

Global Journalist: Mugabe's press crackdown during re-election; President Bush's Asia Trip

Abstract: On this Feb. 21, 2002 program, host Stuart Loory speaks with four journalists about the controversial campaign of Zimbabwe's incumbent candidate for president, Robert Mugabe. They also talk about the status of relations between North Korea, South Korea, Japan and the United States following a trip from U.S. President George W. Bush to the Demilitarized Zone on the North-South Korea Border.

Host: Stuart Loory

Guests: [Michael Zielenziger](#)

[Woosuk \(Ken\) Choi](#)

[Basildon Peta](#)

[Kurt Shillinger](#)

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Mentioned: China, President Bush, Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, United States, Kim Jong-il, Kim Dae-Jung, Jiang Zemin, Koizumi

Stuart Loory 0:13

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. For the first time since he declared existence of an Axis of Evil involving Iraq, Iran and North Korea, President George W. Bush stepped up to the Demilitarized Zone separating North and South Korea and peered into the evil territory. But he said later, the United States would not invade North Korea and neither would its ally South Korea. He seemed to be backing away from the extreme language of last month's State of the Union message after strong objections for critics at home and abroad. On a three-nation Asian tour, he seemed to be saying North Korea might not be so evil after all. In fact, yesterday in Beijing, he said he would like Chinese leaders Jiang Zemin to arrange talks between Bush and the North Korean leadership. In Africa, evil government is fighting to preserve itself. Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe turned 78 today as he campaigns to continue a 22-year period as Zimbabwe's only president. In a strong-armed effort to maintain power, he is regulating both the domestic and international press. He's harassing his campaign opposition, and he's taking land from white Zimbabweans who have long controlled it. The European Union has declared economic sanctions and the United States

may as well.

Elsewhere around the world, there are serious and important stories most notably in the Middle East where the killing of Palestinians and Jews continues to escalate. If any of our guests have anything to say about that situation, or anything else, please don't hesitate to say so. Our guests today are in Tokyo, Michael Zielenziger, bureau chief for the Knight Ridder Newspapers; in Seoul, Woosuk (Ken) Choi, a staff writer for Chosun Ilbo; in Cape Town, South Africa Basildon Peta, an exiled Zimbabwean journalist, currently writing for the British Daily, the Independent, and Kurt Shillinger in Johannesburg, South Africa. This year, Shillinger is chairman of the Foreign Correspondents' Association of Southern Africa. Let's start with South Africa first. Basildon, bring us up to date on what the situation is in your country. Is there any chance that Mr. Mugabe is going to lose the election?

Basildon Peta 3:02

I don't think so. Look, as you rightly say, the man has been in power for 22 years now and he is doing everything he can to ensure that he rigs this election and remains in power. I, I doubt very much that despite the massive unpopularity, he will lose this election by virtue of things that he has done on the ground. Now, the amount of violence that is being witnessed in Zimbabwe is so much that it would be a miracle if the opposition were to win this election.

Stuart Loory 3:42

Kurt Shillinger, he has expelled foreign journalists from Zimbabwe who have been writing what the Mugabe government considers to be unfavorable stories. Is there any chance that these journalists will get back into the country?

Kurt Shillinger 4:00

Well, there's two parts to that question. He expelled a couple of reporters from the BBC earlier in 2001. Those journalists don't stand any possibility of getting back in, nor does the BBC have the possibility of sending anyone in at this point. But just recently, this led starting from Sunday through to this week, they started to issue accreditation or reject accreditation applications for the foreign media after about a period of four or five months in which we were all continually denied without any explanation. The rejections that came this week are extensive, almost all of the British press, all of the Swedish press, all of the Dutch press and all of the Danish press has been excluded with maybe one or two exceptions. The rest of the landscape, about half of the American press that is applied from Johannesburg has gotten in. Several have been rejected. And it's similar across just about any other country you name, some Germans have gotten in, some haven't. Up until a deal was made last night, most of the South African media was denied as well.

Stuart Loory 5:22

Kurt, if I break in for just a second, why is it so necessary for the government of Zimbabwe to try to control the press around the world? What impact does that have on its own power?

Kurt Shillinger 5:37

Well, look, I mean, if you're if you're going to hold free and fair elections, then you have nothing to hide and so you let the media in. If you feel like you can't win elections on a free and fair basis, and you feel as though, you know, doing doing any number pulling any number of tricks will cause condemnation either The Commonwealth, to which Zimbabwe is a member, or from the European Union or from the Americans, then you start to play games and you start to keep some of the media out. The way Zimbabwe would answer that question, though, is that they view those that they have denied access as hostile, as people who have written unfavorably about the president and about what he's doing. But clearly you don't do this unless you have something to hide.

