

Global Journalist: Violence in the Middle East, Soccer in America

Abstract: This July 31, 2003 program features journalists discussing the ongoing violence in the Middle East as Israel and Palestine attempt to come to an agreement for talks of peace. Later, the discussion shifts to America's appetite for soccer as international soccer league is coming to America.

Host: Stuart Loory

Guests:

- [Sam Bahour](#)
- [Jay Bushinsky](#)
- [Tamara Wittes](#)
- [Oliver Thompson](#)
- [Steve Goff](#)
- [Mike Voitalla](#)

Directors: [Pat Akers](#)

Producers: [Yusuf Kalyango](#) and Sarah Katan

Mentioned: Israel, Gaza, Palestine, Middle East, President Bush Administration, terrorism, Juventus, Soccer, football,

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SPEAKERS:

Stuart Loory, Sam Bahour, Jay Bushinsky, Tamara Wittes, Oliver Thompson, Steve Goff, Mike Voitalla

Stuart Loory 00:07

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. roadmap diplomacy picked up somewhat more emphasis this week as Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, and Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas each visited Washington for talks with President George W. Bush and other American leaders. There has been virtually no violence between the two sides in three weeks, and talks are ongoing now, on the issue of turning over responsibility for policing Arab areas in the West Bank and Gaza to the Palestinian Authority. The emerging point of contention appears to be Israel's insistence on continuing to build a barrier of fence or a wall to prevent militant Arab terrorists from entering Israel. Bush tried to convince Sharon to give up the project. Sharon ignored the president. That's the subject of the program today. But we're also going to take a little time to discuss the lighter side of the news, the newly emerging campaign by international

professional soccer to bring the United States into the fold. Manchester United of the United Kingdom, and you Juventus of Italy are playing exhibition games in this country now to stimulate interest. And we'll catch up on that story as well. To discuss the Middle East, our guests today are in Tel Aviv, Israel, Jay Bushinsky, Israel bureau chief of WINS radio, in Ramallah, Palestine, Sam Bahour, a freelance journalist, and in Washington, Tamara Wittes, a Middle East specialist for the US Institute of Peace. And to talk about soccer later in the program, we have in London, Oliver Thompson, editor of MegaSoccer.com, in Washington, Steve Goff, a sports writer for The Washington Post, and in Oakland, California, Mike Woitalla, executive editor of the magazine, Soccer America. Welcome to all. Let's start in the Middle East. There is a big difference of opinion on whether or not real progress is being made toward a roadmap settlement, Jay Bushinsky and Sam Bahour bring us up to date on what's going on? Sam, you go first.

Sam Bahour 02:39

Well, from my vantage point here in Ramallah, not much has changed since the roadmap was introduced. Although on the news every night we do hear about various incremental changes within the Israeli security apparatus around the Palestinian cities. There have been several internal checkpoints, military checkpoints that have been removed. They've been replaced by multiple Israeli military movable checkpoints. So, on the ground level, much has changed. We still have every Palestinian city under Israeli siege, we still have, we still live under Israeli occupation. And our right to travel basically and move freely has been completely hindered by the Israeli military. Having said that, we do see some positive moves on the political front, at least in the rhetoric that's being spoken on both sides of wanting to move forward. But as someone who's very practical, I'm waiting to see that transit is on the ground.

Stuart Loory 03:45

Jay?

Jay Bushinsky 03:47

Well, I think that there was progress to a significant extent because it began with the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the northern sector of the Gaza strip. And it also led to withdraw from the ancient and sacred city of Bethlehem. So, that's that's for starters, yesterday, there were talks between the Israeli and Palestinian defense ministers on another set of withdrawals, Israel was prepared to withdraw from the city of Qalqilya, which abuts on Israeli territory and from Jericho, but security chief Muhammad Dahlan insisted that Ramallah should be one of the two cities, and therefore there was no agreement. that that's on the side of deployment. As far as the other practical measures. It's a case of what's supposed to be, Israel supposed to have agreed to admit 18,000 Palestinians day laborers through the various checkpoints. I think that's a significant development. A question of course, is how many really came across, I can't count them. But for the first time, I saw a vehicle with a Palestinian license plate on the road between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem yesterday. That may mean something. Also, Israel has agreed to release 600 prisoners. They have not actually been released physically but they're up for release and then the releases will take place, I assume very shortly. As far as the wall is concerned, that's another story. I'm sure we'll go through it in greater detail later.

