

## Global Journalist: Will the US Ever Use A Nuclear Weapon Again?

**Abstract:** On this March 14, 2002 program discussed prospects for Middle East peace and whether the United States might use a nuclear weapon again, following Pentagon plans to build low yield nuclear weapons.

**Host:** Stuart Loory

### Guests:

- [Walter Pincus](#)
- Dror Pearl (ph?)
- Khalid Abdul Karim (ph?)
- [Nikolai Zlobin](#)

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**Mentioned:** North Korea, Iran, Iraq, President Bush, Axis of Evil, Syria, Libya, Russia, China, Pentagon, Middle East, Israel, Palestinian, Saddam Hussein, Saudi Arabia, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Yasser Arafat, United States,

**Runtime:** 29:00

### Speakers

Stuart Loory, Dror Pearl (ph?), Khaled Abdul Karim (ph?), Nikolai Zlobin, Walter Pincus

### Stuart Loory 00:12

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. In the war against terrorism, the United States has targeted a few countries as so-called rogue states, countries that do not adhere to norms of international civility, and does pose a threat to this country. North Korea, Iran and Iraq President Bush's axis of Evil head that list, Syria and Libya are on it. And now it turns out the Pentagon planners and a new nuclear posture statement say it would be a good idea to build low yield nuclear weapons that could be used against them, as well as China and Russia, who also pose a threat. The New York Times and editorial this week said the United States itself would become a rogue nuclear state if it carried out the Pentagon's proposal. In the Middle East, the United States is jumping back into the matter of trying to renewed discussions of a peace settlement between Israel and Palestinian Arabs. Part of the reason is that the Bush administration is trying to gather strong support from other countries to remove Iraqi president Saddam Hussein by military action if necessary, and the Bush administration also wants to encourage Saudi Arabia to stay involved in trying to broker a peace settlement. In a press conference yesterday, President Bush castigated Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon for going too far with military action to put down the Palestinian Intifada, and the President

dropped any criticism of Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat for not doing enough to himself to quell Palestinian terror. Our guests today to discuss these matters are all in Washington. They are Walter Pincus, national security reporter for The Washington Post, Dror Pearl (ph?), bureau chief of the Israeli Defense Forces Radio, Khalid Abdul Karim (ph?), bureau chief for Middle East News Agency, and Dr. Nikolai Zlobin, director of Russian and Asian programs at the Center for Defense Information. Let's start with the Middle East. And let's ask Dror Pearl (ph?) whether she thinks that the renewed engagement of the United States with the General Zinni now in the Middle East, the President's envoy is going to have any impact on renewing negotiations there?

**Dror Pearl (ph?)** 03:04

Good evening, I think it would have some impact. Unfortunately, we still have to see what kind of an impact and how far it would go. We do know that the last previous visit, the impact was basically negative. We had a big big surge of a terrorist attacks while he was there, and the Israelis felt that they had to retaliate and it we know this so it became a retaliation against an attack and attack against retaliation. And the escalation became a real extreme. It looked like it's a little bit different this time because it looks like the administration and specially President Bush is more strongly behind the end the mission and the urgency and the necessity to reach some kind and we are not talking about negotiations, even the President hasn't talked about it, but first of all ceasefire in some kind of security talks and cooperation, which was completely woken up in the last few weeks, despite some efforts, and I think there is some chance we have to measure it in very, very small inches as the President himself said one, and we have to build back and forth back and forth and every and each little piece of progress and I think we already saw a little bit from wherever is the point of the Prime Minister Sharon already older they start a pooling, the Israeli Defense Forces the soldiers out of the Palestinians, the refugee camps in the territory, he said he will do it in phased way, but he started doing it.

**Stuart Loory** 04:51

Let's bring Khalid Abdul Karim (ph?) into the discussion. Mr. Abdul Karim (ph?), do you think think that there will be any positive impact?

