

Global Journalist: Investigators Dig Into The Bombing Of An Israeli Hotel In Mombasa; Saddam Hussein Claims No Weapons Of Mass Destruction

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Abstract: In this Dec. 5, 2002 episode of Global Journalist, host Stuart Loory interviews three journalists about two different news items of the day – the bombing of an Israeli-owned hotel in Mombasa, Kenya, and the claims by Saddam Hussein that Iraq has no weapons of mass destruction.

Host: Stuart Loory

Guests:

- [Danna Harman, Africa correspondent for The Christian Science Monitor](#)
- [Betsy Pisik, United Nations correspondent for The Washington Times](#)
- [Jay Bushinsky, Israeli correspondent for New York's WYNS Radio](#)

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SPEAKERS

Stuart Loory, Danna Harman, Betsy Pisik, Jay Bushinsky

Stuart Loory 00:07

Welcome to Global Journalists 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. Through heat and sand to conceal them, hoping to surprise Iraqi weapons builders wherever they might be, the United Nations Weapons Inspection Team goes about its work and finds little to criticize. The

Bush Administration is not impressed. Saddam Hussein says he is doing all he can to show the world he is not stockpiling weapons of mass destruction. Kenyan and Israeli investigators dig into the bombing of an Israeli owned resort hotel in Mombasa, Kenya and the near miss of an Israeli airliner taking you off from the city. Al Qaeda claims responsibility for the slaughter. Did that terrorist group really pull off that massacre and what does that mean for the success of President Bush's war against terrorism? These are the two subjects we will talk about today. The journalists who will take part in the discussion are: in New York, Betsy Pisik, United Nations correspondent for The Washington Times in Tel Aviv, Israel. Jay Bushinsky, Israeli correspondent for New York's WYNS Radio and many other news organizations around the world. And in Nairobi, Kenya: Danna Harman, Africa correspondent for The Christian Science Monitor. Let's start in Nairobi. Donna Harman bring us up to date on this investigation. What has been accomplished so far? And what the possibilities are that they really might find the perpetrators?

Danna Harman 01:53

Well, the investigation has been going on obviously for a week. It was exactly a week ago that the, the bombing took place. Since then, Mombasa has been just swamped with investigators, Israeli Mossad people, people from the CIA, people from the Kenyan intelligence agencies. And they've been coming up with quite a lot I would say of actual evidence. They found parts of the bomb. They found parts of clothing belonging they think to the bombers, they've found people along the way, who saw the bombers, spoke to the bombers, can give descriptions of them. They found the casings of the missiles that were shot up at the, at the charter airplane in a little valley near the airport. And so basically, they've collected a lot of information. They've also detained a whole bunch of people, some Somali, some Pakistanis, they actually early on detained an American and her Spanish husband as well. But those people have already been let out. And they're pulling together all the evidence. I think there's some problems between the different investigative groups whose turf is it, who's taking control, etc, etc. And I think that despite all this stuff that they found, they haven't been able yet to conclusively tie it to al Qaeda, which is their hunch that this is Al Qaeda operation. But but that's what they're looking at.

Stuart Loory 03:12

Al Qaeda says it did it. Everybody thinks that al Qaeda was involved, and yet they haven't been able to tie it to that organization. I thought I read somewhere that the, the missile tubes that they found had serial numbers on them showing that they were related to an attack in Saudi Arabia on American forces. They're a couple of years ago. Is that so?

Danna Harman 03:37

That is correct. And that basically is the biggest piece of evidence directly tying it to al Qaeda. You're exactly right. That's what happened. And the other-- and the other thing that's what's happened is just the other day, Al Qaeda or someone from the organization posted a claim of responsibility on the internet. And experts have looked at this and find this to be credible. So I mean, it's not like there's no evidence at all, it's just that they're digging digging for more.

Stuart Loory 04:02

Jay Bushinsky, Mossad is very obviously involved in this investigation. Suppose Israelis come up with some good information that might stimulate thought of a retaliatory attack by Israel in Kenya. Is that a possibility?

Jay Bushinsky 04:26

Well, not necessarily in Kenya because the Israelis are very interested in maintaining the good relations which exists between the two countries. The Kenyans might resent any kind of Israeli initiative of that kind, but I think that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has given instructions to his agents to track down the perpetrators elsewhere in the world, anywhere else in the world, and deal with them accordingly. That's exactly-- excuse me-- what was done after the Olympic massacre in Munich when the former prime minister the late Golda Meir told the agents of those days of the Mossad that she wants every one of the men responsible to be eliminated, and they were.

