

Global Journalist: Iraq War and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

In this Sept. 26, 2002 episode of Global Journalist, host Stuart Loory and four journalists discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the upcoming war against Iraq. Guests from the US, Palestine, Israel and France discuss how the invasion of Iraq would bring impact to the Arab world and Israel, as the US is making its effort to gain support from European allies to its cause in Iraq.

Host: Stuart Loory

Guests:

[Jay Bushinsky](#)

[Tony Cross](#)

[David Jones](#)

[Sam Bahour](#)

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Keywords

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Stuart Loory 0:08

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. United States may be on the verge of going to war with Iraq and is struggling to put together an international team of co-belligerents. But Israel remains at war with Palestinian terrorists, and its support around the world continues to dwindle. Israelis were once the oppressed underdogs. Now, they have become the Middle Eastern superpower, but they are unable to defend themselves against runaway terrorism, suicide bombers, snipers or other attackers against civilians. Palestinians, despite the terror their extremists initiate are not able to make the Israelis offer any concessions on territory or civil freedoms. Is there a connection between what may be the coming war against Saddam Hussein and the present conflict between Ariel Sharon and Yasser Arafat? Could that connection turn the entire Middle East in a few months into a cauldron of killing and despair? We find ourselves during these sessions looking for ways to avoid that. Each time we tried the problem seemed to get larger, rather than more amenable to solution. Our panel today to discuss the situation is Tony Cross, Middle East and Asia reporter for French Radio International in Paris. In Ramallah, the site of Arafat's headquarters on the West Bank, Sam Bahour, a freelance journalist and author. And in Tel Aviv, Israel, Jay Bushinsky, a reporter and columnist for The Toronto Sun and many other newspapers around the world, as well as as a radio

correspondent for KYW in Philadelphia, and other radio stations in the United States. We also have David Jones, foreign editor of The Washington Times in Washington DC. Welcome to all of you. Let's start with Sam Bahour in Ramallah. Sam, you're just a little bit away from Yasser Arafat's headquarters. Is there anything new that you want to talk about today?

Sam Bahour 2:32

Well, as far as we know, there's nothing new here. We're still at home sitting under a military curfew imposed upon us by Israel. We're about a kilometer and a half from the Arafat's compound. We continuously hear tanks and armored personnel carriers very active, not only in the city as a whole, but specifically in that area of the compound. There was a killing today in Gaza. The Israeli helicopters shot two Palestinian cars. And there was also a shooting incident in Tulkarm, which is in the north of the West Bank, where an Israeli captain in the army was killed when he attempted to enter a Palestinian home to demolish it. So there's a lot of activity here. Unfortunately, none of it is new. As far as we're concerned, we've been living with this for the last two years.

Stuart Loory 3:22

Jay, anything you want to add to that from an Israeli point of view?

Jay Bushinsky 3:28

Well, looking at it from here, we have this problem is the endless problem of cause and effect, or where does it all start? And the answer to that question always depends upon which side you're on. Since I tried to apply a middle course as a correspondent for my media in the United States, I'll try to stick to that policy and say this. Everything that Sam says, said is absolutely right. He just left out one thing. There were three Qassam rockets fired overnight in the direction of an Israeli city on the outside of the Gaza Strip, just across the line city of Sderot. This time the the Qassam rockets actually hit a target, a metalworking factory, and a number of people inside were wounded. And it just so happens that that metal work, that town is very close to prime minister or Ariel Sharon's private residence, a farm about five miles away. So I don't think I have to say much more. It's Crawford, Texas were to experience a narrow miss. I don't think that the United States forces will just take a pass.

Stuart Loory 4:38

Jay, is there any possibility that this is a reaction to the attacks against Yasser Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah?

Jay Bushinsky 4:47

Well, I can never say what it's a reaction to, but it's always correct to assume that it is a reaction to something. The question here is, who started reacting and who started attacking? And if we try to answer that question, we'll get into an endless debate.

Stuart Loory 5:01

We will get into an endless debate and we will not get into any discussion of the future if we talk about the past. David Jones, what can you say about the future? What the United States would like to see in the Middle East, and whether or not, what the United States would like to accomplish is a reasonable goal?