**Khalid Abdul Karim (ph?)** 05:05

What of course everybody is hopeful that the Israeli mission will be successful at this time. And as my colleague said, just one minute ago, that the two missions he had in the past over the past few months, failed, and he came out with nothing from the Middle East. But we have to understand some things in order to add to our hopes and expectations. That Mr. Zinni should have some authorities Mr. Zinni should have some team. Mr. Zinni should have some plan and some backing, especially from the Israeli side, which are the stronger side and this effort. If Mr. Zinni is just there to talk to the Palestinians to let them stop what's referred to as Palestinian violence, I guess his mission was not come out successful. I guess Mr. Zinni has to provide some strong words to the Israeli side in order to convince them that escalation and killing more Palestinians will just push the Palestinian to a dead alley and will put them with their back to the wall was nothing to do but to retaliate to the Israeli attacks, which have been intentionally, I guess, escalating over the past few days, we see more demolition, we see more humiliation of the Palestinians will see more people kicked out of their homes. We'll see more people given badges and numbers and detained and the very much in the same way as the Nazis used to do with the Jews more than 50 years ago.

**Stuart Loory** 06:39

Yeah, Khalid (ph?) if I can interrupt, as Dror Pearl (ph?) pointed out and has been reported here, the Israelis are beginning to pull back from Ramallah, is that not so?

**Khaled Abdul Karim (ph?)** 06:53

Yeah, what we came to know that we have to report that the Israelis are beginning some sort of withdrawal from Ramallah and the West Bank, but what everybody needs and what the State Department just said today that Israel needs to pull out fully and immediately from old Palestinian villages and cities. It has entered and has invaded over the past months and weeks in order to do so the Israelis should the stop this trick, this game of getting into the Palestinian control areas, cities and villages going into the on the rampage killing demolishing houses and then they get out as very much like thanking a killer for washing his hands off after doing his murder. So, they shouldn't have been there in the first place, They should withdraw immediately, and they should put their tanks back to their places and which they were before the start of the Intifada and the start of the clashes more than a few months ago.

**Stuart Loory** 07:58

If I can just bring in Walter Pincus into this discussion. Walter, what do you think the United States wants to achieve in the Middle East right now? Do they really want to broker a settlement? And is that the number one priority in the Middle East right now?

**Walter Pincus** 08:18

Well, I think in the first place, they really want to stop the killing on both sides. And it's a difficult process, because we pull back the Bush administration withdrew, and sort of let both sides go after each other. And I think initially believe that, only when each side is tired of the killing, can they move in and try to do something. And that's what the tenant plan that George Tenet plan was all about. I think right now though we have a second problem, which is the war on terrorism in which we need to maintain our Arab allies, and even future plans that the administration may have to work in other countries and perhaps move more strongly against Saddam Hussein, to get him to stop developing weapons of mass destruction, and again, in that effort, as the United States is going to need support of Arab countries.

**Stuart Loory** 09:30

Dror Pearl (ph?) you just heard Mr. Abdul Karim (ph?), say some very tough things about the Israeli Defense Forces and about the Israeli government and about Israeli policies. Is there anything that you want to say to or respond to that?

**Dror Pearl (ph?)** 09:50

Yeah, first of all, I don't think that the name calling is very constructive. And I think we are trying to to explain different points of views and, you know, very, very complicated situation. And I think it's better to stick to the facts. And if we want to use names we can do it a back and forth and it doesn't make sense and especially resent the use of the Nazi symbolism and because you should not use it in any context. But if we are talking about what State Department said if we just re refresh our memory a little

bit, I remember them saying few times in the last say 18 months that terrorism has to stop. Our fighters has to do more, our fighters has to do hundred percent, our fighters to show and we haven't seen it and, I don't in any way try to execute and to explain everything, something's happened and when you go under defense, even sometimes things happen and I don't agree with everything but this is my government and this is my people and they are not going to shopping malls anymore, the situation me and the Israeli side is not to be compared to the Palestinian side but it's very very bad it's a completely desperation of the masses, it's a completely loss of hope and people are looking to see what happens but when you have the peace now, movement, demonstration angels and where it's considered very very dangerous nowadays. They gathered last Saturday and they demonstrated against the government and for pulling out the forces which will fuel at the time and then when they finish they went to a cafe and they were blown up. You know, you feel different because if somebody from your family gets blown up, you feel differently and you react almost instinctively. So, I think the things came out of control and both sides.

