

Global Journalist: Focus on Iraq and North Korea

Abstract: In this Oct. 24, 2002 episode of Global Journalist three journalists from around the globe discuss North Korea, Iraq, and developments in the wider Middle East.

Host: Rob Logan

Guests:

- [Bill Nichols, State Department Correspondent for USA TODAY](#)
- [Ken Choi, staff writer for Chosun Ilbo](#)
- Lynn Sugarman, reporter for the South African Broadcasting Corporation

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Rob Logan 00:10

Welcome to Global Journalist. I'm Rob Logan. I'm a professor and associate dean in the Missouri School of Journalism. I'm pitching in this week for Stuart Loory and our other array of luminaries who host this show. It's fun to be here. Joining us today from around the world is first, Bill Nichols, who's the State Department correspondent for USA TODAY.

Bill Nichols 00:28

Good morning. Good to be here.

Rob Logan 00:30

And joining us from Tel Aviv in Israel is Lynn Sugarman, who's a reporter for the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

Lynn Sugarman 00:38

Good evening to you there.

Rob Logan 00:39

And welcome to the show. And joining us from Seoul is Ken Choi who is a staff writer for Chosun Ilbo. Ken, welcome.

Ken Choi 00:48

Good evening.

Rob Logan 00:49

What we're going to do today is... we'll talk about, we'll hopefully get to four big issues that mean very much in international news this week. Again, in the U.S. news this week, the news has been awfully preoccupied by a sniper in Washington. And as we speak, there's been a couple of arrests. It has been very preoccupied by Martha Stewart's misadventures, and very preoccupied by the World Series. But there certainly has been also a great deal of international news this week. We'll talk today a little bit about the, the U.N. Security Council's discussions about, about policy towards Iraq and the U.S.'s conciliatory role, which seems to have switched during the week. We'll talk a little bit about the Iraqi amnesty. We'll talk a little bit about some deaths in Israel that occurred this week that for which there was no apparent retaliation, and then we'll come and at the, at the end, I hope and talk about some of the, the disclosures in North Korea about about their nuclear program and some of the contradictions between the U.S. and the West view towards North Korea and their view towards Iraq. Let's start with the U.N. Security Council. I think I'm going to start with Bill Nichols. Bill, the way I read the reporting is the U.S. position shifted from conciliatory in the start of the week to more, to a tougher line towards, towards the French and towards the Russians. Is that a fair view of what's what's occurred?

Bill Nichols 02:12

I think what's happened -- and I covered the State Department here. Pretty preoccupied with covering this issue,-- though, as you say, I don't ever think I've seen Washington as convulsed over any story as we have been over the last three weeks over the sniper incident, which we really hope has come to an end and sounds like it may have. But what the administration started doing a couple of weeks ago is changing their rhetoric on Iraq to at least give the impression that a war or a military attack on Baghdad is not a foregone conclusion. Our assumption is that that was aimed at trying to get some sort of resolution through the U.N. At the beginning of the week, they -- on a on a different rhetorical tack -- everyone including the President and the senior echelons of the White House has said basically the time has come for the Security Council to do something. Our patience is not infinite. And we need to do something soon. I think the timeline we're looking at is probably by the beginning of next week, there will either be an agreement, or I think the administration is really willing to put a resolution on the table with the full 15. And the council without an agreement among the, P-5, the permanent five members, all of whom have veto power. And to see what happens. As of this moment, the French and the Russians still, at least publicly, say they're opposed to the new draft that was put before the full council last night. The administration feels like at the end of the day, the Russians will come along and at least abstain, if not support the resolution. The same is true for the Chinese. But it's really unclear what the French are

going to do and I think we still need another two or three days at least a weekend for this to play out. And I think we could come to a resolution on Monday or Tuesday.

Rob Logan 03:58

Why do you think, Bill, the French have been contrarians about this for so long? I realized, of course they routinely historically disagreed with U.S. foreign policy in a number of ways. Is this, is this just another consistent reminder of the fact that they go, they go, they do things their own way?

