

VT-857 Transcription

Fox News and WCBS-TV discussion regarding peace in Middle East.

1983.

JOHN: -- do what it said it would if the PLO met the conditions, but now, they want to see if the PLO matches words with deeds. And Morris Abram, the head of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations put out a statement. He said, "We neither approve or disapprove, we accept it, we trust the United States." Bob O'Brien is standing by now with more on what his real supporters here are saying about everything. Bob?

BOB O'BRIEN: John, I am with Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, who is Director of International Relations for the American Jewish Committee, of course, one of the most well-known leaders of the American Jewish community. And, ever since this news broke, Rabbi Tanenbaum has been on the phone with his people in Israel, and also people who are leaders of the Jewish community here in the United States. What are you hearing? George Shultz says, "Our object is not a dialogue, our object is peace." Do you think he's on the right track?

MARC TANENBAUM: Well, I think there's great dismay about what is happening. [01:00] The American Jewish Committee trusts Secretary of State George Shultz, he's a great

friend of the Jewish people, and of the state of Israel. But the issue is, we distrust Arafat and the PLO. He has made commitments of this character in the past, and has always managed to violate those commitments two weeks later, a month later. So, I think one has to be very cautious, and wait and see how this unfolds.

O'BRIEN: Has the United States, do you think, Rabbi, put themselves, by making this declaration, that they are going to directly talk to the PLO in a position that they cannot retreat from now? Has something substantively changed forever?

TANENBAUM: No, I don't think so. I think it can be tested, if the PLO demonstrates by deeds what Arafat is saying in words, and, in fact, shows a change of heart.

O'BRIEN: Now, you know, there are many people, leaders in this -- of the American Jewish Community, who feel that the basic premise of [02:00] the PLO is what they really want is also a piece of downtown Tel Aviv, and other things. In other words, that as this negotiating process would continue, they would continue to mount more demands.

TANENBAUM: I think that's the concern, because that seems to be implied in some parts of Arafat's speech before the United Nations. So, all of this has to be tested out. The ball, really, is not in Israel's court, it's in the

Palestinian court. If the Palestinians genuinely want peace, put an end to the violence on the West Bank in Gaza, and move toward accepting the existence of Israel as a sovereign nation, and give up the notion of taking back Jerusalem, then I think there's the basis of some real discussion.

O'BRIEN: A man known well here in New York, Israel's former UN Ambassador, Benjamin Netanyahu, calls it a terrible mistake, and he said that the United States has compromised its credibility, the American government has either been duped, or it is deceiving itself; do you think that is too strong?

TANENBAUM: Well, that's a strong position, it's the position of the Likud party, [03:00] and I think that's consistent with what Prime Minister Shamir has been feeling. I think there's a tendency on the part of American Jews to be extremely cautious, to hope that this could lead to some new movement, but not to allow it to run away as a major peace offensive, which the PLO has engineered.

O'BRIEN: Rabbi Tanenbaum, I think that Johnny Rollen back in the studio, who has been listening to us talking here, has a question for you, John?

JOHN: I just wanted to ask the rabbi if he has heard or disappointed that the United States didn't tip off Israel,

at least let Israel what it was going to do before it made this announcement?

TANENBAUM: John, I have to hear your question again.

JOHN: Are you surprised or disappointed that the United States did not let Israel know what it was going to do before it made this announcement?

TANENBAUM: Oh, I think so. An issue of such momentous possible importance for the Middle East certainly sort of involves some consultation in advance. After all, Israel is not [04:00] a passive bystander in what the consequences of this move will be. But I'm sure, given the strong relationships between Israel and the United States, that after all of this turmoil is over, that they will establish a very real communication between Israel and the American government.

JOHN: Rabbi Tanenbaum, thank you very, Bob, thank you.

O'BRIEN: OK, John, a quick yes or no, Rabbi Tanenbaum, with all of the contacts between Israel and the United States, do you think it's really possible that no one in Israel knew this was going to happen before it happened?

TANENBAUM: I really don't know that.

O'BRIEN: OK, thank you, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum.

JOHN: Well, perfect timing on that one, coming up next...

(break in recording)

M: Now, Mike Schneider, Michelle Marsh, Warner Wolf, Dr. Frank Field, and the Channel 2 News Team. This is Channel 2 News at 11:00. Everything you need to know, because anything can happen in New York.

MIKE SCHNEIDER: Hello, Michelle Marsh has this night off, Jane Velez-Mitchell is joining us. He said the magic words and he turned the Middle East situation upside down. [05:00] Today, PLO chairman Yasser Arafat said the words that Washington wanted to hear. And tonight, the US says it is ready to talk with the Palestine Liberation Organization. The President made that decision, the Secretary of State made the announcement.

GEORGE SHULTZ: The United States is prepared for a substantive dialogue with PLO representatives.

SCHNEIDER: The dramatic announcement followed PLO Chief Yasser Arafat's news conference.

YASSER ARAFAT: We totally and absolutely renounce all forms of terrorism. I ask you to kindly quote me, we want peace.

SCHNEIDER: Arafat admits the statement was crafted to meet American conditions for opening talks. The PLO recognizing Israel's right to exist, renouncing terrorism, and

accepting two UN resolutions affirming Israel's
sovereignty, and the principle of trading land for peace.

ARAFAT: The right of all parties concerned in the Middle East
[06:00] conflict to exist in peace and security.

