Global Journalist: Terrorism in Latin America and the Middle East

In this Jan. 24, 2002 episode of Global Journalist, host Stuart Loory and talks with reporters covering the Middle East and Latin America. They discussed the situation in Columbia, where one of the journalists on the program, Ruth Morris, was later kidnapped and briefly held by FARC.

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SPEAKERS
Stuart Loory, Ruth Morris, Glenys Sugarman, James Reynolds, Jason Hagen

Stuart Loory 00:08
Welcome to Global Journalist on KBIA. This is the program that says mid Missourians. indeed many Americans, are interested in international news. I'm Stuart Loory of the Missouri School of Journalism. All aspects of this country's war against terrorism continue to get a lot of attention, but other countries have suffered from terrorism for a far longer time. Today, we will revisit two areas of the world where terrorism is a firmly established tool of those who want to make their will known. In the Middle East, Palestinians continue their intifada and Israel continues to retaliate. So there appears to be little hope of progress toward peace. In South America's Colombia, president Andreas Pastrana appeared to make headway toward negotiating a settlement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, also
known as FARC. That settlement would help settle the civil war in his country. But as that agreement was announced, word spread that the rebels had shut down a helicopter owned by the United States State Department, and that five Colombian policemen were killed trying to rescue its crew. Can peace be brought to either of these regions? It almost seems as if this is a question that has only the grimmest answer. What are the consequences of a lack of progress for the people directly involved, or for those in the United States? These are the questions that we'll explore if not answered today. Our guests are, in Washington, Jason Hagen, a specialist on Colombia, at the Washington office on Latin America, a think tank. In Bogota Colombia, Ruth Morris, who writes for Time magazine and the Los Angeles Times. In Jerusalem, James Reynolds of the British Broadcasting Corporation, and in Tel Aviv, Glenys Sugarman of the South African broadcasting. Start with the Middle East. For both Glenys and James, is there any hope at all that the two sides the Israeli government of Ariel Sharon, and Yasser Arafat, are going to be able to achieve any progress toward a peace? James, you go first

James Reynolds 02:36
Stuart, at the moment, I have to say there's almost very little hope. I was listening to what the UN envoy was saying yesterday here, Terje Road Larson, a man who's been involved in the so called peace process here for 10 years, he said is the worst moment he's ever seen. He calls it the edge of the edge, and the brink of the brink. A lot of commentators I've been speaking to here say that there's an atmosphere of war. One Israeli commentator to newspapers said, We are on the eve of terror attacks the likes we have never seen. Most people are talking of continuation of hostilities. Very few people are talking about any sort of resolution.

Glenys Sugarman 03:17
Well, let me take just for the for argument's sake a slightly more optimistic line. I don't know whether you know, but approximately three weeks ago, the South African State President Thabo Mbeki hosted an informal meeting between an Israeli delegation and the Palestinian delegation. Now, some would say these people are not directly involved on the Israeli side, in negotiations anymore on the Palestinian side, Saeb Erekat and Zaid Abu Ziad and other prominent figures, but they took three days to sit and talk to one another and (inaudible) mistakes that had been made, and how this can be balanced and kind of balanced in the future. The South Africans came up with several ideas. One of them was don't delegitimize your opponent, which unfortunately, Mr. Sharon is doing at the moment. Because the downside of that is when you reach an agreement, you've done it with an opponent that that you say is not a legitimate person. Keep contacts: the Israelis and Palestinians are doing that. Paris apparently met with Abu Allah, I think 48 hours ago and give that each side should give the other leeway to deal with their eternal problems and the entire political spectrum of abundance that they have. So that now we seeing that Israel's speaker of the Knesset, Avraham Burg, is talking about going to talk to the Palestinian and National Assembly in Ramallah. There's a lot of controversy. We don't know who's gonna make it, but I think Burg will.

Stuart Loory 05:08
The Sharon government says that if he does that, I that he will be charged in a court with criminal charges.

Glenys Sugarman 05:21
Well, this is because all he does is represent the entire Knesset. He doesn't have immunity. So this is being worked out by the people who speak legalese at the moment.

Stuart Loory 05:34
James, do you want to step in here?

James Reynolds 05:35
Yeah, yeah, this is James. I take just just sort of why not taking the other side of the view, saying that yes, these contacts are going on Avraham Burg, the man we're talking about here is a man who just a few weeks ago, Unfortunately for him lost a candidacy lost a contest for the leadership of the Labour Party. Many people have respect for what he's doing as such as what he did in South Africa, such as what Didn't Paris. But the trouble is, in my view the moderates like him don't have the momentum here. The momentum is very much I feel controlled by people like Ariel Sharon in the Prime Minister's seats a man who for 50 years is preferred to speak with military language not with diplomatic languages. Hello is self confessed hardliners like him are in power. So long as he has approval ratings. It To me it seems that the work of the moderates will be overshadowed.

