

VT-862 Transcription

CBS News Sunday Morning regarding Israelis and Palestinians.

14 February 1988.

CHARLES KURALT: "The Land of Lamentations" provides our cover story this morning. It is a sliver of desert, with a violent history that goes back as far as human beings can remember. The establishment of Israel in that desert was the fulfillment of a prophecy, but Israel has not been with milk and honey blessed, as in the words of the old hymn. It has been with stones and gun butts cursed as it tries to defend itself from a new generation of angry young Palestinians. More than 50 people have been killed in Gaza and on the West Bank of the Jordan in the last few weeks. And the officially declared policy of the Israeli government is to beat up Palestinians until they stop resisting. And what does the Jewish community of the [01:00] United States think of that policy? David [Culhane?] went to find out.

M1: More violence and death on the West Bank this morning. Israeli military sources say two Palestinians were shot to death, and three wounded in today's unrest.

DAVID CULHANE: The agony of violent conflict on the West Bank of the Jordan, and in the Gaza Strip is mirrored in the agony of the Jewish community all across America.

F1: I do know that I, myself, feel totally anguished by the pictures that we're seeing, and I'm concerned with Israeli policy. I am concerned that it is official Israeli policy to have 18-, 19-, 20-year-old kids beating up on Palestinian men, women, and children.

M2: A 14-year-old boy, who said he and his mother were taken by soldiers inside a bus, and beaten --

JOSHUA CHASAN: While it may be very offensive to [02:00] some of us, some of these policies, at the same time, we do not for a moment disconnect the immediate situation from the fact that Israel's life is always on the line.

F2: Since Israel has always been kind of, like, everybody thinks, is kind of a peace-loving country, when they started, like, shooting live ammunition and stuff, it was, like, kind of a surprise.

M3: The thing between the Israelis and the Palestinians is not such a simple issue. It's really a very, very basic issue that, in some ways, involves the existence of the Jewish people, because a lot of people think that without the State of Israel, the Jewish people cease to exist.

M4: But somehow, the political process in Israel in regard to the Arabs is not moving in the right direction.

DAVID CULHANE: The Jewish community in America is passionate in its support for Israel [03:00], passionate in its troubled debate about the moral and political complexities of what is happening.

M5: -- in terms of those of us who are not being subjected to the day-to-day, living situation in Israel. What country --

MARC TANENBAUM: It is a very painful dilemma for us.

CULHANE: Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum of the American Jewish Committee.

TANENBAUM: For Jews who lived through the Nazi Holocaust, simply seeing human beings having their bodies beaten on, hands beaten, legs beaten, kicked. That's what happened to our people. We were traumatized by that. The trauma is all the greater if we see Jews doing that to other people.

MORRIS ABRAM: The Holocaust was not the first, nor I'm afraid will be the last of the tragic experiences of our people.

CULHANE: Morris Abram [04:00] is the chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

ABRAM: The Bible says, "All Israel is responsible, one for the other. We are our brothers' keepers." The Bible says, "Choose life." Jews choose it. Therefore, they hate the prospect of death of Arab children, of Arab people, of our own. So, consequently, they are conflicted and torn by the

combination of all these principles which come together in this particularly critical period.

M3: I think also, since the Palestinians are taking it into their own hands, Israel now has a chance to deal with them, the Palestinians, instead of the other Arab states.

CULHANE: This is a class at the University of Michigan. These young people are the control group for a computer-simulation program in which [05:00] students represent antagonistic parties and nations in the Middle East conflict. The West Bank uprising has become the main topic. The stones, the strikes, the demonstrations, the toll of Palestinian dead.

M6: I think the Palestinians have to get their act together as well. They have to meet the Israelis halfway. I mean, we can't just blame this all on the Israelis, and say the Israelis have to do it all on their own. I mean, that just won't --

M7: The question I want to ask, does the concept of blame help, at all, in coming to understand what's going on?

F3: You can blame the Israelis for working more on security and control, than trying to work on the conflict as a whole, and you can blame the Palestinians for striking, but not explaining what they're striking for, not explaining what concessions they need, exactly. So --

CULHANE: The control group must maintain a non-partisan position, and yet, many of these students are Jewish.

F3: Well, when you grow up in a Jewish [06:00] background, you tend to always hear that everything Israel does is right, and it's sort of a moral claim, and you just accept what goes on there, and then with a situation like what's occurring now in the occupied territories, it's something that you have to confront every day.

CULHANE: What do you do when you have a family situation where this subject comes up? I mean, how do you do it? I mean, do you try and...

