

Global Journalist: The war on Iraq following Bush's Republican Party midterm win

Abstract: In this interview from November 7, 2002, Stuart Loory and journalists from around the globe discuss the recent victory of President George W. Bush's Republican Party in the midterm elections and its implications for the war against Iraq. Guests describe how the leaders and people of the U.K., Yemen, Japan and Peru view the Republican victory. They also talk about the weaknesses of the Iraqi army and how the Americans have been involved in the Middle East.

Host: Stuart Loory

Guests:

- [Simon Tisdall](#), London
- Faris Sarabani, Yemen
- [Michael Zielenziger](#), Tokyo
- Hugo Guerra, Peru

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Stuart Loory 00:00

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. This is an important week for international news. Russia's problems with Chechnya are deepening. Saudi Arabia's government said it will not allow American forces based there to be used to fight Iraq. The royal family in Great Britain is involved in a new controversy over the death of Diana princess of rail -- I'm sorry, the royal family in Great Britain is involved in a new controversy over the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. In Israel, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's coalition government has dissolved and he has taken on new partners. The CIA killed an Al Qaeda leader in Yemen with a missile from an unmanned airplane. But the biggest story here in the United States right now is the midterm election last Tuesday, featuring a resounding victory by President George W. Bush's Republican Party. It has widened its lead in the House of Representative, something parties in power seldom do in mid-term, and it has regained control of the Senate. How is this viewed around the world? Is it a good sign or not?

To talk about today we have as guests in London, Simon Tisdall, assistant editor of The Guardian; in Yemen, Faris Sarabani, editor and publisher of the Yemen Observer in Aden; in Tokyo, Michael Zielenziger, bureau chief there for the Knight Ridder Newspapers; and in Lima, Peru, Hugo Guerra, sub director of the newspaper El Comercio. Let's start in Europe. Simon Tisdall, does this election outcome give President Bush any greater mandate to go to war again Iraq?

Simon Tisdall 02:02

Well coming on top of the vote in Congress, which overwhelmingly supported his policy towards Iraq. And given that the Security Council appears about to endorse a resolution that United States has put forward tufton inspection regime on Iraq, the midterm elections looks like a triple whammy for that policy that it looks unstoppable now, and will go the way that Mr. Bush wants it to go. That's not to say that many people in Europe are any happier about it. A lot of concern to system and allies and general public in Britain and elsewhere. So this will make a bad situation worse.

Stuart Loory 02:42

Well you say the the general public in Britain, yet the the British government is in full support with President Bush isn't it?

Simon Tisdall 02:51

British Government is out of step with public opinion according to the latest opinion polls and in the polls going back through most of the year. The majority is here against British involvement in an attack on Iraq, most people would like to see it solved in a peaceful and diplomatic way, which has been a long standing approach. And also the ending of sanctions and there are divisions within the ruling labor party and there are divisions within Tony Blair's cabinet, perhaps is not fully appreciated how solemn Mr. Blair will become on this if the US decides to go to them without full UN authority and Britain supports it, that could well lead to his downfall.

Stuart Loory 03:32

Yeah, Hugo Guerra, how about in Peru and Latin America? What impact if any, has this election had on relations between Latin American countries in the United States?

Hugo Guerra 03:48

Well, for as intellectuals means that they're President Bush, for the...powers to deal with the implementation of the outcast and free trading agreements such as the one that he signed with the Chile. For Peru, that's the good news for President Toledo. I still remember, Toledo is very close friends with President Bush. Our main concern is about the policy on human rights and the environment. As you know, Republicans are very fast on those issues. And also, and I'm so concerned with the policies towards their...

Stuart Loory 04:41

I'm sorry, I didn't understand that last thing.

Faris Sarabani 04:45

I'm concerned about the Republicans' policies on the drug trafficking policies, I think maybe with the White House Villa...

Stuart Loory 05:05

I think we have lost Hugo Guerra. Let's go on to Tokyo. Michael Zielenziger, how are the elections being viewed there?