Stuart Loory 05:07

What is the feeling about the investigation in Israel. Is it going along well?

Jay Bushinsky 05:16

Well, we don't get reports from the Mossad or from the Prime Minister's Office, which is responsible for the Mossad. In keeping with the Israeli tradition. There certainly have been no leaks. There have been no journalistic disclaimers or criticism of the way in which being-- it's being handled. I think there's a total confidence here that whatever can be done to find out who is responsible and where they're based. I think the assumption is that that will be done and successfully.

Stuart Loory 05:48

Yeah. Betsy Pisik, this story is only a week old. And yet I get the feeling that interest in it around the world and particularly in this country, is not as great as one might expect.

Betsy Pisik 06:05

Well, I'm not sure if that's true, but if it is, it's probably because there is so much competition for American ears and eyes right now. We have a looming war with Iraq, possibly including the call up of reservists. There is the Christmas season upon us. And this isn't the sort of thing that is... it's it's not so easy to bring this home to Americans who might not be able to find Mombasa on the map, and, frankly, can't quite keep track of a lot of the different bombing situations that the Israelis go through. But having said that, and regretting it, I would say that I think there is a lot of interest in this. It's... if you can tie al Qaeda to another attack, you might be able to find some more evidence, you might be able to bring some people to justice, climb it slightly up the chain. And I think that is something that Americans are following at least in the abstract. Maybe not in the day to day, certainly not as closely as they are in Israel or, or in Kenya, but I think it is something that Americans are aware of and are worried about.

Stuart Loory 07:10

Danna Herman, are there many journalists who have come to Kenya to cover this story who don't normally live there?

Danna Harman 07:19

Um, no, not many. I would say other journalists from perhaps... a lot of the journalists who aren't Africa might be based in Johannesburg. Some of those came up for the event. A lot of people were out of town at the time, I must say I myself was in South Africa. I know that the New York Times and a lot of the British papers were in Nigeria where there were riots going on, a different story there. There are not that many of us really that full time cover the continent and we were spread out at the time of the bombing. Of course, everyone came back here and is now here, but it's a small group of people who cover these stories to begin with a no not too many people have come in from the outside.

Stuart Loory 07:55

Tell us...

Jay Bushinsky 07:56

This is Jay Bushinsky. I'd just like to interject here that the focus of interest here is what to do to safeguard airliners. And whether there, there's a way to do it. The Israelis have revealed some of the devices that they've developed and the fact that they're developing a brand new system, which would deflect missiles fired from the ground by simply distracting the missiles by by putting up alternate sources of heat, which would thereby throw them off course. There are other means electronic means which we've not been told about in detail, but the focus is that here is that, it's a threat that faces Israeli civil aviation, but civil aviation all over the world. And the assumption is that the international community will have to face up to this a problem. It's expensive, but it's certainly cheaper than losing an entire aircraft and especially the value of the human cargo.

Stuart Loory 08:51

Jay, I think I saw a story somewhere that said the the cost would be about \$10 million an airplane.

Jay Bushinsky 08:59

No, I heard-- the latest figures I heard. Well, the highest figure I heard was 2 million per Boeing for the new system that's being developed by the Israeli weapons development authority. A one and a half million for the existing systems.

Stuart Loory 09:13

Yeah. Danna Harmon one of the things that has been mentioned in the papers here is that the airport security in Kenya is not as good as it is elsewhere in the world. Is that so?

Danna Harman 09:30

I contend what you're comparing it to. It's not as good as it is say in the United States. But then again, look at the good what's happened with our security in the United States in the past, in the past, in the recent past. No, it's not fantastic. I mean, there's been times where I've walked out onto a runway and no one said anything to me. Of course, it's better than other places in Africa, actually. There's some places where I mean there's barely an airport. And the United States is aware of this problem, I think has invested money and time in trying To help some of these countries in particular Kenya, beef up its security at its airport as well as at its ports, which is another problem. And the borders here basically are very poor. So if you weren't flying into the country, you could just walk across the border really from Somalia, from... well from a lot of the neighboring countries.

Stuart Loory 10:18

I think President Daniel Arap Moi is meeting with President Bush in Washington today or tomorrow. Is the Mombasa situation likely to come up in those discussions?

