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A comedy writer pitches his adaptation of The Times' recent Op-Ed from the Islamic Resistance Movement.

Jeff Astrof

As a professional sitcom writer in Hollywood, I am always looking for sources of humor. It might be a snippet of conversation I overhear at a coffee shop, or maybe it's something my father or 3-year-old son says. Oftentimes, I find a real-life story in a newspaper or magazine that is fraught with so much irony, the transition to sitcom seems automatic. I found such a piece in the Op-Ed pages of Tuesday's Los Angeles Times.

The piece, " Hamas' stand," written by Hamas politico Mousa Abu Marzook, contains all the elements of a good comedy. First, the premise: A terrorist organization violently opposed to Western culture uses the media of one of its sworn enemies — in May, a top Hamas official called for death to all Americans — to try to explain itself to the same Americans it wishes to kill! Move over Oscar and Felix, we have Mousa and Uncle Sam.

The text of the letter fits even more nicely into the sitcom format: start with a big joke. Mr. Abu Marzook claims that the recent Hamas coup "... was done as part of our effort to secure Gaza from the lawlessness of militias and violence." In sitcom parlance, this is known as a "flip to": ie: A character claims that he will never, under any circumstance, wear a dress. Flip to: that character wearing a dress. In our example, Hamas is saving Gaza from militias and violence. Flip to: rival Fatah members being thrown to their deaths from 15-story buildings by roving gangs of Hamas militias. It's an easy joke form, but it always works.

Mr. Abu Marzook continues, " Hamas has never supported attacks on Westerners..." Except for that call this past May by Hamas Sheik Ahmad Bahr to "...defeat the Jews and the Americans, and bring us victory over them." Why, I oughta! Mr. Abu Marzook goes on to claim that Hamas' "struggle has always been focused on the occupier and our legal resistance." Well, blowing up women and children in restaurants is actually illegal, but again, dumb characters always play huge.

The laughs continue as Mr. Abu Marzook talks about the "Fatah coup" (To the moon, Abbas!); his claim that Israel's founders said they wanted to "expel the Arabs and take their places," though there is no record of an Israeli spokesperson ever quoted as saying that, is clearly an homage to the clever wordplay mastered by comic Norm Crosby; and his comedic coup de grâce, comparing Hamas' anti-Semitic charter to the U.S. Declaration of Independence. It's a riot!

The only difference between Mr. Abu Marzook's letter and a sitcom is that, after 22

minutes, a sitcom is over. But the problems facing Israelis and Palestinians are not over; if anything, conditions are getting worse. Israeli children still have to sleep in bomb shelters to avoid the daily barrage of Hamas rockets, and Palestinians in Gaza are being held captive by a government that is helping to foment a humanitarian disaster and is not afraid to use its own citizens as human shields. It would all be hilarious. Except it isn't.

Jeff Astrof has been a sitcom writer for more than 15 years, working on such shows as "Friends," "Duckman" and "Grounded for Life." He is currently a writer on "The New Adventures of Old Christine" on CBS.

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