Michael Zielenziger 05:17

Well, I think, for the Japanese this is a big dilemma because the security issues of now, it used to be that we worried in Japan about the economic pressures in the United States. But now we're getting security pressure from the United States because Japan has traditionally been a fairly pacifist government with, although relatively large military limit has never been deployed. Since September 11 of last year, there's been a great deal of pressure from the Pentagon, the Bush administration for the Japanese to be more involved. The news in Japan today was very much spun to suggest that it's very clear that the Bush mandate for the American voters means a very tough approach to Iraq is imminent. And that will put Japan in a difficult position. The the Defense Department and the State Department especially as that the Rumsfeld Defense Department want to see the Japanese, for instance, deploy radar ships to the Persian Gulf, which would once again tend to erode the Japanese pacifist approach towards foreign affairs. And the Japanese people are basically not in favor of a confrontation with Iraq. So Japan, where we used to fight a great deal about economic issues, we're going to see more debate about the security relationship between these two fundamental allies.

Stuart Loory 06:36

And Faris Sarabani in Yemen. What is the feeling there about the the augmented strength of the Bush administration?

Faris Sarabani 06:48

As far as the election not not many people been paying much attention to it except for those who are interested, the scholars and the politicians. For the general public, they they feel that they've abandoned the idea of democracy from the United States. They feel that they don't look at the state as the protector of democracy and human rights anymore. A number of people, elder people, have expressed that they feel that Bush has hijacked democracy and going full force at Iraq, regardless and irrelevant of the Senate and whoever matters there.

Stuart Loory 07:31

Yeah, Faris, last weekend, the CIA operated a drone airplane, an unmanned airplane, that shot a missile at a car and killed an Al Qaeda high-ranking leader in your country. How has that been handled there?

Faris Sarabani 07:56

Actually, we're getting mixed signals from the government that has not, they declined to make any statements, the only comment that they came up with that investigation...is still underway. However, we're getting mixed signals from, let's say opposition parties in the country and from tribesmen and from human rights groups, they disapprove of the way it was handled. They say that it was an

execution without judgment, as we understand it was six people were killed in that. Definitely, one of them is an Al Qaeda leader and has been identified as Abu Ali al-Harithi. A large number of people or a growing number of people approve of the US-Yemeni ongoing cooperation and they say look at the results is out. Also, there is a growing fear of of, a tension in the air of revenge of Al Qaeda. And you understand the American Embassy just closed yesterday their entities here new countries and new literally full alert, security-wise they're worried that that might be an event attack by Al Qaeda supporters, to that that happened a few days back yet.

Stuart Loory 09:11

Mr. Sarabani, do you know whether or not that plane was based in your country?

Faris Sarabani 09:19

There is no comments on that and not officially from the Americans more from the Yemeni government.

Stuart Loory 09:29

The the Saudi Arabian government, of course, has said that it will not allow the United States to use bases in Saudi Arabia in any attack on Iraq. What will be the situation in your country?

Faris Sarabani 09:46

We do not have any American bases in Yemen at all, nor do we have American forces. Ongoing cooperation between Yemen and the U.S. is limited to a training of personnel of the Special Forces and that kind of minimum 30 to 35 persons at one time, we do not have a military base at all in the country.

Stuart Loory 10:09

And there is no pressure from the United States to to put bases in your country?

Faris Sarabani 10:15

The pressure is on to cooperate better. There have no been any requests from the Americans to have a base in Yemen.

Stuart Loory 10:24

Simon Tisdall, do you have any idea where American and coalition forces might operate from in the Middle East if the Saudis don't permit it?

Simon Tisdall 10:37

There is a fairly clear picture emerging despite the elections in Turkey, which is produced a new government there, which has a sort of Islamist flavor. Turkish forces commander has been in United States this week. General Franks was...will reluctantly will be part of this if it happens. There's a lot of American military activity in Jordan. Jordan is very big agents have been at the United States it will do its part, Kuwait said the American military can use the bases there but the Kuwaiti military will not themselves be involved. US Central Command from Tampa setup field headquarters in Qatar. They have the sixth fleet in Bahrain. And Saudi Arabia has been busily clarifying its position since the remarks by its foreign minister that you refer to, the State Department now says that that's not the end

of the story. And if push comes to shove, those Saudi bases probably will be available to American forces and I would expect that to be the case.