**Stuart Loory** 11:54

Okay, excuse me for interrupting you, but we do have to go to a break and before we do that, I want to ask Dror Pearl (ph?) and Khalid Abdul Karim (ph?), for very brief comments on how they think the Saudi Arabian peace initiative is going to play. Khalid Abdul Karim (ph?), you go first, but briefly.

**Khalid Abdul Karim (ph?)** 12:17

Yeah, the Saudi vision, as I prefer to call it, and as the administration actually called it properly, is a great thing. A great offer a great, let's say statement of principle. It's clear on withdrawal to the pre June 1967 borders and exchange for full recognition for Israel. That's clear.

**Stuart Loory** 12:41

Do you think it's gonna work?

**Khaled Abdul Karim (ph?)** 12:43

Yeah, but it needs two to tango, actually, the Saudi side, the Arab side cannot work anything out on its own.

**Stuart Loory** 12:52

Okay, Dror Pearl (ph?) are we going to get a tango here?

**Dror Pearl (ph?)** 12:55

I'm not sure about the tango because you have to tango with a person who do you have the dispute with. I think it's a very, very good tone right now in in the international arena. It is very good that we hear that too. But it's nothing. No, we saw something very similar around 81 or 83. I'm not sure exactly. But in any case, if they bring it to the Arab League contracts, it's wonderful that we hear those voices and we take it from there and just, you know, don't only hear voices of war.

**Stuart Loory** 13:27

Okey, Dror (ph?) we have to go to a break right now. This is Global Journalist on KBIA. I'm Stuart Loory. We'll be right back. Welcome back to Global Journalist on KBIA. You may listen to this program

again, ask questions or make comments by going to [www.globaljournalist.org](http://www.globaljournalist.org) or here in mid Missouri, you can call us at 573-882-9641. Before the break, I heard my friend Nikolai Zlobin trying to get into the discussion to say something about the Middle East. Nikolai, you have something brief to say?

**Nikolai Zlobin** 14:22

Well, I would say that it will be unfair to expect the United States to come up with a solution which will satisfy everybody. You know, not too many countries want to go there in to try to solve this problem. And I think the mission of Zinni and American Force should be appreciated much more really be successful, they won't be successful, but it's not the United States business after all, you know, to keep peace over there. They should be responsible politicians over there, responsible political organizations and journalists over there. If United States will fail this time and Zinni's mission fail, I don't want to be blamed United States again for something we're doing wrong.

**Stuart Loory** 15:05

Okay. If we may, Nikolai. That was a good comment, but I would like to change subjects now. And I would like to talk about the Pentagon's new nuclear posture statement, which says that this country should consider building small nuclear weapons to presumably to be used on conventional battlefields to combat rogue states. Nikolai, from the Center for Defense Information's point of view, what do you think?

**Nikolai Zlobin** 15:38

Well, we don't have point of view of Center of Defense Information. I'll give you my own point of view. I think we have to recognize that first of all, there's a difference between the way how American military things and how American politics goes. It was not political decision to go this way. It was one of the document created in Pentagon and I'm sure there was a lot of documents were created and any military departments in any countries. And I'm sure Russia doing the same thing and doing analysis and other nations, which have nuclear weapons, doing the same thing. So, I wouldn't go too far and to say that America changes policy in this in this area. For a second secondary. I think we're facing absolutely new situation after September 11 when we have to recognize that there are old policy in this area, not necessarily real war, because we don't have, first of all, we don't have a strong control of like it was, for instance, 20, 15 years ago with the Soviet Union, we when we certain number of targets in each country, you know, Russians knew how many targets they have to cover in the United States, Americans knew how many targets they have to cover in Russia. So, everything was clear we could see it to present could seat and sign the agreement.