Stuart Loory 6:28

Basildon, apparently you, as Mr. Mugabe thought it out, were hostile. What did you do? Why were you expelled?

Basildon Peta 6:40

Just a point of correction. I was not expelled, but I had to leave of my own volition after the situation has become unbearable. But as you rightly say, the president accused me of being hostile and writing false reports. And it... this story of my living is a is a long story. But to cut it short, I had been involved in the fight for press freedom for the past two years in Zimbabwe in my capacity as the Secretary General of the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists. And when about two weeks ago, I was arrested and charged under the Public Order Security Act. There were some conflicting reports that emanated from my arrest that then caused the government to accuse me of having lied about the period that I stayed in jail. And then they took that as an excuse to go hard on me and started demonizing me in the official press and all kinds of threats were now being directed at me and everything that is going wrong in Zimbabwe was being blamed on me and the situation just (unintelligible) unbearable. We are talking of a country which is suffering inflation is at 117%, grocery shelves are empty, people are starving. If you read the newspapers today, you might know already that the UN has started a massive food assistance program in the areas. So you meet these people in the streets were being told you are the enemy, you are causing their problems and these people have a history of being (unintelligible). They are all you know these I'm sure you (unintelligible) the violence that has been taking place and as early as two days ago, ruling party supporters went on the rampage in the streets of Harare, the capital city, beating

up people, innocent bystanders. I just felt that I couldn't stand it anymore and I decided to take a break.

Stuart Loory 8:57

Basildon, with the situation the way it is, even with the control but by the Mugabe government, how can it possibly maintain itself in power?

Basildon Peta 9:12

This is precisely why they are rigging the election, why they have embarked on a campaign of violence and to cow voters into submission. This explains why they're not admitting foreign observers from those countries that are unlikely to issue a favorable report of the election. And this is why as my good friend Kat -- who must take advantage of this program to say hi to -- this is why it is well explained, that this is why the government of Zimbabwe cannot admit foreign journalists into the country because it doesn't want to be scrutinized. It wasn't, it doesn't want to be seen. It knows it will lose a free, fair election. But as a result of that knowledge, they have to resort to these ways and end methods of conducting this election, and they wind through a rigged process. This is the only way out for them.

Stuart Loory 10:17

Robert Mugabe when he assumed office 22 years ago was considered a good man who was concerned with the people of his country. What was it that caused him to change? Kurt? Do you want to try that?

Kurt Shillinger 10:33

Well, I think what caused it to change really, I mean, look, the simple thing, the simple, I suppose the simple way to answer that question is, in one sense, Robert Mugabe succeeded. He came in promising two things. He promised to educate the people and he promised to give them land. And when it came to education, he succeeded. He educated the people and now Zimbabwe has one of the most educated societies in Africa. The problem is that he never did anything with land reform precisely because he knew that doing so was very costly and would disrupt the economy. So he left that one aside. In about the early to mid 1990s, when structural adjustment programs started to take a bite, discontent, discontent started to build a little bit year by year and he started to face trouble with the war veterans, the people who fought the liberation struggle and who wanted land and didn't get it. And he tried to buy them off year to year with more generous pensions and so on and so forth. Ultimately, however, what caught up with him was the generation of people that he educated. They wanted a modern, sophisticated economy that provided jobs for educated people. They wanted, these people wanted not so much to be farmers, but to be business men, to be lawyers, to be computer experts, and so on. And they began to realize that their

government wasn't giving them those opportunities. Robert Mugabe is that the society has moved on and he hasn't.

Stuart Loory 12:15

Right. Kurt, I'm sorry, I have to cut you short here. But we do have to take a break. When we come back, we will talk about President Bush in the Far East. This is Global Journalist on KBIA. I'm Stuart Loory.

Welcome back to Global Journalist. You may listen to this program again, ask questions or make comments by going to www.globaljournalist.org or here in Mid-Missouri by calling us at 573-882-9641. Now let's move to President Bush's trip in Asia. Michael Zielenziger, I think there are perhaps two issues involved. One is the status of North Korea and the other are economic relations between the United States and the three countries the President is visiting: Japan, South Korea and China. Is that an oversimplification?

Michael Zielenziger 13:16

No, I think it's definitely a two track offensive in a sense by the President. On the one hand, it was very important for him to try to convince Asia that his Axis of Evil comments should at least be taken not too defensively by the South Koreans especially, but also especially in Japan to talk about the economic problems. The axis of evil comments really jangled a lot of nerves in Seoul. To the Korean people, those people across the border in the north are not enemies. They're kinfolk, they're relatives, there are millions of South Koreans who have family in the north and reunification is a long sought goal. Kim Dae-Jung, the president of South Korea had won a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts at the so called sunshine policy of reconciliation. And so George Bush's comments jangled a lot of nerves. On the other hand, when it comes to Japan, a war with North Korea would not sit very well with Tokyo. So it's very important to at least neutralize any opposition, the Japanese who are constrained by their own pacifist constitution might feel while also try to get some dialogue going with the Japanese about the problems with their economic system.

