

Global Journalist: Prospects for George Bush's second term and Middle East peace

In this Nov. 4, 2004 episode of Global Journalist, Stuart Loory and political correspondents from around the world discuss foreign attitudes regarding the re-election of President George Bush. Also, Loory speaks with journalists in Japan and London about troop involvement in the Middle East.

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Stuart Loory 0:00

Welcome to Global Journalist on KBIA. I'm Stuart Loory of the Missouri School of Journalism. The most divisive presidential election in half a century is over and the United States is left with the job of healing internal wounds. It'll take both sides to do that, but to start with, we have to figure out in the United States, which each side is. Is it Democrats and Republicans? Is it young and old? Is it those who believe in moral values that are more important and those concerned with economic matters and foreign policy? The truth is that the nation just isn't sure. But another truth is that the nation must take some steps to bind up wounds from a divisive foreign policy, President Bush went through a first term widely distrusted abroad. He felt that a go-alone foreign policy featuring a doctrine saying that preemptive war was justified to preserve the United States was okay. But most - if not all - of the world disagrees. So how is the president's triumph seen elsewhere outside the United States, and what is expected of him in the future? To discuss the situation today our guests are, in Rio de Janeiro, Michael Kepp, a columnist for Folha de Sao Paulo. In London, John Rentoul, a correspondent for the - or columnist, I should say - for The Independent. In Cairo, S. Abdallah Schleifer, publisher and senior editor of TBS, that's Trans-National Broadcasting Studies. And in Tokyo, Eric Du, chief of the domestic news copy desk of the Japan - I'm sorry, let me do that again - And in Tokyo, Eric J- once more, and in Tokyo Eric

Du, chief of the domestic news copy desk of the Japan Times. Let's start with John Rentoul in London. John, Tony Blair, after making a little joke about the - the election yesterday in Parliament, was very complimentary of the president's triumph. Was he speaking for the British people? And how do you think that this election is going to play out in the next four years?

John Rentoul 2:36

No, he wasn't speaking for the British people, Stuart. You might expect Tony Blair to be pleased by George Bush's reelection because, you know, obviously, he has been one of the President's most stalwart supporters in the coalition in Iraq. But the truth is that, that I think, Tony Blair would have preferred John Kerry to win - I mean, he would never have admitted that to anybody, even in private - because George Bush is extremely unpopular with the British electorate. And Tony Blair's alliance with him is a drag on his support and the Labour Party's support in the - in the elective - general election here, which is expected next May. I mean, but that said, you know, I mean, it's not it's not a huge issue and Tony Blair is still fairly comfortably placed to win that election.

Stuart Loory 3:32

Even if the the President of the United States continues his current policies in Iraq and continues to draw British troops more deeply into the fighting there?

John Rentoul 3:46

Well, yeah, I mean, I think that's already, you know, that that's already in the market price as it were in British politics, I mean, people, people who don't like Britain's entanglement in Iraq and Britain support for President Bush have already vented their feelings and they've already decided that, you know, if they care enough about it, they're not going to vote for Tony Blair's Labour Party at the next at the next general election. And despite all that, you know, the vast majority looks like they're going to vote on on domestic issues and on the on those the Labour Party's got a very substantial lead. But it makes Tony Blair's life much, much more difficult to continue to, to be so closely identified with with such an unpopular American president.

Stuart Loory 4:30

Let's ask Michael Kepp to step into this, Michael, What is the situation in Brazil and if you can talk about it, the rest of Latin America?