David Jones 5:27

By what the United States wants as tough as just listening to the discussion as reminded of a cartoon in one of our newspapers here in Washington yesterday that showed Arafat and Sharon in each other's embrace, jumping over a cliff together, each blaming the other. And sort of somewhat the discussion sounds like. Obviously, as we know, the Bush administration has been very reluctant to get involved in this from the beginning. They felt, I suppose, President Clinton made a mistake by inserting himself too far and they've tried to do the opposite of that. But it would seem, especially in recent days, their attention is focused on Iraq, not on the Middle East. And they are really wish the whole thing would go away, or that they could, you know, they're just afraid of getting in the way of their other priorities, which is the war on terrorism and the potential war with Iraq. We've seen stronger language in the last few days criticism of Israel for the latest attack on Arafat's compound and that probably is because they see that as a distraction. But, but you know, President Bush has laid out a path forward. To some extent, he has called for a Palestinian state within three years. Just last week, the so-called quartet laid out a plan to have a provisional state by next year. So, so the Americans, I think, have a fairly clear path to where they wanted to go. The question is, what are they willing to do to make that happen?

Stuart Loory 6:48

Tony Cross, in France, France for years and years and years was sympathetic to the Israeli cause. And now, from what we hear in the United States, French public opinion is shifting and has become much more favorable to Palestinians. Is that so? And if it is so, why?

Tony Cross 7:11

Well, I hesitate to speak for the entire French nation because of course there are various points of view in France, but I think yes, that the what's perceived as the very aggressive stance of the Israeli government, increasingly aggressive stance over the years, the reports of massacres, Shatila, the, the invasion of the West Bank of Gaza. All that has happened has lost a lot of sympathy for Israel in France and in the rest of Europe.

Stuart Loory 7:45

Jay, what is Israel doing about the loss of favorable reactions and good public relations around the world?

Jay Bushinsky 7:56

Well, first of all, I have to comment on something Mr. Cross just said. I think that to be precise, French sympathy with Israel ended officially in 1967, when Israel carried out a preemptive preemptive strike against the Egypt, Jordan and Syria, and that was the beginning of the Six Day War. The preemptive strike was castigated by then president Shazar. And the alliance between France and Israel, which lasted from about 1954 or so till 1967 has been over since then. More than that... What was the question again?

Stuart Loory 8:40

The question is what is the Israel doing to counteract bad publicity and public relations around the world?

Jay Bushinsky 8:47

Well, they're trying very hard. The the Arabs in general, the Arab side, the Arab state says Palestinians always contend that Israel is a master of public relations. As a veteran Foreign Correspondent covering Israel and the

neighboring countries for 36 years straight, I must disagree with them on that point. I don't think the Israelis are as good as they're cracked up to be. And they haven't been doing very well. In this particular case, the the basis for what happened in Ramallah is very simple. It's a case of Israel being totally disgusted, I have to use that word, with the leadership of Chairman Yasser Arafat, also known as president of Arafat, in the fact that he cannot put a lid on the situation, he can't keep control of an area that was entrusted to him. And hence, there have been these suicide bombings, the latest one was in Tel Aviv, and it killed six people. That's something that's very hard to take. And I think that Mr. Sharon's reaction was A. to make Mr. Arafat feel that he really is irrelevant and useless in his presence in this situation. And number two, to as he himself said just yesterday, to put a stop to terrorism on on the Palestinian side, which he believes is, is being encouraged by Iraq as a way of deflecting and diverting attention and even deterring United States from an imminent military onslaught.

Stuart Loory 10:16

You know, Jay, you bring up the suicide bombing last week. The New York Times this morning has a story about the Israeli, Arab, who fingered the suicide bomber.

Jay Bushinsky 10:31

That's right.

Stuart Loory 10:31

And I think he borrowed a telephone, it was unclear in the story, whether he bought the suicide bombers' telephone.

Jay Bushinsky 10:38

That happened the day before the Tel Aviv suicide bombing because there was a suicide bombing that preceded it less than 24 hours earlier. It happened in northern northern Israel, in what's what's known in Arabic as Wadi Ara. It's a historical pass through the hills, connecting the coastal plain to the Jezreel Valley. And this Israeli Arab, 17-year-old, caught sight of somebody who looked as if he was about to pull off a suicide bombing. And he tipped off the police who came in the nick of time, I suppose, but who paid a heavy price, because one of the police who tried to to apprehend the suicide bomber before he could detonate his payload, was killed by the explosions.

Stuart Loory 11:23

So the the bomber and the policeman were killed.

Jay Bushinsky 11:26

That's right. And the informant was wounded.

Stuart Loory 11:29

He was pretty seriously wounded.