Stuart Loory 14:35

Yeah, Ken Choi. Does it look like Bush has placated South Korea with his remarks on this trip about North Korea?

Ken Woosuk Choi 14:47

I certainly think so. It certainly seems like he has toned down since he made the comment of axis of evil about North Korea but his his face extends(?) seems like, um, still feels distrustful to the North Korean government. One thing that was interesting was that he differentiated from the other North Korean regime from the North Korean people, he called

the access of people specifically on the North Korean government. So, in a sense, he sort of gestured that he was placating the South Korean government. But in essence, he's still standing firm on on this belief that the North Korean government is not trustful.

Stuart Loory 15:36

He did say that the United States is not planning any military action against North Korea. That has been greeted with with some pleasure in South Korea.

Ken Woosuk Choi 15:50

True. As far as he's concerned, when he made this Axis of Evil comments, it stirred the general public Not because the most of average Koreans disagree with what President Bush believes but because, as Michael mentioned, that, you know, the 99% of Koreans do not want a war at all with North Korea. Even though we are still at war technically and even if we face difficult relationships at the moment, we still believe that any, any negotiations or anything that is happening in question be resolved through peaceful dialogue not through any kind of military actions. So, when President Bush mentioned about Axis of Evil comments, the most (unintelligible) even though they are in same side with the United States stance, they sort of were stirred that this comment would lead to or escalation of the war. So when President Bush went down that sense that United States did not want...

Michael Zielenziger 17:10

It's important to note that summit meetings are about sometimes papering over differences. And so even though Kim Dae-Jung and President Bush fundamentally disagree about how we should proceed in terms of talking to North Korea, they're not going to say so publicly at the end of the summit meeting. The South Koreans still very much depend on the US military alliance. And certainly the Japanese do as well.

Stuart Loory 17:37

I'm not sure what you're saying, Michael. Are you saying that they may have expressed more agreement on their policies than there actually was?

Michael Zielenziger 17:50

Yes, I mean, I was in Seoul a week before this visit. And I think the South Korean attitude now is the same as it was one year ago before Kim Dae-Jung went to Washington to meet Mr. Bush, which was Kim Dae-Jung understands North Korea better than your president does. Kim Dae-Jung has won a Nobel Prize for his reconciliation efforts with the North. He can somehow convince the President about the rightness of his path. But I don't think George Bush's mind is going to be changed.

Stuart Loory 18:21

Yeah, one of the things that intrigued me was why did President Bush ask Jiang Zemin to arrange talks with North Korea and not Kim Dae-Jung?

Michael Zielenziger 18:33

Because the North Koreans have only economic ties with China. Their one real ally in the world today is the Chinese. Once upon a time it was the Russians. But after the Cold War ended and the Russians went broke, the North Koreans find themselves very much dependent on the diplomatic umbrella supplied by Beijing.

Stuart Loory 18:57

If I can, I'd like to change the subject a little bit talk about economic relations. The economy in Japan is in a serious situation. And it has been for years and years and years. How did the Japanese feel about the United States devoting so much effort to improving economic relations with China?

Michael Zielenziger 19:22

They are worried about their relationships with the United States. They're actually more worried about their own economic relationship with China than they are worried about the US economic relationship with China. The Japanese recognized that the accession of the Chinese to the World Trade Organization is also a threat to Japan because Japan is still one of the highest cost countries in the world. We've seen a deflation in Japan where prices are going down. And one of the reasons is that for the first time, the Japanese are being forced to accept relatively cheap imports from China. So that China and the US should China work on their economic relationships, doesn't really worry them so much as it does what's going to be the future of the Japanese economic relationship with China.

Stuart Loory 20:17

Yeah, Michael, you had a story in the San Jose Mercury News the other day, saying that Prime Minister Koizumi has been something of a disappointment in Japan.

Michael Zielenziger 20:29

Indeed. One of the surprises of this trip in a sense. One of the ways Japan traditionally has been forced to change is through foreign pressure. There is a word in Japanese called Gyatso, and typically a president comes to Tokyo, George Bush, George Herbert Walker Bush came to Tokyo this way. Bill Clinton came this way with delegations of American businessmen to push the Japanese to change their rigid system. George Bush came to Japan and put his arms around Prime Minister Koizumi and said "He's my man. I looked him in the eye and I trust him to change the system." Yet in fact, the minute Bush got on Air Force

One to leave, many of the people who hoped for real economic change and structural reform of Japan criticized Koizumi harshly this week for being unable to deliver any substantive change.