Stuart Loory 05:17

Tamara Wittes, we have two different points of view, a Palestinian point of view that there is no progress, and Israeli point of view that there has been significant progress. How does it look in Washington?

Tamara Wittes 05:31

Well, I think the two perspectives you just heard illustrate one of the real difficulties of getting this process going again, which is that there's a lot of discussion of quality of life. For Israelis, that means security. For Palestinians, it means freedom of movement, the ability to start rebuilding their society and economy. But what no one is talking about in these initial confidence building measures, is demonstrating good faith. The Palestinians may see some roadblocks removed but they still are not convinced that this Israeli government is serious about giving them a viable state. On the Israeli side, they see a ceasefire, they feel a little bit freer to go out. But they're still not convinced that this Palestinian government is serious about tackling the terrorism problem. And therefore, they don't have a lot of faith in their security if the Palestinians gain an independent state. So, at the fundamental level, there's still a crisis of confidence between the two sides.

Stuart Loory 06:28

And how is the Bush administration operating in all of this? Is it doing the correct things, do you think?

Tamara Wittes 06:36

I think it's been very helpful in getting the two sides talking again, which has really been the most significant development of the last few weeks that they're meeting regularly and they're discussing these issues. And the question of the separation fence, I think, comes very much under the issue of a crisis of confidence. The Palestinians are saying that the construction of this barrier precludes absolutely the establishment of a viable contiguous Palestinian state. And so for them, this isn't an interim issue. It's not a security issue. It's an issue as to whether the Israelis are serious about this peace process or not. That's why they push the issue so hard. And I think that's why the President has raised some concerns about the fence with the Israeli.

Stuart Loory 07:21

Jay, the the fence also has the problem of being constructed to a great extent in Palestinian territory. and the Palestinians, as I understand it, are concerned that only means the Israelis are going to try to change borders before any final settlements. What about that?

Jay Bushinsky 07:45

Well come you know, it's a problem basically, is who started, what caused it that has to do with every situation, whether it's the difficulties that the Palestinians face at the roadblocks or the military checkpoints or whether the fact that the laborers were not allowed to cross for so many months that there were over 100,000 coming in more than hundred 50,000 coming in before the second than the first Intifada began. So, the question always is, well, who started? Is it the Israelis have been moving in on the Palestinians? First, for some reason to make their life more and more miserable? Or is it the Palestinians who've done things to antagonize or terrify the Israelis and therefore they, they have been experiencing these reactions. I would like to just point out one thing, the fence went up by popular demand. It started in the northeast, where there were attacks on settlements, that is that post 1967

sentiments, but pre-1967 settlements, where the farmers demanded that the government put up a barrier and they began to put it up on their own without government funding until finally the government broke down and started building this fence or wall. If you take a close look at it. By the way, it looks more like a wall but it is a fence but the Israelis don't like to admit that it's a wall. And that's a subject of semantics and debate. However, since the suicide bombing campaign, the government went after this wall even more determinedly and the feeling in Israel was something's got to be done to keep these suicide bombers out, hence the wall. Now in the middle of the construction phase, the peace process is renewed. The question is, should they stop building the wall on the assumption that there will be peace? Or should they go on building the wall on the hunch that might be it may not work out, and then they'll be facing the suicide bombing problem again. And in fact, there were two suicide bombing attempts in the past two weeks. So, that which were foiled by the Israeli secret service, so therefore there could be good reason to go ahead and keep building that fence.

Stuart Loory 09:47

Sam Bahour you think that the Palestinians are going to have any succession in bringing the fence down?

Sam Bahour 09:57

Absolutely, we will, I mean, I think that one needs to understand keep in mind that we're not in a marital dispute or a labor dispute with my Israeli neighbors, there needs to be a baseline for an equitable relationship between us. And regardless of what mistakes were made to make us reach to this point, I think that the baseline is international law and human rights. The baseline is that settlements, for example, are illegal and therefore must be dismantled. And the same applies to the wall. Building a wall on a land that is not yours is like the state's putting a wall around Mexico and saying why there was popular demand to do so. Popular demand to me something very, very serious. If we start using it for justification for abusing human rights. There was popular demand in Europe for anti semitism. There was popular demand at the beginning of the building of the United States for slavery. There was popular demand in South Africa for apartheid, popular demand to me does not constitute any kind of baseline for two parties to be able to build an equitable relationship. international law does, and I think that's where we need to start building from.