Jay Bushinsky 11:32

That's right.

Stuart Loory 11:33

But the the story also points out that in the hospital, he became a suspect. And he was also shackled to his bed.

Jay Bushinsky 11:42

That's right. He was suspected at first. It was hard to believe there's never been a case like this before. But eventually the the security people were convinced by what he had to say. And he always (unintelligible) been treated as a national hero.

Stuart Loory 11:54

And they gave him a condemnation, or not a condemnation, commendation. I'm thinking of the Sean signing, right. So, the burden of the story, though, is that Israeli Arabs are not considered to be full citizens of their own country.

Jay Bushinsky 12:21

Well, that's a that's a that's a long story. It's a running debate. The Arab population of Israel consists of about nearly 20% of the population. The consensus there is that they do not have the equal rights with Israel. Informal constitution grants them, Declaration of Independence grants them equality. They say they are not enjoying equality, they're not getting the equal budgets for their municipal areas, and they're not given the same access and opportunities as Jewish citizens are given. And they have a very strong point. But it's very interesting to point out that whenever Israeli Arabs are asked, they would rather become citizens of the projected Palestinian state, even the people of Islamic extremists sound like, like almost our family, we will say unanimously never we are citizens of Israel. This is our country. And we intend to stay here and we want equal rights.

Stuart Loory 13:14

There are certainly benefits of being an Israeli citizen these days.

Sam Bahour 13:21

May I cut in for a second, this is Sam Bahour from Ramallah,

Stuart Loory 13:23

Please, Sam.

Sam Bahour 13:25

It's interesting that, you know, if you beat the numbers enough to tell you what you do, what would you want them to tell you in polls. However, but when you go to (unintelligible), which is a Palestinian city within Israel, Israel proper that is. I mean, Israel don't have a constitution, so the issue of borders and so forth is a further discussion for another day. But when you go to a Palestinian populated city, of course, people don't want to become part of the proposed Palestinian city in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. Nobody is going to leave their homes, their historic and ancestor homes within Israel to move to a different location. To appease the Israeli government and the Israeli political system to continue to have Israeli-Jews-only state. Unfortunately,

that kind of racism in building your state creates problems. And those are the kind of problems we talked about. The bottom line is, I'd like to touch on this.

Stuart Loory 14:18

Hold on for just one second, Jay. We'll come back to you.

Sam Bahour 14:21

And I'd like to touch on the suicide issue, I agree fully with the discussion about how terrible and every suicide bombing is. And if we look at the details of every single suicide bombing, I think we will feel the pain for all the victims, including the suicide bomber himself. Because at the end of the day, 36 years of a foreign military occupation breeds people who choose terror, because life under occupation, sometimes it's not worth it. So I agree that terrorism needs to stop. And we need to stop looking at the chicken and the egg issue. And really go back to what David said in the beginning. Is the US ready to use the tool that it has available to it? And he said, and what is the US willing to do to make it happen. They need to do a lot more. There are many tools at its disposal. And those tools are not abstaining on a vote in the UN where the rest of the world has ordered for condemnation of Israel.

Stuart Loory 15:10

Okay...(unintelligible) Sam, let's...

Jay Bushinsky 15:14

Tel Aviv. I must I must clarify, though. The idea of Palestinian citizenship and co-option into the proposed Palestinian state was part of a projected territorial exchange, whereby let's say (unintelligible) lock, stock and barrel this town and all of its people would become part of the Palestinian state. And some parts of the West Bank, where Israelis have settled, would become part of Israel. It's not a question of moving people out of their homes and telling them now become Palestinians citizens, nobody's proposed that.

Stuart Loory 15:46

Okay, sure.

Sam Bahour 15:47

It took Ariel Sharon, this is Sam Bahour, he's building a fence, currently that has 10,000 Palestinians. Palestinians refused to move out of their homes. What was the Israeli response with Ariel Sharon? Let's build a fence and fence them into Israel. That's not compromise, unilateral decision.

Stuart Loory 16:02

Yeah, if you will excuse me, we have to take a break. This is Global Journalist on KBIA. I'm Stuart Loory. We'll be right back.

Stuart Loory 16:16

Welcome back to Global Journalist. You may listen to this program again, ask questions or make comments by going to www.globaljournalist.org or hearing mid-Missouri by calling us at 573-882-9641. Before the break, we

were talking about the Israeli Palestinian situation. I'd like to broaden the discussion a little bit now and talk about how that fits in to the whole middle eastern Gulf area, region and the problems there, and specifically with what is possibly coming war against Iraq. Tony Cross. bring us up to date, if you would, on whether or not the United States is making any progress in attracting its European allies to its cause in Iraq?