Bill Nichols 04:15

In part, I think the French... with the Russians, the opposition really has much more to do with billions of dollars of loans that the Iraqi Soviet era loans that the Iraqi regime owes Moscow, and also very lucrative oil deals that have yet to be completed. But what the Russians would really like to do, it's much more of a practical economic transaction for them. With the French, it really is a matter of principle. And I think the French government feels like that a signal needs to be sent, that there are international norms, there are international rules, there are a way that these things should be done. And I think Chirac's government feels very strongly that the United States is not the emperor of the world and doesn't get to decide which countries are attacked and which aren't. What will be interesting to see is if the French feel so strongly that they're willing to veto this resolution. I think that'd be very hard to do. But I think that's unclear at the moment.

Rob Logan 05:12

Can they-- what has been very interesting, when, during the negotiations about the, about the so called Big Five, the five permanent members of the Security Council, is the Chinese seem to be at very much in the middle of all this. They've been, they've been, they've been rather quiet. Is that, is that created any sort of a reaction or stir or any kind of reporting in Korea?

Ken Choi 05:32

Actually, I think the Chinese at the moment is probably the only country that sort of, have some hands on on North Korea. Right now, the Korean sentiment, the vast majority of South Korean sentiment is that they're actually shocked to hear about the-- well we sort of suspected all along but um, was a shocking revelation that they actually developed this nuclear program. And on top of that, we've been supplying you know, the vast majority of the money to North Korea for food supply for, for building a light water reactor and all these things. So South Koreans are pretty much shocked to hear the news. And we are, we haven't paid much attention to the Chinese reaction so far. Because right now, South Koreans are also preoccupied with what the U.S. policy toward North Korea is going to be like. Whether it's going to be changing anytime soon. So, at this moment, I have to say that we are still watching carefully on what U.S. policy toward North Korea would be.

Rob Logan 06:39

Let me ask you all this. Again, there's a real difference. Some people perceive that where disarmament is seen as a almost a precondition in negotiation in Iraq, or disarmament is a precondition to avoid some sort of invasion or even changing the regime and Iraq is seen as a precondition to negotiation. In, of course in North Korea, that is not the case. None of those things hold. We seem to be willing to right

to negotiate right from the start. Ken, is, is that kind of paradox widely discussed in news organizations in Korea?

Ken Choi 07:12

Um actually including paradox in global terms, but if you live in South Korea, we think that it has to be that way. Because, first of all, the the Korean Peninsula is so close. I mean, the proximity from Seoul to the DMZ, demilitarized zone, is only like 42 kilometers away, which is about 30 miles away from Seoul. So it's too close. And then it's one of the most heavily armed area in the world. There about like, you know, one million soldiers on both sides. So any any type of misconception could trigger war and there would just be too many casualties for handle and the... so, you have to be very careful on what you do. South Koreans, no matter what, they don't want any kind of war, any kind of military conflict in this, in this area because it will have a huge impact on our economy and on regional economy as well. So the most South Koreans, they also have a paradoxical attitude toward this because they believe that on one hand, North Koreans should not possessing any type of nuclear weapons. On the other hand, they want, they cannot afford to have a war. So we are sort of torn between what we should do. So hopefully, through the U.S. and Japan and Korea, are they work together to resolve this matter in peacefully, a peaceful manner, so that things can can, you know, can be solved without any any military conflict.

Rob Logan 08:51

glennis is there, is there a perception in Israel or among the, among journalists who work in the Middle East in your view, that the U.S. and the West position towards North Korea is, is wildly different than it is towards Iraq? Is the paradox or differences widely discussed? Or is that not a core issue?

