

Global Journalist: The Unsettled Clash Between Palestine and Israel

Abstract: On this March 28, 2002 program, journalists discuss how a bombing in Netanya, Israel is connected the growing concerns of religious extremism in the Middle East.

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Guests:

- [Serge Schmemann](#)
- [Jay Bushinsky](#)
- [Magda Abu-Fadil](#)

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Speakers: Stuart Loory, Serge Schmemann, Jay Bushinsky, Magda Abu-Fadil

Stuart Loory 0:14

Welcome to Global Journalist on KBIA. This is the program that says mid-Missourians — indeed many Americans — are interested in international news. I'm Stuart Loory of the Missouri School of Journalism. How can you imagine a sadder and more sinister situation? Jews around the world gathered to celebrate Passover, their biblical escape from slavery, and to retell, as they have for thousands of years, the story of how they wandered 40 years through the desert to the promised land, the promised land. Meanwhile, Arab leaders assembled to try to fashion a unified approach to bringing a peace settlement between Palestinian Arabs and Israelis, and they find that they can bring no agreement among themselves. A Palestinian suicide bomber walks into a seaside resort hotel in Israel and explodes himself in a Paris — in a Passover Seder, excuse me, taking 20 lives, including his own, and wounding over 100 people. Attempts at trying to create a settlement again lie in ruins. A conflict more than a half century old grows more intense. The United States' peace efforts look impotent. Is there anywhere to go from here? Our guest today to discuss this situation are in Jerusalem, Serge Schmemann of the New York Times; in Tel Aviv, Jay Bushinsky, dean of international correspondents in Israel, a veteran reporter writer and broadcaster; in Beirut, Lebanon Magda Abu-Fadil, director of the Institute for Professional Journalists at the Lebanese American University. Serge Schmemann, let's start with you. You write in the New York Times this morning that this tragedy in Netanya may be the final cataclysmic event that will bring everyone involved to their senses. Why do you say that?

Serge Schmemmann 2:12

It may not bring people to their senses, but it does create the crisis on a level on a very, very high level. And I think at this stage, the Americans really have two choices either to leave, or to really make an all-out push. And what happened yesterday after the Beirut summit sort of sank into disarray. President Bush announced in Washington that now the focus was on General Zinni's mission to bring about a ceasefire. Then you have the explosion in Netanya. But by now I think the Americans do feel committed to at least ending the conflict here. They have become re-engaged. They have become active again. Something terrible has happened. There will be a terrible retaliation. We're expecting the Israelis to attack something very, very soon within hours. And this could take two days and afterwards when the dust settles is when we will see whether this has gone beyond any, any chance to roll back the clock to find some sort of ceasefire, or whether this will be the event that finally prompts an all-out effort by the Americans, very intense pressure and a realization by the Palestinians that they have to sign on to the Zinni ceasefire.

Stuart Loory 3:40

Jay Bushinsky, what can the United States do? Is there anything that can be done right now?

Jay Bushinsky 3:48

Unfortunately, I think that the people who the United States should be able to reach and the somehow bring into the process are beyond the pale, and they are the Islamic extremists who are responsible for what happened in Netanya. The American peace envoy General Anthony Zinni has been talking to the Palestinian National Authority, which is led by Chairman Yasser Arafat and then to the Israeli government, headed by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. But the Hamas organization for example, which has about 20 to 30% following in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is not involved in any stage of General Zinni's mission, and even if he wanted to talk to the Hamas people, I doubt very strongly if he could find any common ground. The problem, therefore, is Islamic extremism in all of its forms, not only in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but throughout the Middle East. As long as they are a powerful movement, and they are very powerful, it will be very, very difficult to come to terms and reach a viable settlement between the two sides, Israel and the various Arab states and the Palestines.

Stuart Loory 5:00

Magda Abu-Fadil, is there anything that the other Arab nations, now meeting in Beirut, can do to try to bring some reason to this whole situation?