Stuart Loory 21:25

Is he gonna be able to maintain himself in power?

Michael Zielenziger 21:29

Well, the the greatest thing keeping Koizumi in business today is the fact that there is no clear alternative. This week, the woman, the mother of a Koizumi insurgency as she's known here, Makiko Tanaka, the former foreign minister, stood up in front of the Diet and the Japanese parliament, and essentially accused Koizumi of speaking nice words, of saying he means reforms, but being an empty suit unable to deliver his promises. This is a system, this is a country that has nearly \$2 trillion, \$2 trillion in non-performing assets in banks that aren't able to make new loans. We're talking about a crisis like the savings and loan crisis in the United States multiple, multiplied by a figure of eight or nine. It's 10 years since the bubble, the economic expansion period of Japan collapsed, we still haven't moved through it. We still have a highly regulated system, where the prices that I pay for dry cleaning, for delivery services, for domestic services are four or five times what you would pay in Missouri. And this has to be changed. The government has to get out of the business of running the country and let business run the country.

Stuart Loory 22:44

Sounds like the Japanese are saving too much money that they're not spending enough.

Michael Zielenziger 22:50

What are the interest? Absolutely. The Japanese have the highest savings rate in the world, partly because they are so worried about the future. What are the interesting differences between Korea and Japan right now is that while Japan is struggling along its economy is shrinking, Korea is growing at 4% this year, only four years after the IMF crisis when the country was nearly broke, even though its traditional export markets, like the United States and Europe are in recession. So why is Korea growing when Japan is not growing? Because the Koreans are learning how to spend money domestically. They used to save as much as the Japanese did. Now they've discovered things like credit cards and credit card usage and Korea is grown 90% a year for the past three years.

Stuart Loory 23:39

Ken Choi, is what Michael Zielenziger is telling us so?

Ken Woosuk Choi 23:46

Yeah, domestic spending has been a one of the government's initiatives to to get through this economic difficulties. We are not sure how long we can sustain this domestic, I mean, increased domestic spending program because traditionally Korea has been a exporting country and our our GDP growth is heavily related to the world economy. So it remains to be seen whether we will be successful in doing this domestic spending increase.

Stuart Loory 24:20

Do American international economic policies suit Korea now?

Ken Woosuk Choi 24:27

Just want to mention, it was interesting to note that in the meetings, the economic issues was was discussed very little, actually, during the two hours, and only both presidents talked about like three issues. One was automobile issues. The other one was the steel imports in the United States and GMO the bio-products in Korea, so relatively, between the two countries, trade issues. There isn't that much trade conflict.

Stuart Loory 25:05

When you say automobile issues, what are the automobile issues?

Ken Woosuk Choi 25:10

President Bush raised the automobile imbalance. They create export into the United States by like half a million cars while we import about like less than 10,000 and President Bush displays the issue as a "Let's solve this problem" and President Kim agreed to it. It is, President Bush didn't specifically mention what to do with it but um, our president just said that he would try to do best to solve this. So that's automobile issue.

Stuart Loory 25:47

Okay, we have about one minute left and I would like to ask each of you to take half of that time, and give me your idea on what the situation will be vis-à-vis North Korea a year from now. Michael Zielenziger, you go first.

Michael Zielenziger 26:05

I would say a year from now the situation will be not too terribly different than it is today. The Bush administration will not attack the North militarily. At the same time, Kim Jong-il, the North Korean leader, is unwilling to venture south to open up his economy more, to open up his society more. His great fear is the more the country opens up, the more people learn about the nature of its regime, the less likely it is that he can remain in power. Not at not so unlike Mugabe, in some sense.

Ken Woosuk Choi 26:37

I have to agree with Michael. I don't think that there's, that North Korea's going to change for a lot except the President Kim is going to work and he's going to put his entire energy into inviting the North Koreans and Kim Jong il down to South Korea. So it needs to be seen but um, if he doesn't come down to South Korea, then there is not going to be changed.

Stuart Loory 27:01

Okay, I'm sorry but we are out of time. Our guest today have been Michaels Zielenziger in Tokyo, Woosuk Choi Ken in Seoul, Korea, Basildon Peta in Cape Town, South Africa and Kurt Shillinger in Johannesburg. Our director is Mary Furness, and our producer Sarah Andrea Fajardo. For all, I'm Stuart Loory and I should mention that today is the second anniversary of Global Journalist. We thank our listeners for staying with us. We'll be back next week.

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