Lynn Sugarman 09:10

Well I think that they are journalists to probably think that, but I was checking today to see whether there were any official statements made because I couldn't remember having seen or heard any. And I checked with the foreign ministry. And that's true. Israel has not commented at all on the question-- officially, that is-- on the statement that came out of North Korea. Israel has followed a path. a policy of ambiguity all these years and this is deliberate, because its security considerations here are of the utmost importance. What they do say to foreign ministries is that Israel will know how to defend itself, but they say Israel has never threatened another country with nuclear attack. It's also never admitted to possessing any kind of nuclear device. What Israelis do do, however, is that they monitor other countries very carefully. And this is where North Korea comes in, because the Israelis wants to see who is trading with who. Who is selling what, in terms of non-conventional weapons or components for such weapons to the immediate neighborhood and how this could affect the security of Israel. A week or two ago, we had a very strong statement that came from the South African government, because there were stories that South Africa or South African businessmen with supplying a certain amount of tubing that can be used in non-conventional weapons to Iraq. The South Africans denied this. So Israel watches very carefully what is done worldwide and when it comes to nuclear and other non-conventional weapons.

Rob Logan 11:04

Let me stay on the subject for just for just a moment, because you raise an interesting point. In the reporting that's been done about who supplied some of the material to North Korea, okay, there, the... Pakistan and Russia were named rather prominently as providing some of the technology. Wouldn't that be of some interest to the Israelis?

Lynn Sugarman 11:24

Russia is mentioned constantly in terms of being a supplier to Iran, especially for technology that can be used in non-conventional weapons. And what Israel is watching is an Iran, Syria, Hezbollah alliance, and what that means in terms of real and present danger on Israel's northern border. Because we have stories of 9,000-10,000 rockets that have been supplied to the Hezbollah, with a 200-mile range for firing missiles at the center of the country. Practically speaking, the last couple of weeks despite all of these discussions that have been taking place in New York and all over, Israel has been taking very practical steps in terms of giving orders to populations to clean up bomb shelters to renew the gas masks. The last couple of days, people who are in positions of treating other people-- in other words caregivers, doctors, ambulance teams-- have been inoculated with smallpox vaccine by talking about looking at the anthrax vaccines as well in case that is required. In other words, there are very subtle steps being taken here in order to protect the population which indicates again some more other real and present danger.

Bill Nichols 12:58

This is Bill Nichols in Washington. If I can just go back to what Ken said briefly, at least what's being said here by the administration is... well, I think a lot of people, including a lot of leading Democrats on Capitol Hill, certainly realize that there is a disconnect in terms of the rhetoric. There's some very practical reasons for the way that the administration appears to be approaching this. And the main one is that a military action against North Korea would have catastrophic casualties, both South Korean and American, they're nearly 40,000 U.S. troops on that border. The other, and the other very practical reason is, is U.S. officials told us earlier this week, there's, there's only so much the system here can absorb. And if you're planning or at least are on a war footing with Iraq, if you're continuing with a war against terrorism in Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere, be very difficult to open up another front in North Korea, even if you wanted to do that. So I think the expectation here is that this will be a diplomatic effort, and it's going to be very interesting to look at the meeting that President Bush has over the weekend in Mexico with the South Korean President, the Japanese president and then he's meeting Chinese President Jiang Zemin at his ranch in Crawford, Texas on Friday. And in terms of who, who gave the North Koreans this stuff, the name of China also comes up in the reporting the to do on this. And even if it wasn't directly, China has certainly been a big help to Pakistan over the years. So it may be an indirect link. So it's going to be interesting to see how strongly Bush pushes that with Jiang Zemin during their meetings.

Rob Logan 14:33

I think it will be. We need to take a short break. This is Global Journalist.

Rob Logan 14:42

This is Global Journalist. I'm Rob Logan, from the school of journalism at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Let's continue our discussion and we're going to talk about two new issues if we can. First of

all, the odd Iraqi amnesty that occurred earlier this week where hundreds of, hundreds of prisoners were released from jail and at least allegedly in some reporting, there was even some sort of stampede and some people actually suffocated as they were coming out of the out of the prison. Bill Nichols, let me turn to you for a moment. Again, I think the... most of the reporting I see on major U.S. news organizations is the Iraqi amnesty is difficult to interpret or seems very odd. Is that is that your view of the reporting that's done? Or do you have it, do you see it very differently?