Magda Abu-Fadil 5:13

Yeah, given given what's happened, it's all the more reason for the Israelis to accept the hand of peace that has been stretched — outstretched to them. And I'd like to correct you on one thing about the, the Summit having failed to reach some sort of an accord. In fact, not too long ago, there was a news conference, in which it was announced that the Saudi Peace Initiative was unanimously endorsed, and that the US had expressed

his support of the initiative. So, this is now there's only the hope that the Israelis would move forward on that and really pick up the momentum before it all fizzles out.

Stuart Loory 6:00

But Magda, do you say unanimously endorsed and it's true that it was unanimously endorsed by those countries that were there. But two of the key countries, Jordan and Egypt, were not there.

Magda Abu-Fadil 6:15

Excuse me, they - no - they were there but not represented by their heads of state. They did endorse the the, the initiative and their representatives did mention that. Yes.

Stuart Loory 6:29

So there I as you say there was unanimity despite the fact that King Abdullah and Hosni Mubarak, were not at the meeting.

Magda Abu-Fadil 6:39

Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, that had been agreed on before they all showed up for the meeting. There were some some glitches, which would just to be expected in any meeting, but they all in the final analysis accepted it.

Stuart Loory 6:52

Why —

Magda Abu-Fadil 6:53

and and now that the ball is in the Israeli courts,

Stuart Loory 6:56

Right, why did King Abdullah and President Mubarak not show up?

Magda Abu-Fadil 7:03

There there have been several different reasons given for that. President Mubarak came out on on TV yesterday saying that he felt that this was total humiliation for Mr. Arafat and for the Palestinian people and that he could not condone that and did not accept it. And in fact that he had advised Arafat not to attend the Summit. As for King Abdullah, there were different reasons stated for that, one of which was that he wasn't feeling well and other was that the Jordanians were not terribly thrilled with security arrangements because of differences between Jordan and Hezbollah, three of whose members were arrested in Jordan not too long ago. So I mean, whatever the reasons, the fact that they didn't show up, does not translate into not accepting the initiative.

Stuart Loory 7:59

Jay, Magda says that the ball is now in the Israeli court to to deal with the Saudi Peace Initiative. How do you feel about that?

Jay Bushinsky 8:11

Well, it certainly would seem that way on the face of it all. But when you come down to the reality, this is a strange way to make peace. I wrote a column for the Toronto Sun in which I said that "Peace is not made by plans. It's made by negotiators." It's usually the result of an armed struggle in which one side wins and the other is defeated. And then they come to terms and usually it's a different side that I've got to say a different representation than the one that was involved in the conflict on the losing side. In this in this actual case, however, what Prince Abdullah - Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia - did, which is very admirable, was to was to present a formula which was originally presented by American Secretary of State William P. Rogers back in 1969. It's identical to the American Formula for Peace that was rejected them by Israel, namely, withdrawal from all of the areas taken in the 1967 Six-Day War, except the Secretary of State Rogers suggested minor border rectifications and the whereas Crown Prince Abdullah did not even propose that, but it doesn't matter. As I say on the face of it, it's a very good and very positive and it's a matter of fact, the Speaker of the Knesset Abraham Borg, who is a candidate for leadership of the Labor Party of Israel has come out all all out for the Saudi Arabian peace plan. But when it comes to the negotiating process, you have to envision separate negotiations between Israel and let's say, Syria, Lebanon, and of course the Palestinians not to mention Iraq which is also belligerent by the way, and all the other states falling into line which may very well happen, but it can't but but the assumptions in the plan is that Israel will comply or oblige by dint of the fact that the Arab side is willing to make peace. But no allowance is made in the proposal for concessions to Israel for whatever reason, whether its strategic territory that Israelis want to keep, or the problem of not being able to readmit the refugees who fled in 1948, 49, which who now were counted by Time Magazine, for example, at 4 million.

Stuart Loory 10:31

Well, Serge Schmemann. Presumably, all of that is open to negotiation. Do you think that there is much possibility that an Arab-led initiative can replace the United States as the brokers of a settlement in the Middle East?