Stuart Loory 11:43

We now have Hugo Guerra back on the line in Lima. Hugo, is the activity in the Middle East and against Iraq not much of an issue in Latin America?

Hugo Guerra 12:01

First of all, I'm so sorry about the phone connection. About the Middle East, yeah. For Peruvians and the whole Latin America that the very important issue and what we are facing today, President Bush, his will for sure act on Iraq on the...and that will be really a tragedy for the whole region on the Middle East.

Stuart Loory 12:30

A tragedy of course, for the whole region in the Middle East. What will be the impact on Latin America if any?

Hugo Guerra 12:41

Well, it's not a direct impact, but it is a global society. You got to find about all our brothers in the Middle East, of course, and I'm mainly concerned with the Israel because after the war in Iraq, the issue of the Israeli involvement will be increased for sure.

Stuart Loory 13:07

Okay, we have to take a break 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 dot global journalist dot org](http://www.globaljournalist.org) or here in mid Missouri by calling us at 882-9641. Michael Zielenziger, if I may ask you about reaction in Japan and the Far East. There is, of course another major story that the United States is involved in, and that is North Korea and the construction the possible construction of nuclear weapons in North Korea. What are the the likely developments there?

Michael Zielenziger 14:13

Well, it's interesting that American voters may not really appreciate it. But by giving the Bush White House a mandate not only in the Senate, but in the House of Representatives allowing one party to dominate American politics and therefore dominate essentially American foreign policy. They're going to end up polarizing development in Asia as well. Until the summer, both Japan and South Korea were very much hoping to open up the North Korean government to a quote unquote, sunshine policy. It's now very clear that when Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi went to Pyongyang in September, to begin to pave the way to opening diplomatic relations, which was what has been a very isolated government, he knew about the American concerns that the North Koreans were developing were redeveloping nuclear weapons. And he's still wanting to move forward. The Bush administration has come down very hard both on Kim Dae-jung in South Korea, and on the Koizumi government to try to not have any more negotiations to be tough against the North Koreans, and in a sense to put North Korea back in the refrigerator back into the cold, cold freezer until the Iraq situation is dealt with. The Japanese and South

Koreans and the Americans will meet again this weekend to figure out some kind of coordinated policy. But I should point out that at least from the perspective of Tokyo, the American administration itself has been divided between those who say, we're willing to talk to Pyongyang anywhere anytime, and those people who say no, we have to stand tough and stare them down and if we have to confront North Korea. So the American government has not spoken with one with one firm resolve at this point. And so it's been a little bit of a confusing time for the Japanese. And for the South Koreans. And there are a lot of people, of course in America and the American Congress are asking, why are we being so tough against the Iraqis and not as tough at the moment against the North Koreans? There are reasons for that. But that question is being asked.

Stuart Loory 16:26

Michael, I have to say that I get the impression from here in Missouri, I that the Bush administration no longer really considers North Korea to be a member of the axis of evil that the President talked about over a year ago. And that this latest development with the North Korean admission of what it was doing with its nuclear reactors, it has been an embarrassment to the administration.

Michael Zielenziger 16:59

Absolutely, and I think it reflects the fact that the Bush administration was very, very focused only on Iraq, and the North Koreans in fact, didn't like it, it's now fairly clear that the North Koreans made the admissions they made to basically tell to the White House you can't put us in that cold storage you can't put us in the freezer. Remember that the Koreans have made a number of significant moves over the past year to indicate we want to change our system. We want to move away from a dirigiste secluded isolated Empire to have more international relations. And it's the Bush people who keep saying we don't want to deal with you now we want to deal with Saddam Hussein. There's more than one group of scholars in Asia who believe the North Koreans will precipitate crisis until they can get on the front burner of the US government, that they won't wait around to be dealt with. And the other side of the coin is the reason it's easy to attack Iraq, as opposed to North Korea. North Korea has had 60 years to build its troops into the side of mountains and attacking Iraq, a desert country with not a whole lot of army left, is a whole lot easier proposition. It's very difficult to attack North Korea and not see Seoul destroyed in the meantime, that creates tremendous military and logistical challenges for the Bush administration that wants to get a big win in Iraq first.