Danna Harman 10:34

Oh, there's no doubt about it. The, the meeting was planned well before the attack. Well, before anyone knew about the attack. But anyway, the meeting was going to be in part about security. America and Kenya have very close ties. There are American soldiers right here at the moment, carrying out joint exercises with Kenyan military on the coast of Kenya. And I think Kenya has really served as a base for Americans in the region and region which they find to be on friendly. There are groups in Somalia and in Sudan who are on the US list of terror organizations. These are two very close neighbors of Kenya. And so a lot of the American bases of operation when they're looking out at the region, which they find unfriendly are in Kenya, and there's close cooperation on that. Those are some of the issues I'm sure they're going to be talking about today in Washington.

Stuart Loory 11:22

Is there anything that Kenya can do to help the United States out in the possible war against Iraq? Danna?

Danna Harman 11:32

That's a good question. Yes, yes, I'm saying that's a good question. I think that... I mean, they would like to. Certainly the Kenyan government and Moi in particular, is very happy with his close relations with the United States and would like to back America in any way they can. I mean, like I said, they offered... there are soldiers here, there are these joint exercises. I don't know what else exactly they could offer in in a war against Iraq, but I think that they would probably willing to do most anything.

Betsy Pisik 12:02

I have a quick question for Donna, if I can break in?

Stuart Loory 12:05

Sure.

Betsy Pisik 12:05

Um, I'm wondering, is this likely to have any kind of impact on the elections? Is this much of a political issue yet?

Danna Harman 12:14

Yeah, that's also a really good question we have we're having elections here in Kenya on the 27th of December. And I mean, Moi has been in power for decades. And this is the first time that he's stepping down now. Constitutionally, he can't run again. So, so these are really big, important elections in the country. There hasn't been too much of an overlap between the story-- this terror story and the political election story. I mean, for for weeks and months, almost the papers have been only filled with politics. And then there was about a four day hiatus where everything was only filled with the terror attacks. And

now we're only filled again with politics. So there hasn't been too much of a crossover. I don't think it's going to affect too much as far as I can tell right now.

Stuart Loory 12:54

There is also a growing political problem in Israel and elections coming up there. Jay, what about this story? Is it gonna have any effect there?

Jay Bushinsky 13:07

Well, yes and no. I'm sure Danna will agree with me because she covered Israel and worked here for quite a while and it knows the country intimately-- that Mr. Sharon was elected as Mr. Security. Past two years, as you will certainly agree, have not been years of security for the people of Israel and, events such as those that have happened in, in Kenya, and the fact that Israelis now feel threatened everywhere in the world, and no place seems to be safe for them. That's the state of mind in this country. That doesn't do much for Sharon's image, and he will have to see whether he can come up with proof that under his leadership, Israel will once again be relatively secure.

Stuart Loory 13:53

Okay, let's take a break now. We'll pick up on that point Jay and move on from there when we come back. 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. Let's move on to Iraq and the possibility of a military action against that country. Saddam Hussein just a few hours ago made a speech in which he said that the Iraqis had no weapons of mass destruction. And he wanted to prove that to the United Nations weapons inspectors and the United States to safeguard his people. Betsy Pisik. What do you think-- is there any credibility to the statement?

Betsy Pisik 15:01

So well, I hate to quote any particular government, but the Bush administration will undoubtedly receive this with a degree of skepticism and probably open mocking. They have dismissed every effort in the past by Baghdad to try to come clean. And just to put a little scientific perspective on that, you remember that it's impossible to prove a negative.

Stuart Loory 15:25

Oh yes.

Betsy Pisik 15:27

Yeah, the inspectors hate it when when Iraq says we have nothing, come in and prove that we have nothing because it's impossible to prove nothing, you can only prove something. This is something that the Iraqis have seized on that everyone else is tacitly aware of. All that the inspectors can do is walk around and eventually find something. Or the expectation is that this final and full declaration that Iraq is supposed to provide over the weekend might in fact, provide them with something of a blueprint. Proof that things, prescribed weapons, that intelligence knows that Iraq has, Iraq can show "Yes, we've had it, but we've destroyed it. And here's the proof". Then, and I don't know what kind of proof would be

considered acceptable, but that would be a way to move forward to build some trust. But right now, no trust, no hope of trust as far as it looks from here.

Stuart Loory 16:22

Betsy, you worked in Iraq. Give me some idea of what is going on with inspections of some places like presidential palaces. Who is that inspection all about the other day?