M3: My family's very involved in the Jewish community, and in things involving Israel, and my parents, pretty much, support Israel and the government, and whatever, and think that whatever the government needs to do, they do. My sister -- My sister's boyfriend, who is Israeli, thinks -- has a pretty standard Israeli attitude, which is it needs to be done. That's all there is to it.

M8: So many -- everyone was talking about South Africa, and apartheid, and all these things, and when a parallel is drawn to Israel, I want to cry because to me [07:00], apartheid in South Africa is probably the worst thing in the world, and then to say that Israel is like that, I have a very hard time trying to even be objective about it, and

say, well maybe some of the things they do are similar. I can't even bring myself to say that.

F4: But if I have something critical to say, I will say it, and I may say it publicly.

CULHANE: Each generation wrestles with the issues raised by the conflict. This is the Beth Israel Synagogue in Ann Arbor, Michigan. They are Americans, and they are Jews.

F4: I feel that Israel is my family. I feel totally bound and committed to Israel. So, when I question, or when I criticize, it's done out of love, it's done out of concern for the future, and it's done out of wanting to see the best happen for a Jewish state.

M9: I think that the problem is that we're all very moved when you see [08:00] soldiers with machine guns, shooting at helpless people, men, women, children of different types, and different ages. On the other hand, we are not really exposed to the other picture, and that is the rock throwing, tire burning, Molotov cocktails, which are, in a way, the cause for the response.

F5: It feels immoral to me, and when I think about how we, as Jews, have been treated in our past, and I feel that we are doing to another group of people, struggling for their own survival in a land that they feel they have a claim to, as strongly as we feel we have a claim to, it makes me ill. It

distresses me greatly, and it makes me wonder that we have a Jewish state, but at what price?

CULHANE: Morris Abram.

ABRAM: All police use billy clubs, and in the context of a street brawl, and mob [09:00] action, you must restrain, and therefore, police do have to use the necessary force. We don't want indiscriminate, excessive force, and that is not Israeli policy, I am delighted to say.

TANENBAUM: And we really believe this --

CULHANE: Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum.

TANENBAUM: We don't believe that this can go on, the struggle with the Palestinians, with the scenario they have created, where Israel can win in the long term. It is in their interests to find a way out of that, because Israel will suffer and lose by it, and that's what we're trying to say to the Israelis. And the issue here is how do we maximize justice, both for the Israelis and the Palestinians, and minimize injustice for both the Israelis and Palestinians.

CHASAN: My question to you is, do we, sitting in the safety of Montclair, New Jersey have a right to speak out about our feelings about how Israel responds to these demonstrations? Is silence golden at this point, or --

CULHANE: One of the most complicated tasks for American Jews is to try to help children [10:00] understand what is going on now on the West Bank. This is Rabbi Joshua Chasan's class at the Congregation Shomrei Emunah.

M10: If it's the Jewish state, and we're Jewish, we definitely have a right to talk out about it because, you know, it's our state. It's our state.

F6: Well, I think both people should be able to share it in peace, and, like, not fight about it, but be able to use it as their Holy Land also, and not have problems with it.

CHASAN: How about the beatings?

M10: I don't particularly agree with the beatings. I mean, but in some cases, it's very one sided. If the Arabs would blow up a busload of children, I'm sure it would be maybe back page news.

CHASAN: It may be that the struggle now is bitter. It's very difficult. It's almost impossible. And at the same time, individual [11:00] Israelis and Palestinians do talk to each other, and there is the potential there for a real healing, and God willing, that's how the problem will be solved.

M11: (Arabic)

CULHANE: It doesn't happen very often, but sometimes, Palestinians and Jews do talk to each other in America.



Several organizations in Ann Arbor sponsored a meeting at which a Palestinian man and a Jewish woman read pieces that might help people grow toward understanding. Hasan [Nowash?].

HASAN NOWASH: Where did you get this land? Its soil is burning. How could you lift it? Where did you get this sweet? How did you steal it? The seeds are frozen tears. Oh, if I [12:00] squeezed your loaf of bread, my blood will flow from your bread on my hands.

CULHANE: Stephanie Ozer.

STEPHANIE OZER: You, my people, are too blinded by your fears, by our past, by your jets, by your allies, and their press. You say you roll the tanks in the name of all Jews? My name, you ask? No. Not in my name.

CULHANE: Nothing was solved in Ann Arbor that evening, but there was this small ritual of peace. Toward the end, they passed out lemons, a fruit beloved of all the people who live on the banks of the Jordan.

M1: More violence and death on the West Bank this morning. Israeli military sources [13:00] say two Palestinians were shot to death, and three wounded in today's unrest. And the first deaths...

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