Stuart Loory 06:29
Well, not only does Sharon have the power, but he appears to grow more and more powerful and gay more and more support from the Israeli people. Is that right?

Glenys Sugarman 06:43
As the blood flows, that's definitely right. But I think the same can be said of the Palestinian side, where the moderates are not actually able to say too much at the moment.

Stuart Loory 06:55
If you consider Ariel Sharon to be a moderate. He's under pressure from both sides. He's being kept under a kind of house arrest not even in his own house in Ramallah by the Israelis. And at the same time, although he says he's trying to control terrorism, he cannot control terrorism among the Palestinian people. is Sharon right in refusing to deal with him because he is losing so much power?

James Reynolds 07:27
It's James here. It's it's difficult. It's difficult to say I remember when a statement came out in mid December after a number of attacks at three in the morning it came out saying that Ariel Sharon had decided that yes, asset was irrelevant. And this really was was a fairly ludicrous statement, because for weeks and weeks afterwards, Sharon would keep on trying not to mention him, but then he would have to mention him. I don't think you can call the other leader in the conflict here. irrelevant. Yes, if it is relevant, as is Ariel Sharon, the Maybe parts of the problems as well. But whether other people like it or not that parts of the solutions as well, because they are the leaders of their respective peoples. A lot of people here do not agree with the fact that Yes, he's been confined to Ramallah. But some people are
happier that he is now having to spend more of his time focusing on his domestic struggle and less of the time on the international struggle.

**Stuart Loory** 08:26
What is the danger that this dispute is again going to spill over into countries outside of Israel and outside of Palestinian Authority land? How about Lebanon is living on safe from a renewed involvement in this?

**Glenys Sugarman** 08:50
One, I think we saw today that Lebanon is directly involved in everything that happens here with the assassination of Former Lebanese cabinet minister and member of parliament anyone Baker. Now this kind of assassination gives rise to a tremendous amount of speculation as to who did it. abandon me for bacon met yesterday with a parliamentary delegation from Belgium and agreed to give evidence in the court case against Dario Sharon going back to 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre, on the other hand, who Baker had tremendous enemies inside Lebanon services very difficult to know. If you go to Jordan, I think they've been dealing with a lot of problems over the last two days in terms of demonstrations there as well.

**Stuart Loory** 09:46
Was the demonstrations in Jordan. For what reason against the king or what

**Glenys Sugarman** 09:53
I think to deal with some sort of story that the palace the the Palestinians claimed that one of their Palestinian had been killed by the Jordanian police. The police was saying that the man died of a kidney disease or kidney failure. And this gave rise to a lot of tension and some demonstrations over two day period. I'm not too sure what's happening there today. But we do know that the king is very worried about a spillover and conflict inside Jordan, the same can be said of Egypt.

**James Reynolds** 10:34
I take you up on the question about regional spillover. I remember in September, and in the last few years after September 11, send it off to that people were discussing this overseas every day here will the violence spillover will the lack of a Middle East sci fi impede the United States in their war in Afghanistan. We did see configuration here but it didn't see spillover the borders sometimes. I think when people predict the worst things worse things tend to stick around the borders here and not spill over to the rest of the Middle East.

**Stuart Loory** 11:11
What about the United States his involvement in trying to arrange some kind of settlement? I get the feeling that it has been pretty ineffective in recent weeks. General zini has been back and forth to the Middle East without much progress.

**James Reynolds** 11:38
Still does any issue. There is a critical issue in terms of the prism of events after September the 11th. before September the 11th. As you're well aware, the Bush administration was trying to do all it could to
stay back from getting involved in the Middle East it saw what it conceived of the mistakes of the clinton administration's micromanagement. And tried to stay back after September 11. United States we believe officials are telling us wanted to show that it was more involved in the problems of the Middle East of course it sent forth. Anthony's in his first trip was a catastrophe. He arrived during an absolute wave of violence. His second trip, there was less violence. And they were lukewarm statements then released afterwards by the State Department saying that some progress had been made serious challenges remained. He's now as far as I understand, back in Washington, with no date set for his return. He's a special envoy at the moment for the Middle East who's not in the Middle East. And I think that says something about how mediation efforts are going.

Stuart Loory 12:44
Thank you very much, James. We have to take a break now. 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.dotglobaljournalists.org or here in Missouri by calling us at 573-882-9641. Let's move now to another part of the world and that is to Latin America and particularly Colombia. Earlier this week, there was a promise of renewed negotiations between the government of Colombia and the so called FARC, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia to settle a civil war that has been raging there on and off for 37 years. I let's start with Ruth Morris in Bogota, Ruth, is there any chance that these discussions are going to take place and that they will be meaningful

Ruth Morris 13:59
Well, the discussions are taking place. They started up again yesterday. But it is another question whether they'll be meaningful or not, since the FARC, and the government agreed to sit down again, with an actual timetable for some sort of agreement on the ceasefire, there's actually been an escalation of violence in Colombia. And this has been pretty typical of the entire peace process. And the reason why it's become so frustrating to Colombians that there was no, never any ceasefire agreement before talks began two years ago. And every time the FARC wants to sort of put some pressure on at the table to start attacking infrastructure, or ambushing small towns, and that's exactly what's happening right now.