Bill Nichols 15:28

No, that's my view. I mean, I think I think people within the administration who certainly are predisposed to have a certain view of Saddam Hussein think that this is yet another attempt to try to raise the morale within Iraq, and also to demonstrate to those internationally who might be inclined to support Iraq at the U.N. and elsewhere that this is not the demonic regime that the U.S. has tried to paint it. And I think in the American administration, they they see this as something that will likely continue. These sorts of tactics if indeed U.N. inspectors do go back into Iraq in the next weeks and months.

Rob Logan 16:09

Let's see, can we turn to Lynn Sugarman? Lynn?

Lynn Sugarman 16:12

I was just thinking to what we were discussing before. And this is, the general feeling over here is that the American attack on Iraq, if it should come, actually carries a worldwide message to other countries of pariah states, who are busy playing around with non-conventional weapons. In other words, this is the test case. And the way the Israelis see it is that France for instance and certain other European countries are trying very hard to appease the tiger rather than face it head on. And and that is, that refers also to to international terrorism, which is part of this problem because of the possibility that international terrorists can use non-conventional devices in their attacks, and and destabilize regions all over. So that the Israeli view is that an attack on Iraq is actually a global message.

Rob Logan 17:12

And... you think you think that view is is is widely shared in other countries outside the Middle East? Would that view be widely shared, for example, in Western Europe?

Lynn Sugarman 17:26

I have, I can't speak for Western Europe. I know that the Europeans are not very happy about any kind of attack on Iraq. A lot of them have tremendous financial interests and economic interest in Iraq today, as they do in Iran. And they would still prefer to, to take the diplomatic path. But again, Israel is-- if I speak from an Israeli point of view here-- Israel is coordinated with the United States. Prime Minister Sharon visited Washington, as you know, last week, and the the Americans have undertaken to neutralize the Iraqis' non-conventional versatile capability as far as Israel is concerned in terms of an attack. This is Israel's biggest worry today. What the Europeans think or don't think at this point honestly doesn't count too much over here.

Rob Logan 18:29

Let me let me change the subject slightly and talk about Sharon's visit. Both Haaretz and the Jerusalem Post both reported when when Sharon returned to Israel, that he'd be basically blasted the Bush peace plan for the Middle East. That that story was not covered very heavily in the United States, but nevertheless was obviously covered by news media in Israel. Isn't that kind of interesting that he would, he would return from a trip like that and be, not be very pleased with the plan that he was given.

Lynn Sugarman 19:02

I don't think that is what Sharon said, I think Sharon's message was that he would rather wish to have more time to study the plan. That basically he agrees with the the, the overall pictures as President Bush sees it. And he has mentioned the fact that it is very clear today that, that there is some sort of movement amongst the Palestinians to stop terrorist activity, and to get back to some sort of process. And as soon as that happens, Israel will go along with that. But Israelis are very, very adamant that this will go on a piece by piece, stage by stage basis. And as you know, two days ago, 14 people were killed again in a blast. Which was horrendous in terms of the damage it did, killing 14 people but injuring another 40 who are burnt are maimed for life. This kind of thing doesn't go down well here, and no amount of dictates, dictates from Washington or from anywhere else is going to change the Israelis public view today. That is the overwhelming majority view. And that is the terror has to stop before or certainly be cut down to minimal before any kind of peace process can be even considered again.

Rob Logan 20:40

Well, again, if I could follow up. It has been very interesting. There has been no apparent Israeli retaliation for those deaths. Is the, is the relative is that is the lack of retaliation linked to some of the things you're talking about before?

Lynn Sugarman 20:54

I would think that the lack of retaliation is linked directly to the talks last week in Washington. To some sort of undertaken, tested or not, between... on the part of Israel's Prime Minister to President Bush to ,from Israel's point of view, do as little as is absolutely needed. This doesn't mean that there won't be some kind of the retaliatory acts whenever. The Israelis very often say so. The retaliation need not come immediately. As soon as they have intelligence information as to who was directly responsible for an attack, they will then go out and get the guy. This has been done in the past.

