizenship to all Jews, while refusing it to non-Jews; by preventing ownership of non-Jews of property in over 80% of the territory; by political control of housing; by permitting the rabbinic to control civil status of citizens, forbidding mixed marriages in order to preserve the 'purity of the race...'

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The Communist daily L'Humanité came out in favor of the resolution, as it could be expected, but stating that "The French Communists were for the continued existence of a secure and peaceful State of Israel as well as for the right of Palestinians to establish a peaceful and independent State"; and added that the Socialist countries combating Zionist policies never questioned the existence of Israel, whom they were the first to recognize. In any case, concludes L'Humanité, Zionism is not essential to the survival of Israel; nor will all anti-Zionists side with those who wish to destroy Israel as a State.

More nuanced, Le Monde headed its editorial "An ill-omened Decision." The article finds the vote "regrettable, both morally and politically; and against the interests of the international community. But the editorial also explains that the notion of Zionism is a complex one and, "as all nationalist doctrines, one that often makes debatable distinctions, the more so because the idea of Jewishness is based on ethnic, religious and cultural criteria which the Israeli authorities themselves have sometimes difficulties understanding." The principle of illimited immigration of men from different cultures and background in a region that Arabs consider theirs, continues the article, cannot but arouse suspicion in Arab lands toward an ideology that in itself contains the germs of expansionist tendencies.

To round up the negative and not too positive, is the conspicuous silence from the Vatican, pointed up by more than one radio, television and press commentator. This was eventually explained by Vatican spokesman Federico Alessandrini, who said that the daily Osservatore Romano had given prominence to international criticism and this in itself indicated Vatican disapproval.

There was, however, an immediate reaction to the resolution by the World Council of Churches and its Secretary General, Dr. Philip Potter, categorically refusing the equation of Zionism and racism, and calling it a liberation movement of the Jewish people against oppression, including racial oppression. "None of the many understandings and interpretations of Zionism could be used to prove it was racist," said Dr. Potter. The WCC urged the UN to "find urgently ways to enable the Palestinian people to achieve their legitimate rights to nationhood and statehood -- while recognizing the right of Israel to exist peacefully within internationally agreed boundaries." It is believed that the issue is likely to become a major point at the WCC Assembly in Nairobi which is to begin in about a fortnight.

All other press reactions literally seem to vie with one another in the choice of condemning language:

--- Aurore's front page: "For men of good will the UN has ceased to exist yesterday, at 2:38 GMT. Some will say it committed suicide. Others that it was assassinated by a strange association of statesmen without faith, without law, without morals and without shame..
It is enormous, unbelievable, monstrous...an infamy with terrible consequences..."

--- Le Figaro: "Is the UN condemned, or at least its present structures which no longer are those of 1945 when the states of our old civilization were in the majority?...the repercussions of this decision lead to dangerous confusion. Truly, a certain conception of morality and international rights is in question....

--- Le Quotidien de Paris' headline is: "UN: Zionism eliminated by 72 to 35. The vote equating Zionism to racism comes from a planetary accounting whereby the influence exercised by some cheapens the reality of the Israel-Palestine drama." In the text of the article: "The UN resolution is Hitler's most beautiful posthumous revenge....Is it necessary to insult the people who more than any other had the vocation for auto-determination in order to recognize the rights of another? Must we forever repeat that Zionism, born with Herzl at the time of the Dreyfus affair took form the day Western Judaism realized that assimilation was a failure and only a return to Zion could permit the survival of a national community from the pogroms of Russia and those of 'liberal' Europeans?...We have but to await the next steps in the liquidation of the Jewish problem: first throw the Israelis into the sea and then 'clean up' still infested territories on the pretext that Jews are 'racists'...A policy that Hitler hardly dared put into effect openly is now consacrated..."

--- Even before the General Assembly vote, but after the Social Committee passed the resolution, the weekly Nouvel Observateur published a page-long article on the subject. Its author, Richard Marienstrass, is a native French Jew of East European parentage and his name is associated with 'leftist intellectuals' in France. He has written a great deal about the need for strong Jewish life in the diaspora and is opposed to the view that Israel is the sole center of importance for Jews everywhere.

His article condemns the Committee resolution and calls it a further discredit to the organization. Particularly so, he feels, because the resolution was adopted within the framework of the decade against racism and thus UN member states are implicitly asked to give moral and financial support to anti-racist initiatives, therefore against Zionism. "The result of the resolution will also mean that all those whose opinion on the Middle East differs from that of the Organization for African Unity, Mr. Yasser Arafat or, why not, Mr. Amin Dada, will henceforth be Zionists, and therefore racists. A handy label to attach to any Jew, or non-Jew, who declares that he does not wish the disappearance of Israel as a state." The consequences of this vote, says Marienstrass, will be minimal in liberal democracies. But what of East Europe, what of the lands where Zionism was described as a 'bestial ideology' already at the time of the Slansky affair? and what will happen to Soviet Jews after a resolution is passed giving international sanction for all sorts of discrimination? Marienstrass calls upon the French left and the international left to react against "this particularly insidious resolution.
which uses a phraseology that is essentially progressive. Those who believe that Socialism must not be built on lies and immorality will know how to react. The others must ask themselves, in view of what is happening, whether their analyses are correct and whether it is possible to accept propaganda worthy of Goebbels to take over an international rostrum, to utilize and pervert the very concepts of Socialist generosity in order to achieve ends satisfying only hatred and destruction."