Michael Kepp 4:40

I'm not comfortable talking about the rest of Latin America because I only cover Brazil and only, basically, I get Brazilian newspapers so I don't know exactly what's been going on in the rest of Latin America. I can - on that note - I can say that the probably the one of the biggest newspapers in the country, in my hometown - in my town - of Rio de Janeiro, O Globo, the headline says: A vote for isolationism and a wave of conservatism re-elect Bush, which gives you sort of - and that's a, Globo's considered as a relatively right-wing paper. So that gives you an idea of sort of the sense that, that Brazilians have that. It's sort of more of the same right-wing government, in a country that is basically extremely anti-American based on all sorts of reasons, primarily, the US intervention in foreign governments ever since the US held back the coup that ousted the democratically elected government in 1964. That - that - and that conserve, that anti-Americanism, has continued. And it's not simply based on what The United States is - how the United States has intervened in Brazil, but all over the world, including including Chile. Chile was a major, major factor. Brazil doesn't look - it doesn't see anti-Americanism as a local or local issue. But as a - it sees it as part of - Brazil as a part of a world community that, that feels somewhat endangered by the by us anti - by US intervention. Not that the US would ever intervene in Brazil again, or anytime in the near future. But it's a - it's a sort of a cloud that hangs over the United States in relation - in relation to Brazil's feelings towards it.

Stuart Loory 6:39

Michael, if I heard you correctly, O Globo was saying that this is an isolationist government here in the United States, and yet, it has been a very interventionist government around the world, has it not?

Michael Kepp 6:56

I think it was rough. I haven't read the story, I just looked at the headline, to tell you the truth. But I think was talking about the isolate - the sense of the unilateral - the unilateral nature of this foreign policy.

Stuart Loory 7:10

Uh huh. Let's go to Abdallah Schleifer in Cairo. Abdallah, what do you think about the reaction in Cairo and perhaps the rest of the Arab world?

S. Abdallah Schleifer 7:22

A tremendous disappointment - a tremendous unhappiness. As - as media approaches the level of speaking for the establishment, in Egypt, that disappointment, that unhappiness, even anger, is masked a bit because there's always a traditional position here that Egypt relates to states rather than - rather than to particular parties and regimes. I mean, for instance, I remember when

Sharon came to power, many Egyptians simply did not want to — those very closely connected to the establishment simply did not want to say what they might have feared in their hearts. That instead they would say, well Egypt's relations are with states, not with particular parties. But actually, when you go beyond that, there is a tremendous anger. And it has — it's pretty much focused on one thing — in the Arab world, everything is seen through the spectrum of the Arab-Israeli conflict. And even the anger about Iraq, in a sense, relates — is not in a vacuum — but it relates to the Israeli conflict, what is seen as an American double-standard ; one standard applied to Saddam Hussein in Iraq, a completely different standard applied to Israel, and Prime Minister Sharon. And therefore, this tremendous anger directed at a president of the United States who declared Sharon as a man of peace, when he is perceived throughout the Arab world, throughout Africa, throughout most of Europe, as someone who until recently has done everything to subvert peace. So there's a great anger in that sense against the administration on a level of intellectuals, journalists, the street, the Arab Street, it isn't that they had such great hopes for John Kerry as and typically and and there's a tremendous subdued sense in the city today. And I would imagine elsewhere in the Arab world. Of course, part of that reaction is been affected by other news, Prime Minister Arafat is reportedly in a coma, last I heard, in France. And a very, very - his condition, as reported, has taken a significant change for the worse. And that's weighing heavily here too. What are the implications of that? Will this unleash a bloodbath - a power struggle - in his death? You know, so it isn't - their focus is not just exclusively on the American election as it might be elsewhere.

Stuart Loory 9:47

And Eric Du in Japan, I think, from what I have read, the re-election of George Bush has been met with a great deal of approval.

Eric Du 9:59

Well, yeah. In various circles, that's true. The business circles, more or less, have welcomed it, especially exporters, because they feel that Bush, unlike perhaps Kerry, is more likely to not apply trade pressure on Japan, much to the dismay perhaps of American automakers and people that want the dollar's value to go down — although it ultimately probably will. And politically speaking too, the Prime Minister who's committed troops — peace troops, I guess you could call them, i guess they're humanitarian troops - to southern Iraq, and has staked a certain amount of his political fortunes with the Bush camp, has breathed a sigh of relief. Although, I think he hedged his bets going into the election in that I think he was willing to concede that things were going to be the same with Kerry or Bush. And you know, unlike perhaps other parts of the world, Japan is one of the places you're less likely — regardless of who won in the White House - to see anybody taking to the streets over it. It's — other than the fact that the military — the Japanese troops deployment in Iraq is about to expire in a month and they're — they're considering extending it for another year, and they had a straw poll over the weekend that showed most people are against it because, coincidentally, a Japanese hostage who decided to go to Iraq,