Betsy Pisik 16:36

Oh, well, I wasn't there during a period of weapons inspections. So I have no real knowledge of that firsthand. But we've been following this really closely. Anyone who's ever worked in Iraq is, is marveling at the the access that these reporters and for that matter the inspectors have right now. Those... no, to my knowledge, no one goes into those palaces. The only exception I can think of prior to this was during the allied bombing, when Iraq opened, the government invited people in and Iraqis were encouraged to bring their whole families and sleep on the floors of the palaces and so called protect their leader. This happened during '98, during the bombings in December, and also, I think, during portions of the Gulf War. Aside from that, these palaces are pretty much off limits. And these photographs that we've seen, I think an Iraqi camera crew was invited along, and that film was was put out by AP TV. And it was fascinating because you know that these things are opulent. But this was the first indication I think that we've seen of the scale of these things. Whether there's germs and plague hiding in the marmalade jars, you know, I would be doubting it. But it's certainly possible that things could be stored in those facilities or some of the buildings that aren't quite clad in marble and topped with gold might actually be some kinds of production facilities. You don't know.

Stuart Loory 18:03

Jay and Betsy, you are both experienced journalists. You both read the stories about how these inspectors went about their job in the presidential palace. It didn't seem to me from the stories that I read that they were really interested in trying to find anything. They just sort of wandered around. They had no equipment with them, no marmalade jar monitors, nothing.

Betsy Pisik 18:28

Yeah, I think that was just a way of showing that they could. Kind of kind of testing to see if the door was going to open, and it did. I suspect that if they have any reason to go back, they will and this time, they'll go directly to what they are expecting to look at, and they will bring the appropriate equipment. I think this first one was just to kind of knock on the door and see what happens.

Stuart Loory 18:50

Jay, how was this story handled in Israel? Was there any....?

Jay Bushinsky 18:53

Well, we have to of course recall that this country was on the firing line during the Gulf War. Back in 1991, 39 of the Scud missiles, which were fired in this direction actually landed here in the country and caused damage. Fortunately, there were no direct casualties, but there were indirect casualties and indirect fatalities, including a four year old child. The Israeli assumption, I would say, the man of the street-- and I've heard this again and again from people-- is that if a war starts, Israel's going to be hit

again. Seems the Israelis find it hard to believe that Saddam may not have enough of an inventory to resume the launching of his Scud missiles and of course, many people are afraid of the unconventional warheads that might be attached to them. The officials have been distributing booklets with information on what to do in the event of biological or chemical attack. People are of course of preparing their underground shelters and checking out their gas masks that protective masks are replacing them with new ones. So there is, I would say an awareness here of the danger that could that could result from the American onslaught getting underway with Israel as the scapegoat.

Stuart Loory 20:16

The feeling here in the United States is that the Bush administration really does want to strike Iraq. Betsy, is that as strong a possibility now as it was before the before the weapons inspections began?

Betsy Pisik 20:34

Well, if you just listen to the public statements that are coming out of most of the corners of Washington, it would have to be yes. Every time there is an opportunity to do so. I mean, every day actually on every campaign stop on on every public appearance. President Bush, the cabinet secretaries, they, they come out with hard statements, provocative statements, you know, "Once a cheater, always a cheater. A week of cooperation is nothing compared to 11 years of defiance." It's, it doesn't sound as though they are expecting this to work out any other way. What's interesting at the United Nations at least is how this determination from Washington is, is swamping other diplomatic efforts, sometimes completely unrelated. And it's also complicating their efforts to maintain this council unity on the whole question of Iraq. There have been some actions in the Security Council at some point, the Americans are going to have to go back and say, "this is a material breach of the resolution. We want to go in, this has serious consequences. It's time it's time for the war, and we want your blessing." Perhaps they won't. But if they do, they will have a lot easier time of building up Arab and regional support for an air war or a ground war. And they're going to meet an awful lot of resistance in the council front because of some of these statements.

Jay Bushinsky 21:58

You know, it's Jay again and I just I'd say...

Stuart Loory 22:00

Go ahead Jay.