Tony Cross 17:18

Well, I think that, yes, it's moving towards it in the sense that, the French in particular, but the Germans as well have made it clear that they wouldn't back an invasion or that they wanted that they want war to be backed by the United Nations if it takes place. But that's, I think, means that if US goes to the United Nations get some degree of backing, then I think that they will fall in line. It looks like a big disagreement, but it might not be such a big disagreement as it looks like. Having said that, I think that there is a lot of public opposition to war in Iraq. I don't know anybody here, who's not frightened at the prospect of war in Iraq, and who doesn't think that it's being run for the interests of the United States, under the Bush administration, and not for the interests of the world, not for the interests of world pieces claimed.

Stuart Loory 18:14

David Jones, I get the feeling that the United States is making more headway in the United Nations than it is making in the United States Congress.

David Jones 18:23

Well, you know, I think they're gonna get their way in the end of both places, not maybe because all these people think it's necessarily a good idea, but because they, the administration has clearly made up its own mind. I think it's clear to most of us here in Washington, they are going to go ahead regardless. And nobody really wants to be left behind, or at least they don't want to be caught on the wrong side of the issue in the end. The continued nations (unintelligible), as you just heard, most of these countries probably don't think it's necessarily a good idea, but the idea being opposed, they're on the wrong side of the United States goes ahead is even more unpalatable to them, so They will find a way to get on board in the end with with the least embarrassment of themselves. And pretty much the same thing that's going to happen, I think in the Congress, the democrats are facing elections, they don't want to be, you know, accused being appeasers. They don't want to be on the wrong side. They don't be accused of being unpatriotic going into the election. And again, they will try to find a way to do it with at least embarrassment to themselves. And we've seen in the last week or so where previously the democrats are hoping to put off a resolution until after the November elections. Now they want to get it over with as quickly as possible so they can get on to other issues and try to talk about the economy and before the election.

Stuart Loory 19:40

The Democratic reaction yesterday, the speech by Senator Daschle was a pretty strong speech. Even if they do support and administration resolution, are they not going to be charged after that speech with an-anti war position?

David Jones 20:03

You know, the speech itself, if you look closely was he wasn't, I don't think he calling the whole war effort, attempted politics. But just the specific remarks, the President Bush made the other day when he accused Democrats of not being interested in national security. I think was meant to be a warning shot across President Bush's bow that if the republicans tried to make a political issue of the war, tried to demonize Democrats that know that the Democrats were playing the same game. How it will actually unfold? I don't know. But I think that was Dasho's intention.

Stuart Loory 20:36

Jay, the United States wants to keep Israel out of any war with Iraq, and the Israeli say that they may not be able to stay out. What do you think is really going to happen assuming there is going to be a war and I think that is a reasonable assumption these days. How will Israel be involved?

Jay Bushinsky 21:01

Well, Israel certainly will try to stay out. And it's easy to understand why the United States wants them out because a coalition against an Arab state, especially a country, as militant, as Iraq, and with as many allies in the Arab world, with Israel, as one of the belligerents would be a hard pill to swallow. For the Arab side, even the moderate Arab states would find it hard to be members of such a coalition. However, a few things have to be said very quickly. Iraq is very much a very much involved here. First of all, it's the only Arab state, which officially still has, it still has, it's in a state of war with Israel. No armistice was signed between Iraq and Israel in 1949. Unlike Jordan, Egypt and Syria. Second, the Iraqis have a large following here. Saddam Hussein is admired by perhaps a large percentage, if not a majority of Palestinian Arabs, not only in the West Bank and Gaza, but in Jordan as well. And the Iraqi regime finances, the suicide bombers families to the tune of \$25,000 per family, which hands over a son or daughter as for suicide bombing, so, and Israel is the country that bombed Iraq, back in 1981, to destroy its nuclear reactor. So Israel is very much involved in any rack and vice versa. The Iraqis, of course, will try to provoke Israel. If they launch chemical or biological missiles, even conventional warheads that actually hit targets and cause casualties, I'm afraid that all of these diplomatic considerations will fall by the wayside.

Stuart Loory 22:41

What about the the support for the Palestinian cause? Is there anything that Israel can do about that to to prevent that in the future, without getting involved in the war?