**Stuart Loory** 16:59

Nikolai excuse me, but if I can bring Walter Pincus into this discussion. Walter, how seriously Should we take this Pentagon Nuclear Posture statement?

**Walter Pincus** 17:11

Well, I first thing I have to say is what you described is what was described by people, some of whom I've read the policy statement, some of the hadn't because it's essentially still classified, although there have been public briefings, and it's actually been hearing on the Hill about it. There is a question in my mind as to whether this policy statement, which hasn't been translated yet into real working.

**Stuart Loory** 17:43

Is it first of all, is it really a policy statement yet?

**Walter Pincus** 17:47

It's it is essentially a background statement. It sets up requirements and to some degree, it follows along the policy lines, but translating policy into action building of weapons and setting of targets is quite a big step. The main thing I think is worth pointing out is that the United States has been discussing building a new small nuclear warhead for at least 10 years. And in fact, during the Clinton administration in 1994, Congress passed an amendment to the defense legislation that still is in existence, that bars any word to either research or develop a weapon that's under five kilonewtons 5000 tons of TNT and that's still the law. And as latest today, the Secretary of Energy was in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee and said that at this point, there is no such research contemplated. What we are doing is looking at modifying to nuclear warheads that are already deployed, to be used with what's called called an earth penetrator so that you could develop three to five years from now, a weapon that would be nuclear and could threaten sort of underground hardened targets. Or, as with now, Florida, the building of factories that develop weapons of mass destruction, chemical, biological or nuclear, that the US fields are being sort of built inside mountains if you can believe that.

**Stuart Loory** 19:36

Walter, can you imagine the United States using first strike nuclear weapons?

**Walter Pincus** 19:44

No. That's a simple answer. In fact, there was preparatory planning, is there is during every crisis period, contingency plans for using weapons and an actually there was planning in 1991 of what would be done if if there was a requirement to use a nuclear weapon against Saddam Hussein. And General Lee Butler, who is now retired, the true ran Strategic Command, has spoken out publicly that he was the one prior to becoming the commander who was doing that work. And faced with that responsibility said he couldn't find any way to use a weapon that we would never use a weapon against Baghdad, United States, which used a weapon against Asian people would never use it against an Arab urban areas. And that even attempting to use it out in the desert against spread out Iraqi troops would create fallout that would clearly go past Iraq and usually and probably when they started the winds hit Kuwait and maybe Saudi Arabia.

**Stuart Loory** 20:58

And there would be this same kind of fallout, of course, of those weapons used in the caves of Afghanistan, in the mountains there even though they might penetrate into the ground. Nikolai Zlobin, the Center for Defense Information, what reports, what reaction are you getting from around the world to the revelation of this nuclear policy statement?

**Nikolai Zlobin** 21:26

You know, international reaction was quite different. Media reaction was a very sharp about from all over the world but political reaction was very quiet, particularly from as a nuclear contest because I think not just United States, but a lot of countries sent in this way and maybe some of them even doing



these things. So, nobody could you know, basically blamed for the United States for thinking about this way of developing nuclear arms. So political action wasn't so bad. And if I can to add one little comment to previous statement, first of all, I don't think that this is a it's not any generals or army military people business to decide to use nuclear weapons. It's pure political decision. And in the United States, a decision can be made only by President first of all. And second of all.

**Stuart Loory** 22:24

The president is the one who carries the black box with him and he is the only one in this country who can authorize the use of the nuclear weapon.