against everybody's warnings, to see it for himself, ultimately got beheaded. I mean, a Japanese traveler who became a hostage and — and so that tempered the the straw poll, but nonetheless, I mean, if they go to extend the, the troop deployment in in Iraq, it probably will be a done deal without any real public involvement.

Stuart Loory 11:53

John Rentoul. Can you tell us a little bit about what, if anything, can be done to improve relations between the United States and its traditional allies in Western Europe?

John Rentoul 12:09

That's a very, very difficult question. I mean, I think it comes down to the to some of the some of the familiar things. I mean, like trying to trying to broaden the coalition in Iraq and trying to play-down the perception that America is engaged in a sort of go-it-alone strategy in Iraq. That's what puts a lot of European noses out of joint. And the other the other big issue. You know, as Abdallah was saying, from Cairo, I mean, the British politicians and European politicians generally do seem to take a pretty Arabic line on on the Middle East. And I think if the - if - if the Bush administration showed a real impetus to put pressure on on Ariel Sharon, to to negotiate with the Palestinians, possibly, you know, with with the leadership after Arafat, then I think that would make things a lot easier for --for the Americans and the way they viewed in Europe. I don't know, it all depends on whether Bush, in his second term, wants to make his mark on history as — as the the guy who, who pushed for the for the two state solution between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Stuart Loory 13:23

Do you think he might not push for that?

John Rentoul 13:26

Well he'll push for it. But I mean, you know, the criticism that the people have in Europe is that he hasn't meant it. I mean, that he that the Bush administration has always held back from applying real, meaningful, economic pressure on the on the Israeli government. And, you know, we all understand the reasons why that is and why America is - is - is so close - so closely tied to to, to Israel has its ally. But you know, we did see, you know, George Bush's father, I think put it — It did — did apply some, some meaningful pressure, and Bill - Bill Clinton, you know, threatened to. And, but, and — but George W. Bush seems to be slightly softer on the Israeli government when it comes to — when push comes to shove.

Stuart Loory 14:15

What about relations between the United States and Germany, United States and France? The - the comments that I read seem to indicate that in both those countries officials feel that it is not up to them to to work to improve those relations, that it's up to a re-elected George Bush

John Rentoul 14:39

Well, you know, I mean, strangely enough, the French don't — don't like being called cheese-eating surrender monkeys. They perceive the sort of — those sort of attitudes in America towards them as being closely associated with the administration. And, you know, they don't see why they should put themselves out for — for a president who, who, who seems to regard them with, with thinly-veiled contempt. But as I say, you know, depends on — on whether George Bush, you know, freed from the constraints of having to win another election, besides, you know, to make a real push for for an Arab-Israeli settlement and and perhaps adopt a different approach in Iraq. I mean - I - I doubt if he will, but it is certainly - it's up to him.

Stuart Loory 15:23

Okay.

John Rentoul 15:24

I don't see any any sort of real change in the in the German and French attitudes over here.

Stuart Loory 15:28

Right. I want to come back to a discussion of Iraq and also bring in a discussion of Iran. But first, I have to say you're listening to Global Journalist on KBIA. I'm Stuart Loory. Welcome back to Global Journalist. You may listen to this program again, make comments, or ask questions by going to www.globaljournalist.org or here in mid-Missouri by calling us at 573-882-9641. Let's talk a little bit, specifically now, about the war in Iraq and what the Ppresident might do to extricate himself and the rest of the world from the increasingly bitter insurgency there and - the destructive insurgency. Abdallah, what do you think? Is there anything that the President can do? Can he can he get out of Iraq in an easy way?

S. Abdallah Schleifer 16:41

Well...hello?