Stuart Loory 11:04

Sam, you say human rights, but the ultimate human rights is the right to life. And how can we talk about human rights when terrorism, killing of Israeli citizens is such a major aspect of the Palestinian drive toward autonomy and freedom.

Sam Bahour 11:32

Unfortunately, the terrorism is also in the settlements against Palestinians, the 2000-and-so Palestinians that have died within two years is a tragic incident as well. Terrorists need to be stopped and dismantled, both in the Israeli communities and the Palestinian community. And I think until we realize that we cannot equate the occupy with the occupied in as a starting point for a solution. Yes, we need both sides to take steps to omit terrorism from one societies, from our mindsets and from anything we do, however, in the meantime, the issue that terrorism exists in the world can never be a justification to occupy another people forever. So, I think that the beginning studies, the end the occupation, respect

human rights on both sides, and those that do violate human rights, and those that do violate the right to life need to be prosecuted, whether they're Palestinian, whether they're the Israelis, or whether they're somebody from Michigan that blew up the Oklahoma State Building, every terrorist needs to be prosecuted to the land of the law.

Jay Bushinsky 12:35

I just want to say some things if I could, the most important thing is this. Not every Israeli is in favor of the wall and that every Israeli is in favor of the settlements. But that doesn't make any difference if that if those people who are against those things happen to go in for a cup of coffee or stop at a shopping mall. They too may be blown up by a young woman or a young man with explosives around their waist. So, that kind of tactic is not exactly so we say, fair play. And it's not something that people can just shrug off and say, well, we commit terrorism, you commit terrorism. I'm not going to argue the question whether the settlements are the equivalent of suicide bombings and therefore a form of terrorism. That's another question. The other minor point I'd like to raise before I get off, is simply to remind you, Sam, that the West Bank was not taken from the Palestinians in 1967. The Palestinians didn't have it in 1967. Unfortunately, perhaps for them, but they didn't have it. Jordan had it, Israel took it from Jordan, because Jordan opened fire on Israel, even when Israel urged you're not open fire the short, King was saying that nothing would happen to him if he stayed out of the Six Day War, which turned into the 16 day war. The Palestinians then found themselves under Israeli occupation and then the issue of the status of the Palestinians, Palestinian nationhood, and aspirations came on the international stage. So, I think we should keep everything in perspective Israel did go into take it away from the Palestinian, that's for sure.

Sam Bahour 14:01

I would love to have another program where we can speak history. But I do agree in your beginning of your statement. We are, yes, everyone has the right to go to a shopping center. So, I invite you to put your hand in my hand, and let's destroy the conditions that allow people to have terrorism as a tactic.

Jay Bushinsky 14:22

Sam, if I took you to the Island shopping center outside Tel Aviv, you'd be blown up with me if a suicide bomber happens to come by at the same time, that wouldn't be politically acceptable to me.

Tamara Wittes 14:36

I think this this back and forth actually gets that one of the big key efforts underway in the current initiative between the Israeli government the Palestinians and and the US and the quartet, which is to isolate those on both sides who hold extremist positions and those who are willing to back up his extremist positions with violence. I think What the new Palestinian Prime Minister has been trying very hard to do within his own community, and it's a very difficult struggle, is to isolate the extremists to isolate those who've been carrying out terrorism and say, this is not, a legitimate part of our strategy. And this is not the path we're going to take. So, you have a choice to make, you can either abandon this path and stay as part of the Palestinian National Movement, or you can continue this path and we're going to have to spit you out. Rabin actually began to do this in the early years of the Oslo process. He ran up a lot against a lot of domestic opposition and eventually, sadly resulted in his

assassination. But this is a struggle on both sides to isolate and cast out. Those who oppose any kind of negotiated compromise.

Sam Bahour 15:44

I agree fully with you Tamara. I also would like to note that unfortunately, it was an Israeli extremist that killed Rabin but we don't find the Israeli government building a wall around this person, city. Building walls, building apartheid system on an already very, very sensitive conflict can only engage more violence. We need to stop the cycle of violence. And that's what I'm hoping that we can start from.

Stuart Loory 16:07

Sam, I think it was yesterday that Representative Tom DeLay, the House majority leader, said in Israel, that responsibility for peace rested with the Palestinians and the Palestinians had to change their ways. How was that greeted in Palestine? and What effect did that have on Palestinian attitudes toward the United States?