Stuart Loory 14:42
Jason Hagan in Washington, what are — what insights from which you have from outside of Columbia?

Jason Hagen 14:51
Well, I think that we have to be realistic. And if we look at recent history, we know that these negotiations, negotiations will will be very costly. Located in they will be very violent. But I think that there have been some very positive steps taken particularly the FARC agreed to sit down and talk them. So the most positive gesture they made in three and a half years during the entire restaurant administration. And most importantly, I think the international presence here is really an optimistic turned. The United un representative James Lemoine has been a very important facilitator, he seemed to run the confidence of the FARC leadership. And the Palestine administration seems to be placing a lot of faith in Him, and also the role of a number of countries or Latin American and European countries and in Canada, there's a 10 countries in total, and they've also promised to play a negotiating role. So I think this is a real positive turn. I don't expect the peace process to go smoothly. We know that that
FARC is decentralized. There's a lot of factionalism and even if certain leadership decides to talk about peace, there may be need be a lot of renegades factions which made decide to engage in terrorist activities on their own.

**Stuart Loory** 16:05
One just the impression that the only thing the United States really wants out of this is some control of the drug trade. Is that being too cynical?

**Ruth Morris** 16:17
Well definitely is. The drug trade could be controlled it would cut down on a lot of the funding for the different sides that are fighting in Colombia, not just Marxist inspired rebels but also anti communist ultra right. paramilitaries us we should note doesn't have a seat at the peace table. The US won't speak with the FARC since the FARC killed three U.S. indigenous rights activists about two and a half years ago. But, but I do also agree that having a third party at peace at the peace table has been a positive step forward

**Stuart Loory** 16:56
Several days ago FARC shut down what was described as a helicopter owned by the United States State Department. That was kind of mind boggling to me what is a State Department helicopter doing in Colombia taking part in? What is at least paramilitary operation? Jason?

**Jason Hagen** 17:22
Well, I can't comment on that particular incident. I'm not very familiar with it. But the part of the Plan Colombia, which you probably are well aware of is military assistance to the US assistance the Colombian military, in which they ship are shipping a number of Black Hawks and Kiwis in order to escort fumigation planes with the planes which are fumigating largely southern parts of southern Colombia and trying to eradicate the coca crops. And part one of the arguments for the assistance was that the rebel troops would be able to shoot down these these fumigation planes so That is the reason these officials and these players are not belonging to the Colombian government. They're officially onload. So that may be what you're referring to.

**Stuart Loory** 18:06
Well, probably the interesting part of it is the story — it's a Reuters story — describes the helicopter is owned by the State Department. But the pilot as a Peruvian and the story says that no American personnel are involved in military actions in Colombia.

**Jason Hagen** 18:29
American personnel are not permitted to engage in that type of activity. Right now, a lot of the work is being contracted out to private companies, and they are mechanics and technicians. And they do intelligence work and whatnot, but they're not permitted to fly the planes or the helicopters,

**Stuart Loory** 18:46
They sound almost like mercenaries to me.
Well, they've been described as such, a lot of them are ex — most of them are all ex, CIA and ex military and They have a very sizable contract, a lot of this done is being contracted out precisely to avoid direct us engagement, because they know that it's very bad press the United States to have US soldiers killed abroad.

I think it's worth noting also that the Colombian president, Andreas Pastrana, would like to see more US involvement not necessarily US troops in Colombia, but more training of youth Colombian unit special units that would be highly mobile, that would be protecting infrastructure like the Kenyan Amman pipeline, which is attacked almost two or three times a week, and some of the electricity pylons that have been knocked out recently. So that sort of speaks to a request here for more us oversight and involvement in Colombian domestic policy.

And right now, the current assistance the United States has given to Columbia is dedicated exclusively for counternarcotics. operations. Yet since November evidently the Pastrana administration has been soliciting more counterinsurgency assistance from the United States and the Washington Post reported just last week that there have been very high level discussions here in Washington. Looking at that possibility, and this would signal a dramatic turning us policy towards Colombia. A lot of us have suspected that the counter narcotic assistance is going in directly to counterinsurgency operations, but this will make it much more explicit and open.

Let's get back to the the 10 nations that are involved in trying to fashion a settlement there. Why is it that so many nations are involved in this process?