Serge Schmemann 10:51

I think initiative may not be the right word for what this is. Initiative in diplomatic terms means something that's put on the table and you begin building on it. This is an idea that has been floated out there perhaps a pledge, the Saudis have taken it upon themselves to lead to guide the other Arabs to the statement that they would normalize relations with Israel. Even there, there's been some discussion whether they promised full normalization or normal relations, which are very different concepts. It's out there now, and everything of that sort does contribute to the process. And Israel, I'm sure will have to respond, but this cannot replace an American mediating role. I mean, this conflict right now is at a level of violence where people live on a day-to-day basis. We are sitting here right now awaiting retaliatory attack into Ramallah. You know, we will wait tomorrow to see if Zinni proposes something. We have already forgotten what happened a week ago. It's it's really become a day-to-day sort of conflict. So adding to the to the potential foundation for a future political solution is, of course, beneficial. I think the Saudi initiative has done that. It has, it has added a horizon, which until now

was missing, and it will be an important element if and when negotiations resume. But that will not replace the need, first of all right now to find a way to get out of this horrible bloodshed here. It, it doesn't, you know, preclude or make any less important, an American almost day-to-day role in seeking for ways to end what's going on here right now. As I say it mean to understand what's happening in Israel, you have to understand that it's really become a day-by-day sort of process.

Jay Bushinsky 12:50

But if I could jump in here, as Stuart said, we actually can, as moderator. I just like to remind my colleague and good friend Serge Schmemann with whom it's a pleasure to be back in a dialogue after many, many years of separation. Hello to you, Serge, in Jerusalem.

Serge Schmemann 13:08

To you, indeed.

Jay Bushinsky 13:10

We had many, many conversations years ago when you were here on your previous stint. I just like to say that you may have been here at the time that the late Prime Minister Rabin was trying to fashion the Oslo Accords and succeeded in signing them back in 1993 with the Palestinians. During that phase, there were bus bombings in which Israelis were blown up inside urban buses by terrorists who were affiliated again with the Islamic movement. It seems that every time a positive step is taken towards a settlement in this case, the positive step being General Zinni. I'm leaving out the Netanya disaster. That's a catastrophe of in its own sense. There are always reactions. In fact, the the the scuttlebutt going around Israel is that every time General Zinni comes here, all hell breaks loose. Why? Because the Islamic side does not want any kind of a settlement that presumes the legality and viability of a Jewish state in Palestine, which the leader of Hamas Sheikh Ahmed Yassin considers to be an Islamic legacy or an Islamic walk. That's his point of view. In itself, it's not a violent point of view. It's a religious point of view. Islam cannot surrender any part of Palestine or Filastin as a called in Arabic to any other entity that is not Islamic: UN, Jewish, Christian, whatever. And with that kind of an element in the background of every positive efforts, such as the one that's being made by General Zinni, and by Crown Prince Abdullah, it's hard to predict an outcome as you said before, Serge. And that's where I tend to disagree with you. Maybe the Netanya catastrophe will kind of turn everybody around and point them in the right direction. I wish that were the case.

Stuart Loory 15:03

Okay, Jay. I'm sorry. We have to take a break now. This is Global Journalist on KBIA. We'll be right back. I'm Stuart Loory.

Stuart Loory 15:16

Welcome back to Global Journalist. You may listen to this program again, ask questions or make comments by going to www.globaljournalist.org or here in mid-Missouri by calling us at 573-882-9641. Before the break, Jay Bushinsky was was making some

remarks that indicated the futility of this whole situation. Magda, I imagine you might want to respond to that. Go ahead.