Sam Bahour 16:37

I think it was greeted just like any other superficial comment from a politician trying to lay blame on one side or the other. Anyone who have and, I didn't hear the comments. So, I can't go into detail but anyone who has any kind of in depth understanding of the conflict, understands that it's not one person one side did something and the other side has to pay the price for it. There are mistakes making history that's for another program. But for today, it's not the responsibility of one party. However, having said that, there's not an equal responsibility as well. There needs to be an application of international standards. I call it international law of human rights as a starting point. If the starting point is just our popular demand, I would fear that many, many new conflicts will arise tomorrow and the world is popular demand is going to guide the way we solve conflicts, there needs to be a baseline internationally guided baseline that allows us to start occupation happens to be illegal. The United States itself has said settlements are illegal. We need to stop illegal actions if we're going to start building confidence.

Stuart Loory 17:44

I know you have to go but I will give you the last word on this issue.

Jay Bushinsky 17:49

I just want to say are you implying that the occupation by the United States of Iraq is illegal?

Sam Bahour 17:56

I think both are illegal, personally.

Jay Bushinsky 17:59

I beg your pardon?

Sam Bahour 18:01

I believe any occupation of a foreign country is illegal in my point of view.

Jay Bushinsky 18:04

And that the occupation of Germany by the United States after World War II was illegal?

Sam Bahour 18:09

We can discuss history with another program. We're talking about the Israeli occupation, military occupation for the last 35 years in Gaza strip in East Jerusalem.

Stuart Loory 18:18

Okay, I'm sorry, but we do have to break this discussion off right now. This is Global Journalist on KBIA. I'm Stuart Loory. We'll be right back. Welcome back to Global Journalist, you may listen to this program again, ask questions or make comments by going to www.globaljournalist.org or in mid Missouri by calling us at 573-882-9641. Well, let's go now from the Middle East to a somewhat actually a much more frivolous story. And that is the story of the attempts to introduce international football, that is soccer in American terms here in the United States. We have exhibition matches going on in a tour between Manchester United, the New York Yankees of international football and Juventus of Turin, Italy, also a very, very strong team in the United States. Let's start with Steve Goff of The Washington Post. Steve, is this having any impact? And do you look forward to the day when you were covering major matches in the United States on a regular basis?

Steve Goff 19:44

Yeah, I think it's definitely having an impact. There's a lot of soccer fans in this country. The sport certainly has a cult following. It's gained more wide, mainstream acceptance. And I mean, it's not just Manchester United in the event, this AC Milan is here, Celtic of Glasgow Scotland is here. And so, you know, Barcelona is here from Spain, the seven teams here some of seven of the biggest names and international soccer. And it's certainly gaining a lot of attention in the cities where it's where it's being played.

Stuart Loory 20:21

And there have been attempts over the years to develop a world class soccer league. And they haven't really panned out. What has changed that is make that is going to make this more possible now?

Steve Goff 20:38

I think Major League Soccer is slowly growing, it's the league that averages about 15,000 fans per game. In some ways, it's done well, in some ways it hasn't. I think what they need to do is spend more money on better players and that will attract bigger crowds. At the moment it's a very modest league with stars from Central America and many of the American stars who did well at the World Cup in Asia last year, but if they want to take the next step up and draw bigger crowds and become more of an international presence, they're going to have to spend the money and get some of the stars that we're now seeing pass through here. Unfortunately, just for one or two games, during these exhibition tours,

Stuart Loory 21:24

Mike Woitalla, do you see any possibility that the money is going to become available?

Mike Woitalla 21:29

Well, you know, I gotta say that you when you talk about introducing international soccer to the United States, as if it's something new is a little bit inaccurate, because you have to remember that we've had the incredibly successful soccer events in the United States. For years and years and years now, the 1994 World Cup had 3.5 million fans come to it in the United States. And that was the big the best attended World Cup ever and it still is. The 1988 Olympic Games were the best attended sport Soccer was visited tennis court at that at those Olympic Games. And every time there's a big event, a big soccer event in the United States attendance grow to draw huge crowds now, it's true MLS averages about 15,000 fans per game, which doesn't sound like a lot, but you know, that's pretty much what most leagues in Europe if you don't count the big ones like Spain, Germany, Italy and England draw but the MLS final last year drew more than 60,000 fans. So, you know, I think soccer is a lot bigger than the United States and people than people give it credit for being.

Stuart Loory 22:34

And Oliver Thompson what do you think?