Well, initially it was going to wind up there from the United Nations and, and all along, there's been some talk about sort of expanding the peace table and involving more people. In it, and this reflects a need or a desire to sort of with the same Colombia's internationalize the conflict makes the world more aware of what's going on Colombia, perhaps erase some of the romantic notions that might linger in Europe about what a rebel group is in Colombia. It's not like Central America in the 80s. It's very different. These are groups that are involved in drug trafficking and kidnapping. And the idea also is to try and get the farmer to care more about how they're seen abroad and to integrate them more into the modern world is that largely peasant army, largely uneducated, and now the peace talks are going on. For example, a lot of these commanders have email addresses and CRM, chatting with journalists about international events. This also could be seen as a positive step.

Ruth, Columbia is a particularly deep dangerous place for journalists to work these days there have been many journalists killed in Colombia in the past several years, Colombian journalists most of them. What does that mean about how this story is covered locally in Colombia?
Ruth Morris  22:19
It means I don't have my mom listening to this program. I think it's mostly dangerous for the domestic press. And so far, the international press has been pretty safe. But on a local level, I think it does make a big difference. I think it makes it more difficult for journalists to really maintain objectivity. If you're talking about a journalist who's in a real remote area, they might be in an area say controlled by the fire, and they've obviously got no choice but to be talking to the fire. And then if that were area where content In paramilitaries were to come in that person might be seen as sympathetic to the FARC. And it's not just journalists, all its union leaders, it's all walks of life. You know, if you live in an area contested by the warring factions in Colombia, you you have a hard time having any kind of effective political opinion.

Stuart Loory  23:22
Kidnapping is a common hazard in Colombia for not only journalists, but as you point out for for politicians, business people, professional people, whatever. And the kidnapping appears to be a money raising technique, not necessarily a political technique. Is that right?

Ruth Morris  23:45
Yeah, kidnappings are generally economics based. That's true.

Jason Hagen  23:51
Yeah, there were 3000 kidnappings last year. Half of the world's kidnappings take place in Colombia. Two thirds of them are conducted by the two main guerrilla factions. The FLN and the FARC. Others are attributed to the paramilitary organization, the AUC, and as a lot of them done just by common common criminals, but yeah, there's a purpose is is primarily for extortion and to receive money. It's not there really, are there are their political motivations behind it.

Stuart Loory  24:17
And is it a successful fundraising technique, they raise a lot of money that way,

Jason Hagen  24:22
it seems to be very successful, that's a cause of concern for the FARC, the FARC. If the peace negotiations are going to proceed, they have committed to cease kidnapping. And one of the concerns is that that will dry up a lot of a lot of their income. And so part of the process here is to make sure that the FARC and will have another means of financing of operations, otherwise they won't be committed to talking piece.

Stuart Loory  24:47
Okay, now the FARC is a left wing movement. There is also as one of you mentioned before a growing right wing opposition in Colombia. paramilitary groups. Why are there no negotiations with the the right wing paramilitary people?

Ruth Morris  25:11
Well, if the paramilitaries were invited to the peace table, the fight would simply leave. And one of the obstacles to peace in Colombia one of the things that keeps getting stuck in the peace process is that
the FARC asked the government to crack down on the paramilitaries and do something about them. The paramilitaries have links to the militaries sort of a local level and even up into the middle range of the military hierarchy. And obviously, there can't be peace in Colombia until those links are broken.

**Stuart Loory** 25:48
If I may, we have about two minutes left. I would like to ask each of you to speculate a little bit on what you think the situation in Columbia will be like five years from now. Jason, you go first.

**Jason Hagen** 26:05
Well, in December, James LeMoyne and gave a talk here. And this is before the most recent tentative at turn of events in Colombia, of course, but he predicted a 10 to 15 year peace process. And he has been very privy to the the world that the FARC leadership Lee lives in. And he recognizes that it's going to be a very stubborn process, it may take a long time to, to convince them that that piece negotiated settlement is the best way to get the best out for all of Columbia. And, again, as it's been suggested, the paramilitary problem is an enormous one. So I'm I would like to be optimistic. But again, I would look at recent history and I think that this process will be a long, clumsy, violent process. But hopefully five years from now, there will be some progress made and at least a reduction in the violence is which is right now, so astronomical.

**Stuart Loory** 26:58
Let's give Ruth a chance.

**Ruth Morris** 27:00
Yeah, I think that in five years, I hope Columbia will be in a peace process, but it might not be the same one that could very easily be a rupture before then and then a new peace process startup and this has happened in the past in Colombia where there has to be sort of a different military balance before the rebels will have to say that peace—

**Stuart Loory** 27:21
Ruth, we are out of time. Our guests today have been in Washington, Jason Hagen in Bogota, Colombia, Ruth Mars in Jerusalem, James Reynolds, and in Tel Aviv, Glynis Sugarman, our director is Mary Furness, our producers Sarah Farjado. For all, I'm Stewart Loory. Global Journalist will be back next week.