Stuart Loory 18:19

You said that you don't think there's much of an army left in Iraq? Simon, Faris, how do you feel about that? Simon you go first. What is the the military situation in Iraq? Is it is it so that there is not much of an army left there?

Simon Tisdall 18:40

One of the I mean, nobody really knows for sure which is why we need the inspectors to go back. But most estimates by military analysts here and I'll say in America too, suggest that the Iraqi army is a mere shadow of its former self, a mere shadow of the force that was that was confronted during Operation Desert Storm, that it been denied spare parts and new machinery, new equipment, state of the art missiles and so on. Most of the stuff rusty and pretty useless. There and also the loyalty of the mostly unscripted army is in doubt. There are only a few elite regiments that really might cause a

problem to any invading force. So must the same goes for its supposed weapons of mass destruction as well, I think one of the problems of the forthcoming special regime will be that not much will be found and then the Bush administration will have to say, well, that's because they've hidden it.

Stuart Loory 19:37

And do you think that might actually be the case, or do you think that there's not much to be found?

Simon Tisdall 19:41

I'm sure that if Saddam Hussein's got anything half decent, he will have hidden it. And it won't appear on the inventory that they're supposed to produce in 30 days and I'm quite sure, sooner rather than later the Bush administration will be crying foul about that. They'll be saying that the Iraqis are not playing fair, they haven't owned up to what they've got. They're not cooperating with the inspectors, that they're still playing silly buggers in the no fly zone. And they'll go back to the Security Council and demand everyone's agree with them that the Iraqis are a material breach and that point you have a war. I think the Security Council story is not over by a long way. Because at that point, it will be open to permanent members and others to say, well, we don't agree with your judgment that they're a material breach, and you're not justified in launching an attack. So the whole wrangling that's been going on for the past eight weeks isn't necessarily over once this resolution has been passed. Faris Sarabani, is it generally felt in the Middle East that the Iraqi army is no longer very powerful?

Faris Sarabani 20:44

I think that if military action was taken, it would be very flubby. They should use not ask on the Iraqi army. We have millions of people who have been grown to love a leader or taught to defend them and fight for him and fight with him. And as a result there will be millions of volunteers and millions of people who will not have any training standing in line holding a gun and you can see a lot of bloodshed, not on both sides but it will be only from the Iraqi people and the Iraqi side.

Stuart Loory 21:14

And do you think the guns are there to do all of this? The weapons are the does does the the Iraqi military establishment really have the weapons to to arm all of the volunteers and civilians?

Faris Sarabani 21:33

There is no match, absolutely no match. You have people who are getting emotionally adversive to the latest technology adversive things like fighting, genius fighting somebody who's not there yet. They just use weapons and arms and bombs landing everywhere and unfortunately if the war goes ahead, we will see a lot of blood and a lot of hatred and a lot of division among us. I'm hoping and pray that it never comes to that situation and to that point.

Simon Tisdall 22:05

This is to say that, you know, I don't think conventional weaponry is the point here. The point is, Saddam does have probably stocks of biological and chemical weapons that were not accounted for when the inspectors left in 1998. And if he is faced by an invasion, which will inevitably end in his own removal or death, the chances are he will use those weapons if he has them and if they're still viable

and that is what George Tenet of the CIA told Congress a few weeks ago, and that is the real risk, not conventional forces.

Stuart Loory 22:36

So the the real risk is the the weaponry that we are so concerned about. And rather than go in and try to destroy it, it's it's better to do nothing, is that the the general idea?

Simon Tisdall 22:50

Well George Tenet's assessment was that the circumstances in which Iraq was most likely to use those sorts of weapons of mass destruction if it has them, are exactly the circumstances which are now envisioned by the Bush administration and making a military attack on Iraq. And one of the first recipients, and ask the Israelis, but not me, the Israelis will tell you that they are frightened stiff that if it's the last thing he does, Saddam Hussein will fire off chemical or biological weapons at Israeli citizen. They already have, you know, very serious contingency plans of mass casualties in place in cities like Haifa.