Magda Abu-Fadil 15:53

Well, first of all, I'd like to say that Prince Abdullah's initiative will be carried to Washington when he meets with President Bush sometime in April, if I'm not mistaken believe. So there will be building on that initiative. And the Arabs certainly will not be excluding the United States. In fact, they they're urging the US to be to become more actively involved and to help out with this whole process. In fact, there is also there seems to be some indication that the United Nations is being brought back into the picture. And that it's been given the green lights for more sanctions to go ahead and plans for a some sort of a summit in Seville, Spain sometime in May. In fact, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan was here attending the summit. And he plans to convene the summit, grouping key Arab Israeli and European figures to discuss the framework to end the conflict. And then the meeting will break up into working sessions to focus on thorny issues like Jerusalem, the refugees borders, settlements and securities. So there is a move afoot to take this to the next stage. Naturally tragic events like what happened yesterday, do, you know throw a wrench into the works, but would not deter those who are truly seeking peace to go ahead. I mean, this is a landmark summit, and I don't think anyone can expect any more concessions from the Arabs. What what was discussed here, I think, has got to be the, the ultimate that any Arab leader can offer at this stage in the game.

Stuart Loory 17:42

Okay, I would like to change the subject if I may and talk about what Magda just called the tragic events that happened yesterday. Yesterday, an Arab terrorists walked into a hotel in Netanya, a seaside resort in Israel. And he exploded a bomb that killed 20 people and injured more than 100. What I want to know is how that could possibly happen in Israel, given the need for security. Why was there not more protection? Why was there not a security setup that that prevented this? The reports are that there was only one security man in that hotel, and he was out walking the grounds checking security. Jay, what happened there?

Jay Bushinsky 18:38

Well, undoubtedly there was a lapse. Your your account is absolutely correct. The one security guard didn't do the job. But that's not where security began and ended. Actually, there was a very strong and intensive police deployment all along the, what they call, the seam, separating Israel from the West Bank. The distances from Netanya to the town, the town of Tulkarm for which the suicide bomber came is only six miles. So he could practically have walked there, but he didn't. He was helped to come in by by automobile and was dropped off undoubtedly. But the fact that he did get through that particular cordon and, and his vehicle undoubtedly passed through other roadblocks. It was a time when there was almost no traffic whatsoever on the highways. Therefore, whatever police and army setup there was between let's say Tulkarm and Netanya had no would have had no problems stopping checking and clearing any automobile going

through. It didn't happen. He made it to his target and the the final flaw was just as you say at the hotel itself.

Stuart Loory 19:47

Yeah, the final flaw. We in this country have just been through the Academy Awards. People are getting ready for the Kentucky Derby and there is talk about the tremendous amount of security, the checks. And here are 250 people gathered for a Seder in a hotel and you would think that there would be a tremendous security setup, and there wasn't. Serge Schmemann, you wrote last, well, earlier this week, a moving account of how for want of some shekels in your pocket, your life was probably saved. But yet there was a terrific security problem there. How do you feel about security in Israel as compared to the United States these days?

Serge Schmemann 20:40

You know, I think that suicide bombing is a weapon that cannot be fully stopped. And I think everybody here in the security services recognize that. You take extraordinary precautions, and the precautions are extraordinary. There is an armed man at the entrances to any larger store, drugstores, you know, supermarkets. Somebody will check. Somebody will look. Every Israeli right now is on the lookout, you know for suspicious looking guys with a big backpack or a big parka or something wrapped around. The fella who got on the bus up in Fahm - Where was that? - Umm al-Fahm. He was spotted. The point is that there's absolutely no way to stop this altogether because you have so many of these suicide bombers who are making these attempts at all times. Meaning the last few weeks since I've been here there has been far many attacks that have been intercepted. Then there have been attacks that you know have taken place. Yes, there was this terrible lapse but when you think about it, every hotel in Israel was was packed last night with Seders with Passover Seders. And so you know, in each one probably had a security guard. And you know, you do the odds, you work it out. And you know, the man got through, maybe he was standing there watching, maybe he was waiting for the guard moved away, maybe he didn't look suspicious. A lot of these fellows have been in uniform lately. So, you know, they do stop quite a few, quite a few in many, some of them go unnoticed in our Western press, because they get lost in the crush of other news. But when they get through, of course, it's horrendous. And this one was was especially appalling, even by the standards of the past year. But I cannot see how these can be stopped. And as Jay was saying earlier, you do have these organizations that are doing this deliberately to undermine both Zinni and the Arab summit. The difference? I would say it's, Jay, between now and the days of Yitzhak Rabin was when there was goodwill, when there was a mutual attempt to keep the process going. There was a mutual recognition that there will be such efforts and a mutual desire to get past them. That sort of goodwill right now is totally lacking. But, you know, if there is a recognition that these things will happen, that they are something that could not be fully stopped, not now and not in the near future. And if you are determined to go ahead, you, you grit your teeth and try your best to stop it and know that it will happen again.