Jay Bushinsky 22:00

...that it's having a direct effect on Israel's response to intermittent acts of terrorism. In effect, it's been staying Prime Minister Sharon's hand. Whatever Israel has done in the face of suicide bombings, or ambushes or whatever has taken into account to the impact that an excessive use of force might have on the Bush administration's effort to rally the Arab world to its side. The Israelis don't want to be the spoilers. They don't want to give the impression that the Israelis should be dealt with first or that the United States should reconsider its sympathy with Israel or support for Israel. So it's had that effect and even at the political level, you've just had this statement by Prime Minister Sriram that he would consent to the establishment of a Palestinian state which eliminates a sore points in a way in the regional debate. I think that that's partly attributable to the fact that the Israelis really want to stay back

and not appear to be catalysts or parties to this conflict, but rather to just let it unfold in the hope that the results will be to their best interest.

Stuart Loory 23:18

Jay, what would be to Israel's best interest would an attack on Iraq be in Israel's best interest?

Jay Bushinsky 23:26

Well, frankly, I'd have to say, yes, because of what I heard with my own ears at this very prestigious conference on national security that just ended in (Hert Salea?) on the Mediterranean Sea coast where the former chief of the Mossad Efraim Halevy, who is now the head of the National Security Council-- you might say he's Israel's Condoleezza Rice-- said Israel can benefit greatly by an American success and military success against Iraq and by the American elimination of the incumbent Baghdad regime. He said that it would have a salutary effect on the peace process in the region. It would be positive in terms of the political orientation of the various Arab states and political parties within the Arab world, and even in the Islamic world, because the Israelis consider Saddam a menace, especially if you just take one example the fact that he has been subsidizing the families of suicide bombers to the tune of \$25,000 per family per suicide bomber.

Stuart Loory 24:27

Yeah. But, Jay, would, would removal of Saddam have any effect beyond the the presumably the lack of those \$25,000 payments on Palestinian terrorism?

Jay Bushinsky 24:42

Well, yes, because he supports Palestinian terrorism. He supports the Arab Liberation Front, which is one of the groups that operate in this country. More important than that, it of course, is to consider who will come into power in the aftermath. If it is a democratic group of one kind or another, such as the Iraqi National Congress, then I think Iraq's priorities will change. I've done some work as a journalist in, in interviewing people from the Iraqi opposition. And they've told me consistently that if they took over Baghdad, the domestic problems faced by Iraq, what they call the neglect over the years of its real problems by this Saddam Hussein regime would take priority over anything else, and that Iraq would effectively remove itself from the anti-Israel coalition.

Betsy Pisik 25:34

I would like to respectfully offer a second opinion.

Stuart Loory 25:38

Please do.

Betsy Pisik 25:40

With all respect, I think that's an incredibly optimistic scenario. There's not exactly a Jefferson that's, that anyone's identified that can come forward and lead Baghdad to a swift and bloodless democracy. Given what we have seen in the region in history, in tradition, there's absolutely nothing to suggest that this would happen easily or painlessly and I don't see where the United Nations or the United States or the Europeans or anyone else would have the resources or the patience to see that through. The Iraqi

National Congress is desperate for power, but I don't know what kind of support or, or credibility they have inside Baghdad. I'm not even sure what kind of genuine credibility they have with the people or the -- excuse me -- , the governments that would be supporting them in theory. Taking that another step further, if you look at the obvious successors to Saddam, and no one knows what's going to happen, but the Bush administration has repeatedly said that regime change is their goal. Would it be one of Saddam's bloodthirsty sons, no better than the father? Would it be one of the generals that we may or may not already know about? Not likely to be a better place. Furthermore, you've got incredible social unrest just below the surface. Severe, widespread displacement along racial and ethnic lines, lots of scores to settle. I think that once the incredibly repressive regime is lifted, all hell's gonna break loose and that is possibly me just being pessimistic and I hope that's the case. I like Jay's scenario much better, but I'm not really optimistic.

Stuart Loory 27:24

Okay, Jay, excuse me, if I may. We have 15 seconds left. I would like to ask each of you for your prediction of whether or not there will be a war against Iraq. Betsy, you go first.

Betsy Pisik 27:40

Sadly, it feels inevitable.

Stuart Loory 27:42

Jay?

Jay Bushinsky 27:43

It looks as if there's no way to avoid it.

Stuart Loory 27:46

Well, there we are. We are out of time. Our guest today has been Danna Harman in Nairobi, Kenya; Jay Bushinsky in Tel Aviv, Israel; and Betsy Pisik in New York. Our director is Pat Akers, and our producer is Sarah Andrea Fajardo. For all, I'm Stuart Loory and Global Journalist will be back next week.