Rob Logan 21:39

It's interesting you say that, because some of the reports from Israel indicate the Israeli government is discussed, is blaming, in some cases, Islamic Jihad in Syria. Not in the West Bank for what for what occurred. I'm curious whether or not that story has been, been, has been reported in Israel, of course, that will make retail rather difficult or add another dimension.

Lynn Sugarman 22:03

Well, the question of claims of responsibility is very interesting around here. Because immediately after this attack, there was an announcement by the Islamic Jihad that they had done it. The Hamas congratulated them, but have said however, that they would have liked the setup, which is yes, a first organization to have carried out. There is some cooperation today between the various organizations. And they are very careful in terms of claiming responsibility openly, because of the fact that it would

give Israel an immediate opportunity to retaliate. But, again, from what we have learned, the Israelis do try for the most part, to find a direct connection between the people that they attack or the, or the target that they attack and whatever attack was carried out in Israel or against Israelis.

Bill Nichols 23:09

I guess, the point that I would make is this the Sharon government is willing to moderate its response that would certainly be one of the first times that it's done that in response to requests from President Bush. In terms of reporting of the Sharon visit, what was interesting to me was that really virtually all of the reporting only dealt with a visit in terms of Iraq. It was as if there was no crisis in the Middle East anymore. I mean, it was certainly mentioned in stories but probably way down in most accounts. I think there is the sense here that the Middle East, along with a number of other very vexing foreign policy problems, has fallen off the radar screen a little bit except for how it relates to Iraq and a potential attack on Iraq. There, I mean there is travel. Bill Burns, who is assistant secretary for that part of the world, is in the region now or is scheduled to go shortly. But I don't think you've seen the high level engagement here that you did, certainly prior to the speech that the President gave in June in which he essentially said that Yasser Arafat has to go and until then, no great progress can be made.

Rob Logan 24:22

Again, if--

Lynn Sugarman 24:23

--if I can, if I can just interrupt. Bill Burns is in is in the area right now. And he's into discussions with the various parties. But again, they are talking about a three-stage program, a program running between now in the year 2005. So that is not something that indicates that Washington, Washington wants and settlements impose tomorrow, or the day after. This is again what we're talking about. A staged process, depending on the level of violence.

Rob Logan 25:02

Let me-- we only have a couple of minutes left. Ken Choi, I'm going to return to the amnesty in Iraq this week. I'm just curious about how the-- what was the response to that among Korean news organizations? How was that received?

Ken Choi 25:15

Not much to tell you the truth because you're so focused on the North Korean issue. We talked about the impending sort of Iraqi war or whatever. But the amnesty issue was never really brought up here. Because we didn't ever start that out, you know, the same rules apply to North Korea. Number one reason is, as it was stated earlier, that that because of the casualty issue, catastrophe casualty issue. Second problem is that, right now, the funny thing is going on in this country is that the government is sort of, like, very uncertain. I mean, it has to because of whatever it did on those kind of policy, it turned out to be a total disaster. So he has to reverse the whole policy so far that whatever it was. And it was quite, quite embarrassing for them. So they are very reluctant to admit that their policy was wrong. So they are just keep on saying that this whole thing has to be resolved through diplomacy. But the vast majority population believes that some sort of a, you know, it... they can't, they cannot just give carrots all the time. They have to use sticks to make sure that, you know, the whole thing is sort of complied.

And the, I think, more probably more, the majority of the population believes that the government is-- the current government-- has been cheated by North Korea. So you know, the Iraqi issue is going on around the world, but this, you know, within this peninsula right now, we just have to, you know, this this nuclear issue is just too bigger problem for us to handle. So, um, right now, the Korean people just focusing on the North Korean issue at the moment.

Rob Logan 27:05

Thank you Ken. I'm gonna, I'm gonna have to close the program. Ken Choi, thank you very much for joining us.

Ken Choi 27:12

You're welcome.

Rob Logan 27:13

Lynn Sugarman, thank you very much. And Bill Nichols, thank you very much for joining us and let's hope events in Washington continue to go a little better.

Bill Nichols 27:21

Absolutely. Thanks a lot.

Rob Logan 27:22

Rob Logan for Global Journalist. Have a good week.