Jay Bushinsky 23:31

Serge, though that that's really asking too much of the rank and file Israelis because when it happens, nobody here who's outside the political establishment and not involved the same in the actual negotiations. And I'm sure that people who are involved if they were the ones whose dear ones were hit by an attack, no one here is willing to say, Well, okay, it happened but we're involved in a peace process. And we have to make allowances. You know, that in the heyday of the Oslo Process, when Rabin was was in charge of the government with Shimon Peres at his side, he used to talk about Israeli martyrs for peace. At that time, there were martyrs for peace. Now, we you I agree with you, we can't even say that the people who were killed in Netanya can be classified as being martyrs for peace because there is no peace and there doesn't seem to be a peace process that's that's getting anywhere. But but to assume that there can be a process and the occasional suicide bombing or as terrorists would say today, even if Israel makes peace with the various Arab states, what has to brace oneself for the likelihood that there will continue to be periodical terrorist attacks of this kind. That's really asking too much of the Israeli people.

Stuart Loory 24:46

If I may, there is a story in Haaretz this morning, identifying this bomber, talking about the fact that he was a hotel worker, that he was known and that he was under suspicion before this happened. How can a guy like that get through? I don't understand that. Netanya is a place where terrorism has taken place before. There has to be more security.

Jay Bushinsky 25:18

I must come in on this because that's exactly the point and forgive me for taking for taking up too much of my share of the time. But I must say that, that that's exactly the problem. The Israelis, I think, have done an amazing job in the field of Secret Service intelligence work by actually pinpointing and identifying terrorist suspects and as or as suspects will call them and and, they went ahead repeatedly and notified the Palestinian National Authority of the names and locations of these suspects, urging a Chairman Yasser Arafat to take these people into custody or in some cases to put them on trial. And the breakdown here is Arafat didn't do it. And that's why President Bush keeps on saying that Chairman Arafat must do more to put a stop to terrorism, but he doesn't. And he seems to be either unwilling or unable to do it.

Stuart Loory 26:14

But Jay, with all due respect, in this country these days, if you go through airport security, you're getting used to taking off your shoes, to getting whole body searches. And here's a situation where there was a packed hotel in an area that was known to be dangerous. And this guy just walks right through. I don't understand that.

Jay Bushinsky 26:40

It is hard to understand, but you have to imagine, you know, millions of people in the West Bank and Gaza, totally porous border. I mean, you're not there's no way to seal it off. People can cross hills. A population, you know, that moves around, plenty of cars with the right kinds of plates, and plenty of people who can look perfectly normal. I

mean, you're talking in America, a very specific target. You know, there's we always say we always protect against the last terror attack. You know, in America, probably you will not have airplanes hijacked anymore, but just try to imagine patrolling every store in every hotel in New York City all the time. And, and not only in New York City, in Atlanta, you know, and in St. Louis. I mean, every city around the country patrolled all the time. You're really positing an enormous project, which just could not succeed.

Stuart Loory 27:40

Okay, I'm sorry, but we are out of time. Our guests today have been Serge Schmemann in Jerusalem, Jay Bushinsky in Tel Aviv and Magda Abu-Fadil in Beirut. Our director is Pat Akers, and our producer this week is Mary Lou LeClair. For all, I'm Stuart Loory. Global Journalist will be back next week.