**Nikolai Zlobin** 22:33

Correct. So, it's one of the military decision. That's one being a bunch of general sitting together and deciding to use it or not. It will be president. But second of all, answering your previous question, I would say I don't see also either any situation when the United States will use nuclear weapons first, but believe in Kansas, I would say that I don't want to make wrong impression like it was with recently even during Clinton administration will when the rest of the world believes that America will never do any things which put in danger American troops, ground troops, and everybody will assure that America will never send troops where people can die. And now we suffering from this wrong impression America can send troops and it was surprised and it's big actually change in American foreign policy. So, saying that America will never use nuclear weapons, I believe in this but at the same time, I don't want to make a wrong impression saying that America can't ever use it against enemies which can you know, threaten America if it is mass destruction, equipment arms or any how else.

**Stuart Loory** 23:41

Dror Pearl (ph?) if I can bring you into this, Israel is presumed to be a nuclear power. Can you envision a time when Israel might use nuclear weapons on a first strike basis?

**Dror Pearl (ph?)** 23:56

First of all, Israel never publicly confirmed, always the policy was of what they call the deliberate ambiguity. And lately, it's been a little bit more open but never real confirmation. But the public policy says that if Israel will never be the first one to introduce a nuclear weapon to the region. And from that you have to draw the conclusion that Israel will not use it unless it will be as a response to a like an attack. And his own thought already once it was going to be the target of maybe a chemical maybe biological attack from Iraq during the Gulf War and there was not a pushed into any extreme a reaction and especially because of the American advice, but it looks like Israel will not do anything desperate and less it would be in a real, real desperate situation and under very, very extreme attacks.

**Stuart Loory** 25:15

Yes, Khalid Abdul Karim (ph?), if I can bring you into this discussion, what would be the reaction in the Arab world if the United States were first of all to use nuclear weapons against, say Iraq, but secondly, assuming that that would not really happen, what would be the reaction to an American attack on Iraq military attack?

**Khalid Abdul Karim (ph?)** 25:43

Well, actually of course, that would be outrageous, first of all, and the use of nuclear weapons by any country especially by a superpower like United States, which everybody expects to be a responsible superpower and so far, it is it will be a global catastrophe as far as Iraq is concerned that I don't see actually you why should anybody use nuclear weapons against Iraq? What for? I don't see any logical grounds any reasoning for attacking Iraq in the first place, the Iraq is are getting more than enough signs that they may accept the return of international inspectors back to Bagdad anytime in the future. Actually, the US has enough image problems in the Middle East and the Arab world and among Muslims all over the world. And I guess attacking Iraq will give fuel to whatever feelings of hatred, bias and antagonism against the United States and will create an impression that the US is following anti Arab and anti Islamic policies, which in many cases is not true. So, the possibility of using nuclear weapons against Iraq by the US, I guess is out far, far away from possibility, far away from reality, is far fetched. And I guess it's not possible. And I guess the US will not go into that mistake anytime.

**Stuart Loory** 27:19

Okay, Khalid (ph?), I'm sorry to say we have less than a minute left. And I would like to use it by asking Walter Pincus, what was your reaction the other day to the New York Times editorial, that said, if the United States goes ahead with this policy, it itself will become a rogue state?

**Walter Pincus** 27:39

Well, I think, the policy that they were talking about is not the policy we're following. In fact, one of the things we're doing is bringing in these very precision guided weapons take over many of the roles that We're first thought of for nuclear weapons. But the role of nuclear weapons is really to deter other people from using them. And they've now moved into a new era in the last decade and that is to deter a country from using chemical or biological weapons against another country.

**Stuart Loory** 28:18

Okay, Walter I'm sorry, I have to cut you off, but we are out of time. Our guests today have been Walter Pincus of The Washington Post, Dror Pearl (ph?) of Israeli Defense Forces Radio, Khalid Abdul Karim (ph?) of Middle East News Agency and Nikolai Zlobin of the Center for Defense for Information, all in Washington. Our director is Pat Akers and our producers Sara Fajardo, for all I'm Stuart Loory, Global Journalist will be back next week.