Stuart Loory 16:41

Hello, Abdallah? Are you there? Yeah. Okay.

S. Abdallah Schleifer 16:46

Here in Egypt, President Mubarak is trying to put together a conference on Iraq to discuss exactly that. Bringing in all - not just the new Iraqi governing group, but also to a certain degree, even opposition elements in Iraq - I guess as long as they don't show up with bombs and rifles - and other Arab leaders to discuss what can be done to extrad- for the United States and for the Arab world to handle this situation. And I think in that sense, because, you know, Egypt is very closely aligned with America, but terribly embarrassed by this. And in fact, President Mubarak did warn on the eve of the invasion of Iraq, that it would lead to violence and chaos and instability in the whole region. So he feels very much tragically confirmed by events. But now he's going to try and do something. He's also called for conferences on international terrorism. So that's another thing where he wants to sort of try to get an understanding. But you know, he had the pessimists - are the ones saying: why talk about Iraq, let's talk about Syria, and Iran - this tremendous fear here, that because of this election, the administration will feel sufficiently bold to move on Iran and Syria. And you remember that was very much in the air in the first weeks after the fall of Baghdad, when civilian politicians in the Pentagon felt very vindicated. And they were talking up a very hard line. I mean, there was even people saying, alright, let's go on to Damascus onto Teheran.

Stuart Loory 18:20

There has already been talk of that in the United States in the in the past several hours. But there has also been some pretty immediate reaction from the Bush administration saying: no, sir, we're not going to get involved in expanding the war beyond Iraq, because we just don't have the troops. And the military has said it would take a new draft and I don't think that that is in the cards here either.

S. Abdallah Schleifer 18:51

Well, the more - the more subtle the pessimists are, the more they say no won't be an American intervention, but the Americans will wink at Israel, which will then launch an airstrike - a major strike - against Iran - suspected Iranian nuclear facilities. That's also circulating. The optimists, on the other hand, are counting on none other than Tony Blair. There's a great hope that Tony Blair will take - insist, will not just take but will insist - on a major initiative that he's going to go to President Bush and say: it's now or never, you've got to do it, we've got to come out, and the only way that we're going to bind wounds and recover our opposition that's tremendously deteriorating. And as I said, people here do not separate Iran and Iraq. If there is tremendous progress, even if it's - however, it's imposed - towards an Arab Israeli understanding on the way

towards a peace process that will have its positive effect on the Iraqi situation. And so the optimists are hoping that that's going to happen, that there'll be a British initiative, then - then that President Bush will Go for it under this thesis of: Alright, he's not up for re-election, he doesn't need funding anymore to run another campaign. Why not go for his place in history as other leaders as varied as Jimmy Carter and Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat have gone to their place in history?

Stuart Loory 20:14

Yeah, I've done. Let me bring Eric Du back into the discussion here to react to what you just said and to ask him if there is any feeling that the Japanese government, which of course has - has some amount of pressure that it can impose on the United States, would do anything to prevent that kind of reaction. And also, Eric, I'd like to ask you about nuclear non-proliferation, and what the Japanese expect of the United States vis-a-vis North Korea.

Eric Du 20:55

Well, they're they're again, they were kind of thankful with the Bush win because they believe that okay, the - the four part- or the six party process in play involving China, Russia, the two Koreas, Japan and the United States and trying to talk, negotiate North Korea out of its nuclear ambitions, although that's probably a pretty tall order. Japan is always faced with the reality that there is this - this country right across the pond and it's really quite literally a pond that's got thousands of warheads trained on it. What Japan can do in the Middle East is marginal other than the fact that it's heavily reliant upon various, you know, oil concerns. The United States tried to get Japan not to get involved in a large hydro elec- hydro project in Iran. Just because it felt that helping Iran and providing funds for Iran was helping Iran pursue its nuclear ambitions. And in the end, Japan sort of - sort of went along with the Iranian deal. But, it right now - it got brought in initially as having humanitarian troops and Iraq. But then when Bush sort of changed streams and sort of redefined the coalition there, and Japan had to grudgingly go along as being part of the US led coalition or the... And so it can't really apply a whole lot of pressure to prevent the United States from any kind of ambitions that might have towards escalating anything in the Middle East. But it has, you know, domestic - there is a certain level of domestic opposition to bring the troops home. And they, as so far there has been no casualties with those troops. And that's been one of the saving factors and it's also been Probably one of the things that's keeping Koizumi in - out of hot water as well. But the thing is with Japan is that it is heavily reliant on the United States protection over here. And so it will, to a great extent bend over backwards when the United States asked for help to ensure that its security is always maintained here. And to that extent, it's even pursuing a missile defense plan with the United States even though it really has no offensive capability at this point.

