

VT-861 Transcription

NBC Today Show regarding Middle East conflict and American
Jewish community. 8 January 1988.

Q: On *After 8* today, the Palestinian riots in Israel and the disagreement in the American Jewish community over Israel's handling of those disturbances. The Palestinians live in territories occupied by Israel since the 1967 Mideast War. Despite 20 years of international efforts, there have been no talks between the Israelis and the Arabs on a negotiated return of the occupied territories. Over the years, the simmering resentment in the Palestinian settlements has occasionally boiled over into violence. A new round of violence, perhaps the worst, erupted in early December, and confrontations with Israeli soldiers have left 25 Palestinians dead. Israel has said it will deport nine Palestinians [01:00] it identifies as leaders of the unrest. And this week, the United States, which usually vetoes UN measures critical of Israel, went along with the vote taken by the UN Security Council demanding that Israel refrain from deporting those nine Palestinians. Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum is the director of international relations for the American Jewish Committee. And [Rita Hauser?] is a lawyer and founder of the International Center for Peace in

the Middle East. And join us this morning to talk about divisions in the Jewish community. The Jewish community has, in the past, been -- had so much solidarity for Israel. The two of you are uncomfortable with me putting you in the position of being on one side, and Rabbi Tanenbaum on the other. But you are not entirely in support of the Israeli handling of this situation, are you?

RITA HAUSER: I don't think that that's the real issue, how they handle the specifics. It's important, but it's not the crucial issue. The crucial issue is where does Israel go from here, and what should the United States policy [02:00] be? Many of us who would be lumped in the "peace camp," if you like, had been strongly in favor of Shimon Peres's initiative for an international peace conference with all the problems that are involved. But the commencement of negotiation, looking to an autonomy in the area, giving the Palestinians some civic and political rights, and a phased out activity for the Israelis. We have been fearful for a long time that these built-up resentments would blow over and erupt as they have, and it is imperative, it seems to me, that the United States Government put its shoulder now to the wheel to help facilitate an international conference.

Q: The pictures you've seen on television have to have caused you great anguish.

HAUSER: It's caused everybody anguish. Not just the Jewish community. There are many people interested in the Middle East beyond the Jews. It's an anguishing situation.

Q: Prime Minister Shamir says unequivocally, Israel will never leave the West Bank. [03:00] Does he give any room for negotiating anything but quelling this particular round of violence, only to see it boil up and over some other time soon, perhaps?

MARC TANENBAUM: [Jane?], I think one must make a distinction between the propaganda warfare that goes on and the possibilities of political solution. I think we recall that former Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who is regarded as a hardliner and would not yield anything, the moment at which President Sadat of Egypt made his dramatic visit to Jerusalem, suddenly everything changed. Begin, who had talked about not yielding an inch of territory, who was even more hardline than even Prime Minister Shamir is, ended up giving away the Suez, airfields, oil fields, exchanging territory for peace. I think the real issue is who in the Arab world is prepared to become another Sadat, to take that dramatic step forward [04:00] to sit at the

table? I think the Arabs would be amazed at the flexibility and the responsiveness of the Israelis, including Shamir.

Q: I know both of you anxious to discuss the broad picture. But in the meantime, in the last 30 days or so, the pictures that the world has seen on their television have done more the Palestinian cause, wouldn't you agree, than anything in the last 20 years?

HAUSER: I think there's no question about it. The rioting has brought to the forefront the dilemma of an occupation that seemingly is without end, and without solution. And quite clearly, a million and a half plus Arabs in the West Bank, and their compatriots who are citizens of Israel, are saying that they want a resolved solution. It is a very complicated political problem, and I cannot agree with Marc in his analysis. The situation is not the same as Sadat's Egypt. The West Bank is wholly territory for a very large number of [05:00] more traditional, nationalist religious Jews. Hussein is not in the same position as Sadat, and that's been made clear at least two dozen times. He cannot, he is unwilling, he is unable to go to Israel and negotiate face to face. He's met with Shimon Peres at least a dozen times. They have reached an accord last April, which was reduced to writing. The problem is to organize a conference with an appropriate representation of the Palestinians, the

question of where the Americans will be, where the Soviets will be, where the broader Arab world will be. It is not an easy problem. But because it's a difficult problem doesn't give you the liberty of doing nothing. And we have, for the last year or so, watched a terrible drift of nothing, as Israel is divided in two on the question, and as the American government has not been willing to really put its shoulder to the wheel. I think these events now show that something must be done. [06:00]

TANENBAUM: I think the missing piece -- and probably the issue on which I would differ with Rita, for whom I have great respect and affection -- is that what emerges generally out of her analysis of the situation is somehow that Israel is held primarily responsible for everything that seems to be going wrong there. And you dismiss the fact of Arab responsibility. I think that you have got to talk directly to the Arab world as well, and talk to them about their recognizing the complexity, and what the cost will be the Palestinians [unless until?] they move in. Let me just make one point. You know, the Palestinians may have won a political, a propaganda victory. I don't see anything, any political formulation coming out of it. Also, I think we ought to keep in mind the question that there is something wrong in the treatment of this crisis. You know,

during the past seven years, a quarter of a million have been killed, many of them young children, in the Iran-Iraq War. There's almost no passion about that, no concern about that.

Q: I'll have to leave it at that, [07:00] looking at the clock. I ask you if we would just eavesdrop on a discussion that I know American Jews are having all over the country. Twenty-two after the hour. This is *Today* on NBC.

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