Jay Bushinsky 22:55

Israelis tried, and I can't apologize or justify their performance, but they certainly are interested in a peaceful solution with the Palestinians. The question is at what price to be paid by the Palestinians. So far, the price has been too high, evidently. And even Chairman Yasser Arafat, who came back to this country about eight years ago, to make peace and live side by side in two neighboring states has been unable to come to a peaceful agreement even with the active involvement of an American president, President Clinton. So on one hand, the Israeli certainly want an end to the conflict. The majority of people in this country is tired of the casualty toll and are willing to pay a very heavy price. The question is whether the price is heavy enough and without going into detail, it hasn't. The price has not gone over, as far as the leadership of the Palestinian National Authority is concerned.

Stuart Loory 23:54

Sam Bahone, is Palestine or Palestinians also willing to pay a heavy price?

Sam Bahour 24:06

Definitely, and we have paid that price many times over. I don't think you'll find one Palestinian, me included, that will pay what we've more than what we've paid, which is 78% of historic Palestine. At the end of the day in facing this war, upcoming war against Iraq, the United States knows that Israel is its weakest link in the coalition. I think that the US will bend enough arms in Israel to make sure they don't respond. Even though the war rhetoric coming out of the Sharon cabinet is very clear that he's saying publicly and that he will respond. I think the US has enough leverage to make sure they don't. And I think Israel knows that they shouldn't take that lightly, because most likely after this war, the next issue on the Bush agenda, late in coming but nevertheless is coming, is to I think, use some of these tools that we spoke about to end the Israeli occupation and to put Israel back in line with the international community. The United States understands that it cannot attack Iraq, who has maybe violated one or two United Nations resolutions. And let their major ally in the world, who has violated over 100 resolutions, which call for the end of occupation, to remain as a side on the sidelines. So at the end of the day, I think Israel will not respond, not because they don't want to, they would love to attack any Arab country. But I think that the US will put them into line because they know that the next thing on the agenda, and they will want the United States to be lenient, at least in trying to solve the problem. At the end of the day, the international law and the United Nations resolutions will guide both us and our Israeli neighbors into a solution. The time has to come with Israelis elected administration that's not bent on war and is bent on peace.

Stuart Loory 25:47

If I may, Sam, I would like to ask David Jones this question. I hear Sam Bahour that war against Iraq is going to be harmful to Israel and helpful to Palestine as far as United States is concerned. Do you agree with it?

David Jones 26:06

Well, this is the question nobody knows the answer to. The people who think the war is a bad idea, as I was saying, yes, just going to build, you know, encourage fundamental, encourage the radical Muslims. I think it depends how long the war lasts. If it's over in a few days, very quickly, the Iraqi army collapses and the Iraqi people welcome the American system operators, may have as Bush administration hopes a beneficial effect in the region, may make America really the power disabled to dictate terms in Israel and the Palestinians, usher in a new era of democracy in the Middle East. And so forth this seems to be the plan. The alternative if the bombing drags on for weeks, if it's the result is indecisive, the Americans finally do copper Baghdad, and they're treated not as liberators, but as occupiers by the people, then I think it's going to have very bad results for everybody. It will encourage increasing hostility to the United States. It'll build up the strength of the radical, extremist Muslims, and it'll, you know, encourage more terrorism. And Americans will become targets and the more Israel and the United States are seen as allies, and that is going to be bad for both of them.

Stuart Loory 27:17

Okay. If I may, I'm going to give Tony Cross the last word. And, Tony, I'm going to ask you this question, we talked a little bit at the beginning about the so called quartet and its role in shaping a solution. Do you think this quartet, the United States, the European Union, Russian, Russia, the Arab League can be effective?

Tony Cross 27:40

No, I don't think that at all. I think that the United States will do what it wants and that the other countries, Russia has a certain independence and a certain diplomatic independence which which will lead it to be more stropky, we say in Britain. Then Europe, but I think that Europe is a spare wheel, to be quite honest in the United States plans...

Stuart Loory 28:02

Tony, I'm sorry, but we have to let it go with that, we are out of time. Our guests today have been in Tel Aviv, Jay Bushinsky, and Ramallah, Sam Bahour. In Paris, Tony Cross and in Washington, David Jones. Our directors Pat Akers, and our producer Sarah Andrea Fajardo. For all, I'm Stuart Loory, Global Journalist will be back next week.