Oliver Thompson 22:39

Well, I think that there's been a definite growth in the past sort of five years and MLS, isn't doing that badly when we hear over here that an MLS has got 15,000 average attendance. I mean, there's plenty of leagues in Europe who be extremely proud of that sort of getting that sort of number three of the gates into what the, what this tour is doing from United a new Juventus and Barcelona, I mean, these are big clubs. Selling out as far as I understand that wherever they play, and if the people who are going to those games is just a small percentage of the people who are going to those games, get the book start going to MLS games then you know, that's, the first little bit of it crack. Because once you get people going to watch domestic football, that's where the strength both the international team soccer across the states is going to kind of come from.

Mike Woitalla 23:33

Actually they can throw something in there. In a way this tour though, with this tour is obviously great for soccer the United States because it gives it more attention but it's also competition for Major League Soccer. I would say that one of the biggest problems in Major League Soccer has is that there is so much soccer available in the United States right now. For example on TV, with small dish or digital cable, a soccer fan can watch games of every major league in the world without leaving his living room in the United States. So, what you have here is you have a league that's trying to get fans to come to the stadium now these soccer fans and we have plenty of soccer fans. We have enough soccer fans United States for this league average 30,000 the game, but these same soccer fans have a choice on Saturdays do they sit home they can if they're Mexican Americans, if they're fans of the Mexican League, they can actually see every single Mexican league game on TV. So, the league's challenge and Steve talked about this earlier, is to put a product on the field that will make people want to go and watch Major League Soccer instead of maybe watch Chivas in club America at home or watch Manchester United in the Premier League game. You know, we get Premier League games on TV. There's so much soccer available here that that soccer competes with itself.

Steve Goff 24:47

Yeah, Mike's right and last night for instance, in Washington, AC Milan, the European champion, played Barcelona, and it's a Wednesday night in the middle of the summer with ridiculous ticket prices, and 45,000 people showed up. And I mean, these people love the game of soccer. And certainly a lot of people came down from New Jersey and Philadelphia area and some from New York. But you know, this was a very diverse crowd. It was an ethnic audience. It was Anglo audience. It was young, it was all it was an incredible crowd. And MLS has challenges to attract these people that go, that will come out for these big time games to MLS games at the same time. But at the moment, if they have a choice, oftentimes, as Mike said, they're choosing to watch on TV, either domestically, or just saving their money for big event.

Stuart Loory 25:45

Is the game of soccer going to have to be adapted in any way to the needs of commercial television in the United States to be successful?

Oliver Thompson 25:55

Now, you know, we've done that already earlier there's something incredible happened. That was in 1994. They started showing soccer games in the United States without commercial interruption during the two 45 minute halves. Now, unless you're watching public television, there is no TV available in the United States or except for maybe HBO, where you can go 45 minutes without commercial interruption. They actually made this adjustment because they figured out TV people, the soccer powers that be that it's impossible to watch soccer with commercial interruptions, you know, back in the NFL days, we had a league worth with Pele and Beckenbauer and they were a crowd of 70,000, a giant stadium. And ABC started showing soccer games in the first game they showed they missed the goal because they went to a commercial break. But we got beyond that, you know, I think the the sponsors have realized that having their little logo next to the score on the top left hand corner, isn't that bad and you can do graphics and things like that. So, the good news is that American television has adjusted to soccer and not the other way around.

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Stuart, you have one minute please.

Stuart Loory 26:58

Okay. Steve Goff would you would you just take a couple of seconds to talk about the impact of television and how their television and soccer will get along?

Steve Goff 27:11

I think they're getting along pretty well as Mike said that they worked out a way to show the games on interrupted which is unheard of in an American sport. And but certainly the soccer needs to take advantage of television in the sense of finances and once there's a demand to see the game on TV, and they can colleagues can start making money.

Stuart Loory 27:34

Steve, I'm sorry, but we are out of time. Our guests today have been Jay Bushinsky of WINS radio in Israel, Sam Bahour a freelance journalist in Ramallah, Palestine, Tamara Wittes of the US Institute of

Peace in Washington, Oliver Thompson of Megasoccer.com in London, Mike Voitalla editor of Soccer America in Oakland, California, and again in Washington, Steve Goff, of The Washington Post. Our director is Pat Akers, and our producers Yusuf Kalyango and Sarah Katan for all, I'm Stuart Loory, Global Journalists will be back next week.