Stuart Loory 23:22

Yeah. Simon, part of the judgment here in the United States is that although he may have the chemical and biological materials that you're talking about, he really doesn't have the weapons to deliver them, the missiles.

Simon Tisdall 23:38

I think that's entirely possible. I think that in a way, the Bush administration is a victim of its own propaganda here. I mean for years not just them but the administration before them have been saying that the Pentagon, the CIA, the DIA been saying, Iraq maybe has this, maybe has that, it's got these Scud, we don't know where they are. So this picture that they got these missiles that can deliver these weapons, long distance. I mean, George Bush in Cincinnati recently, even playing the Iraqis had unmanned aerial vehicles at the time that was used in Yemen this week, which were capable of attacking US cities. Now this is fantasy stuff. It's just no basis in fact, that the reception has...

Michael Zielenziger 24:19

Pointing out that this administration has started rough. This administration has also been willing to accept sort of doctored intelligence to justify itself to Congress. We've had reports in the papers in the last three or four weeks that you know, material has been juiced up, so to speak, to deliver to Bush to make the case even though, as Simon points out, the real facts on the ground don't necessarily justify it.

Stuart Loory 24:45

That kind of thing is is not really unprecedented, though, is it? It's what we face during Vietnam, and maybe even in the pre-World War II years.

Simon Tisdall 24:57

I think you're right. It's entirely true. But the basic question here is, what is the threat that we're supposed to be countering? No one was really accepted in Europe anyway, the argument that there is a real present urgent threat posed by Iraq, either to the regional neighbors or indeed to the west.

Michael Zielenziger 25:19

And to make the story one step further, what you even hear in Asia is okay, even if you've gotten rid of Saddam Hussein, then what happens? A lot of people been very amused at people in Washington that suggested that you would have a Japanese like occupation of Iraq. And of course, the circumstances are completely different. And it's hard to believe the Americans would be willing to, you know, create a new government and run the country for five years.

Stuart Loory 25:45

It does seem pretty clear though, doesn't it, that there is going to have to be some kind of occupation for some period of time. Faris Sarabani, are Americans going to be able to occupy a large country in your area of the world and get away with it?

Faris Sarabani 26:09

I think it'll be very difficult especially in a country like Iraq. Throughout history, it has been, they are very tough and very rigid people, nothing similar to Afghanistan in which they were to. These are people who've been in the army, these are people who are trained, these are people who are educated. These are people who are brainwashed and mentally conditioned to hate Americans or to hate occupation or to hate, they've been brainwashed that the condition of your misery for the past few years is because of Americans. So I think it'd be very, very difficult, and anyone who will be cooperating from their leaders who are outside who are currently being portrayed as traitors.

Stuart Loory 26:55

Okay, we have just about a minute left and if I may, I would like to give the last words to Hugo Guerra. Hugo, with all of the talk about what is going on elsewhere in the world, the United States is often accused of ignoring the problems in the Western Hemisphere. What can the Bush administration be doing and what should it be doing to solve those problems? If you can do it in 30 seconds, please.

Hugo Guerra 27:28

A few years ago, Mr. Bush claimed that Latin America is very important for colonialization (?), but the strategy changes after 911 because Bush's administration molded their priorities in order to be successful in the security of the United States. Now, when the public majority involves made under House of Representatives, it cannot stop the ability of immigrants, especially Indian to be documented legal. The republicans want to have a green light to affect Iraq and problem solve Latin America.

Stuart Loory 28:16

Okay, Hugo I'm sorry but I do have to cut you off. We're out of time. Our guests today have been in Lima, Peru, Hugo Guerra; in Tokyo, Michael Zielenziger; in Yemen, Faris Sarabani; and in London, Simon Tisdall. Our director is Pat Akers, and our producers have been Sarah Andrea Fajardo and Mary Lou LeClair. For all, I'm Stuart Loory, Global Journalist will be back next week.