Stuart Loory 23:32

Yeah. Talk a little bit about a little bit more about nuclear non-proliferation and how important an issues this is for the Japanese people

Eric Du 23:45

well, of course, they've - they've been engaging or they're proposing C-trials - C-drills - with the United States and other countries in ASEAN countries and Australia and whatnot. See interdiction exercises. And it's all basically geared at trying to halt North Korea from attempting to run nuclear-related type - weapon-related type - equipment on, you know, on the fly. Of course a another big 'if' factor is China and China's relationship with North Korea, which is not necessarily that adversarial. And - and so, Japan I think has a lot of fears about proliferation in this area and they - I think it's pretty much assumed that North Korea's has got, you know, it's got - is well on the road to having several bombs. And not that it's inclined to use them, but - that - there - it's inclined to perhaps suggest that they could be traded, and Japan has deep fears about that.

Stuart Loory 25:01

Yeah. If - Michael Kepp, his nuclear non-proliferation an issue in Brazil?

Michael Kepp 25:12

Well, the - the US government and as well as atomic energy - International Atomic Energy agencies have pressed for Brazil to open up its nuclear plant enrichment facilities, its existing nuclear enrichment facilities, to US and the International inspectors.

Stuart Loory 25:37

And Brazil has been resisting that, is that right?

Michael Kepp 25:40

It has been but it's only on the grounds that it doesn't want to give away the nuclear secrets in terms of the kinds of centrifuges that it's using and such. It's allowing inspections into its facilities, but not perhaps as extensive as the United States and the - the international agencies would like. But the - Brazil also argues that it's never shown any interest in developing any kind of a nuclear weapon and this - this energy would simply be used to fuel its nuclear plants and - and to and to avoid having to import enriched uranium, given the fact that it's one of the world's biggest uranium producers - or has one of the biggest uranium reserves, whether it's producing - I don't know if it's producing as much but - so the Brazilians don't see it as an issue as much as the

- the international community does and doesn't believe that it's given any reason to, for the foreign community be suspicious of its nuclear role.

Stuart Loory 26:48

Michael, we have about 30 seconds left and let me ask you, in that time, what is the the main thing that Brazil would like to see accomplished vis-a-vis it by the Bush administration?

Michael Kepp 27:04

Well, I think that it would like a softening of the trade difficulties that Brazil wants to see the US drop agriculture subsidies and anti-dumping duties on - on steel from Brazil and other countries as well. As the US wants to see Brazil begin to strengthen intellectual property rights, but such as patenting medicines - market prices for patented medicines for AIDS - Brazil, however, resist that arguing that the US is a wealthy country doesn't need that ...

Stuart Loory 27:42

Sorry, I do have to cut you off, we're out of time. Our guests today have been in Rio - Rio de Janeiro, Michael Kepp, a columnist for Folha de Sao Paulo, in London, John Rentoul, a columnist for The Independent, in Cairo, S. Abdallah Schleifer, publisher and senior editor of Trans-national Broadcasting Studies, and in Tokyo Eric Du, chief of the domestic news copy desk of the Japan Times. Our director is Pat Akers, our producers Woo Tak Hong(ph?) Pavretta Sarah-George(ph?) Renata Johnson and Stefanie von Brochowski. For all, I'm Stuart Loory. Global Journalist will be back next week.