-- In contrast to l'Humanité, the Italian Communist daily L'Unità condemned the UN vote. The article nonetheless states that "Zionism is a reactionary and conservative ideology used by imperialism and causing aggressive, expansionist and discriminating impulses among the Israeli leaders. However, we do not accept equating Zionism to racism, and believe this vote in the UN is harmful to the Arab cause and will lead to its loss of support among Western European lands that may have contributed to a peaceful solution in the Middle East."

L'Unità also gave separate space to a statement by Senator Umberto Terracini: "The UN resolution tolls the shame for that assembly and marks an indelible brand upon those who proposed it, those who supported it and also those who comforted it with their abstention."

Other political leaders in Italy made brief statements. Among them Socialist leader Pietro Nenni: "The UN resolution is an outrage to the historical truth of 2000 years during which Jews were exposed to the constant racist menace of being massacred. It is surprising that the Arabs believed they were serving the Palestinian cause in this way. Even more surprising is the vote of Communist nations." The Vice-President of the Liberal Party declared: "We are precipitated backwards to Nazi myths of 30 years ago that the UN was supposed to exorcise." And the Secretary of the Republican Party said "The vote is an authentic shame for those who gave it." Minister Mariano Rumor rejected this identification of Zionism with racism on October 31, with a public statement on the occasion of a meeting of European Foreign Ministers in Rome.

--- La Stampa of Turin calls the resolution "An Anti-Semitic Verdict." Says commentator Carlo Casalegno: "Of the three resolutions concerning Israel one might say of the first two that they affirm just principles and even if these are ambiguously formulated and insidious in political consequences, they are worthy of a proper debate. As for the third, however, any discussion is out of place: one can only refuse it as an offense to the truth and civic conscience...The ambitious 'Parliament of the world' has confirmed with the same confused majority its anti-Zionist and therefore anti-Semitic position. In the plenary assembly of 143 states fanaticism and blackmail, opportunism and demagogy managed to constitute a hybrid alliance to vote a document which falsifies historic truth by accusing Israel of racism."
--- In Britain's Daily Telegraph's editorial headlined "UNO's Racist Orgy" the text says: "To brand world Jewry as 'racist' is a ghoulish inversion of morality which ignores the genocide in the gas chambers and anti-Semitism throughout history...Arab money, of course, played a large part in the UN majority..."

--- The Guardian entitles its editorial "A Wild Swipe at Israel" declaring: "Many of the countries which provide the automatic majority on these occasions are up to their knees in racial and tribal ambiguities, but without having a democratic apparatus such as Israel's...The long list of dictatorships, starting with the Soviet Union and ending with Uganda, which helped to swell the roll on Monday, is a less than persuasive lobby for civil rights." But then the article also warns that "the support the UN initially gave to Zionist ambitions in Palestine does not absolve Israel from the continuing duty to examine its policies not as they appear from Tel Aviv but as they appear from the Arab capitals." The Guardian is one of the rare papers claiming that the resolution does not infer a revival of anti-Semitism: "The national policy of Israel can be legitimately criticized without insult to the Jewish race or the Hebrew religion."

--- The Times (London) comments mostly on "the sharp and damaging divisions within the organization" brought on by the vote; and worries about "reactions against the UN as a whole, particularly in the US." It is one of the few papers that also mentioned the Belgian proposal to have the vote postponed. "The 55 votes in favor (67 against and 15 abstentions) showed the embarrassment of many countries that were undergoing diplomatic pressure from both sides."

Statements by political leaders, organizations and personalities in Europe continue to appear daily, and one is almost awed by the vast vocabulary variations of this outpour of condemnations. (One also wonders whether such eloquence was displayed in UN behind the scene exchanges, or is it all for public consumption.)

What of the vote itself? The one important major factor was the steadfast unequivocal unity of the 'nine'. But comments, public and personal, depend on whether one takes an optimistic or pessimistic view...and I might add that I have heard many say that the resolution was worse for the Arabs than for Israel.

On the cheerful side it can be said that the period between the Third Committee vote and the final passage of the resolution brought impressive gains to those who voted against it: 29 to 35; and 28 to 32 abstentions. One can also take comfort by calculating that the resolution passed, after all, with just a fraction above 50% in favor of it. Certainly, too, a further crack was achieved among the third world countries, almost half really withdrawing blind acceptance of the Arab bloc position. But what of the gradual shift in the Mexican vote? At last year's Unesco General Conference decisions on Israel Mexico chose to abstain. Now, a year later, it voted in favor of the UN resolution.
This same path was followed by Brazil. Can this be balanced by Peru's reversal? Not quite: from a steady adherence to the Arab bloc it simply abstained at the UN. The two most glaring 'absents' in the roll call, Rumania and Spain can be put on the optimist's side -- but the 'absents' are hardly ever mentioned or counted when resolutions such as this are referred to.

It is sad indeed to conclude by saying that a little more courage, that a little more independence, might have averted passing the resolution, especially if practiced at the time of the Belgian proposal.