SCHNEIDER: So now, the man who couldn't get a visa to speak
to the UN here in New York, and who apparently didn't go
far enough in yesterday's UN appearance in Geneva, is now a
man to be bargained with. What's really changed?

SHULTZ: I didn't change my mind; they made their statement
clear so that it doesn't have the ambiguities have in it
that earlier statements had.

SCHNEIDER: Aides to Arafat were delighted by the US
reaction, but determined not to gloat

HASSAM ABDUL RAHMAN: You know, it is not really a victory
for anyone, or a defeat for anybody, it is basically the

SCHNEIDER: Shultz made it clear that the process must now
include direct talks between the PLO and Israel, and he
closed with words of support for the Jewish state.

SHULTZ: The United States commitment [07:00] to the security
of Israel remains unflinching.

SCHNEIDER: But tonight, Israeli officials clearly feel less
secure and more isolated.

ARAD: Well, I think for us, it's a major disappointment,
regret, of course, the American decision to establish

contact with the PLO, and our views, the PLO is still the same old terrorist organization.

SCHNEIDER: And the US says it'll be looking for proof that the PLO has indeed changed its violent ways. The Secretary of State also made it clear that even though Washington is ready to talk, it does not recognize the declaration of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Jane?

JANE VELEZ-MITCHELL: Tonight, there are a number of voices reacting to Washington's recognition of Arafat, some are surprising, others, quite predictable. Among them, Mayor Koch, who says he still believes the PLO is a terrorist organization, and he is not alone. Channel 2's Randall Pinkston has more on the acceptance of Yasser Arafat.

RANDALL PINKSTON: For years, the name Yasser Arafat stood for terrorism in the minds of Israel and many Americans. [08:00] But tonight, a new view, and a major policy change. Official US recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization, a decision sparking strong reaction from all sides. On Brooklyn's Atlantic Avenue, with its concentration of Arab-American businesses, praise for the US movement.

ZACH HEFNEWY: I think Arafat and everyone in the middle is to get tired of fighting -- I mean, they're ready to settle.

MOHAMMED SALEM: I think it is sincere, I think, like, there is a bluffing, call the bluff.

PINKSTON: And tonight, just hours after the Secretary of State's announcement, two influential Jewish organizations have endorsed the American policy change -- with reservations, but they nonetheless endorsed it. Those groups are the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith, and the Conference of Major Jewish-American Organizations. However, the Israeli government, and some of their Jewish-American supporters are less than skeptical, they just don't trust Arafat.

URI SAVIR: Based on his record, based on his positions, and based on the personalities involved, [09:00] we do not believe that it can, and we do not change our position.

TANENBAUM: If the uprising continues on the West Bank in Gaza, if there are more killings, and more cycles of violence, then clearly the pronouncements about the condemnation of terrorism become meaningless.

PINKSTON: And there's even criticism from Arafat's allied. PLO Spokesman Dr. M.T. Mehdi.

MT MEHDI: So, finally, now that Shultz is moving, he is opening a dialogue, which is much better, and it is really like a bone thrown to the Palestinians, no use.

PINKSTON: But amid all of the skepticism tonight, there is the sense that whatever the past problems have been, there is now an opportunity for change, a possibility for peace in the Mideast. In Brooklyn, Randall Pinkston, Channel 2 News.

SCHNEIDER: Of course, this move hits very close to the emotions of American Jewish groups and American Jews, and joining us right now live is Abraham Foxman, he is the National Director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith, we thank you for joining us, first of all. Your group tends to accept the US decision, [10:00] but I don't sense any enthusiasm with what's happened.

ABRAHAM FOXMAN: No, because it's an acceptance, it's an understanding, but a skeptical one. An understanding that the United States sets standards for the PLO to meet, for it to talk to them, the PLO met those minimal standards, the US is living up to a commitment. So, it's an understanding of Israel's anxiety and concern. While these words have been uttered, the deeds haven't changed. The uprising continues, stones, and bombs, and Israel buried two victims yesterday. The Palestine covenant still says that the goal is the elimination of Israel. Palestinians state Jerusalem as its capital as a precondition. We're a long way off, but we understand that this must be a beginning.

SCHNEIDER: Benjamin Netanyahu, the former Israeli Ambassador to the UN, said tonight that he thinks the US has been tricked, hoodwinked, by Arafat. Do you think so?

FOXMAN: No, I don't think so. I think, on the other hand, the United States recognizes the anxiety in Israel, [11:00] I think the fact that the Secretary of State made it very clear, this is the beginning of a dialogue, America's commitment to Israel continues. No opposed peace settlement, no indirect negotiations, and no acceptance of a Palestinian state indicated the US understands the anxiety, and I think is skeptical. Mr. Arafat isn't coming to New York tomorrow, nor to Washington, no visa has been issued. It's the beginning of a process to see if the leopard has changed its spots.

SCHNEIDER: Do you think, in a way, that the Israelis may have brought some of this upon themselves in that their internal political problems, their parliamentary problems, are such now that they've really been looking inward for a greater period of time.

FOXMAN: Well, one could've wished that there'd be more clear direction, but I think it's almost irrelevant. There still is no partner with whom, whatever is (inaudible) will emerge will talk, and I think that, again, this is the American effort to begin a dialogue to see if someday in

the future, hopefully, in the near future, the PLO can possibly [12:00] be that partner.

SCHNEIDER: Mr. Foxman, we have to leave it there, we thank you for joining us tonight, sir.

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