

Global Journalist: Global perception of U.S.'s stance on Iraq War build-up

Abstract: In this February 20, 2003 conversation, Stuart Loory interviews several journalists on the relations between the U.S. and Australia, the Netherlands, Japan, and Venezuela concerning the build-up toward the Iraq War. They discuss whether each country supports or opposes the U.S.'s position on the war, as well as internal controversies occurring in the countries, such as Middle Eastern oil exports.

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Guests:

- [Ben English](#), Australia
- Wendy Bronker (ph?), Netherlands
- [Eric Due](#), Japan
- [Andrés Izarra](#), Venezuela

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Tags: Stuart Loory, Ben English, The Daily Telegraph, Sydney, Australia, Radio Netherlands, Netherlands, Eric Due, The Japan Times, Tokyo, Japan, Andrés Izarra, Caracas, Venezuela, Iraq, Iraq War, Saddam Hussein, oil exports

Runtime: 28:21

Stuart Loory 00:12

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. Coming to you again from London. As deployment of troops to the Persian Gulf area continues, there has been intense attention paid to the United States' relations with the larger nations of Europe, particularly Germany and France, which oppose the war, and Great Britain, which supports it and will help fight it. There has also been a lot of discussion about relations between the United States and the countries neighboring Iraq, but there has not been much said about relations between the United States and other important countries. And that's what we want to talk about today. How is the build-up to war viewed in Australia, in East Asia, in the smaller countries of Europe, particularly the Netherlands, and in Latin America? To talk about that today we have Ben English chief security reporter of The Daily Telegraph in Sydney, Australia; Wendy Bronker (ph?), economics editor of Radio Netherlands in Utrecht, the Netherlands; Eric Due, chief of the domestic news copy editing desk for The Japan Times in Tokyo; and Andrés Izarra, a freelance journalist in Caracas, Venezuela. Let's start with Ben English. Ben, Australia is very much on the side of the United States and very supportive of George Bush. Is there much opposition to that and your country?

Ben English 01:57

Certainly if you could take a poll in Australia today, and it probably wouldn't be much different, the outcome probably wouldn't be much different than perhaps in the Netherlands. I'm not so sure about Venezuela. But I could tell you it'd be fairly similar to an outcome of a poll in the Netherlands or England as to whether there's support for at least unilateral action to be taken against Saddam. See, if you took a poll it's probably be about at the moment 60% opposition to to a military strike against Saddam without UN approval, and then that would be reversed once you know that UN approval was gained. So in other words, 60% approval if there was the tick of approval from from the UN.

Stuart Loory 02:50

Yeah, but on the other hand, the government is going to send Australian troops to help fight the war, is that right?

Ben English 03:00

Yeah, that's right. If anything, Australia would have to be regarded as the US the staunchest ally in this, they've actually gone a little bit further than Tony Blair and said that the Australian Ambassador this week has said that time has completely run out for Saddam that the time for negotiation has ended, that there's, there's really no more time to consider whether he's genuine in in considering the world's requests for him to disarm. So Australia is pretty gung ho about it. They've already committed 2,000 troops. It's more of a qualitative than quantitative commitment. But nevertheless, it's not insignificant for a country the size of Australia. And you know, the big controversy here is that the the opposition groups and and certainly a lot of the marches that have taken place as half a million people marched against the war last week. And the message has been, why, how, how and why has John Howard, the Australian Prime Minister, committed so many troops when when really the Australian public is not behind him?

Stuart Loory 04:23

We'll come back to Australia in just a bit. But let's talk a little bit about Japan. Eric Due, we don't read very much about what is going on in Japan or what the attitudes are of the Japanese people and the Japanese government?

Eric Due 04:38

Well, officially, the government is somewhat akin to Australia and Great Britain in that probably the only four countries that are conspicuously supportive of this effort in the Middle East are those four, including Japan. Like Australia, Japan also had and I guess most other countries had a large rallies last weekend and Japan had a fairly large turnout, although I don't think nearly representative of the, of the population that half a million people would be in Australia. I think you know, and basically Japan has always had since the world war two since World War Two, it's had an aversion to war. And it's basically had that, you know, made into law. And you know, I think people by and large are opposed to the war just like they are in any other country. But there's a little bit of a this this attitude is a little bit tempered of late because of the nuclear brinkmanship going on with North Korea and the reality that this could become a very, very dangerous situation real fast. Then the the damages that could occur from something getting out of hand would happen in a day's time, you would you would totally transform this whole area into a holocaust that and I think that, you know, there's a certain amount of the anti-American base rhetoric is kind of disappeared. Right if I can ask Wendy Bronker (ph?) in the Netherlands, the situation there is complicated, your country is sort of caught in the middle. Yeah. In a lot of ways. How is that playing out?

Wendy Bronker (ph?) 06:43

Well, I think that that's some some of the embarrassed about the situation because of the risk risk between the NATO members, especially the politic politicians are very unhappy about it. But then again, the local people, people, the inhabitants, they have a different feeling about the whole situation. They want clarity, but they don't the clarity that the politicians want, like one face for NATO. They want a more clarity about what what is the outcome of this war if it happens? I mean, people worry about it that that because it's so unclear what what could be the result of it, they worry about it. And I think in that case, they look toward our neighboring country of Belgium, because it's a small country like Holland, and they had quite a strong stance when the NATO members had decided about whether to support Turkey with military aid, they had quite a strong stance against it. And the Dutch they just sent back a bit and they were just being embarrassed by the whole situation, but they didn't do much about it.

Stuart Loory 07:44

But Wendy, how does the Dutch government come down on the situation? Are they being supportive?

Wendy Bronker (ph?) 07:55

I think the government is more pro-Bush more pro-the US and especially because we have a currently we have social democrats and Christian Democrats talking about a new coalition. The Christian Democrats are very much a pro-power, pro-Bush, pro-America. So they try to solve it their way. And I think they try to bridge what has gone wrong between NATO countries. And they like, even before NATO decided that they were going to support Turkey, the Dutch government decided that they were going to send patriots to Turkey. So they were behaving like they were more like saints in a way, they were a bit too fast in my sense.

Stuart Loory 08:36

And if I can ask Andres Izarra in Caracas, Venezuela, your country has its own very serious problems, problems that are in fact overwhelming and problems that are of great concern elsewhere around the world, including the United States. What is being said there about the the buildup of war to Iraq?

Andres Izarra 09:02

Well, as you said, we are pretty much overwhelmed by the internal debate political debate that's going on right now. We went through a national strike that lasted 60 days. And that left us pretty tired in terms of political fighting. Nevertheless, we saw a very, I would say that around five, between five and 8000 people march last Saturday, during the marches against the Iraq War that happened throughout the world. I say that marches there will compare to the big marches that we have seen from both sides happening during this confrontation that we've been going through for the last month, almost almost a year so far. So I would say in Venezuela that the war against Iraq or the possibility that the United States will attack Iraq is a big moment on a second level. We are now too much concentrated on our own political crawlers which are big enough.

Stuart Loory 10:08

If I could go back to Ben English in Australia. Ben, I understand that the Australian Army members were told not to wear their uniforms when they leave their bases because there is so much criticism there. Is that so?

Ben English 10:30

That has been report there have been reports of that, there's been isolated reports for in Northern Australia, for example, a couple of days ago, that that a couple of soldiers were a number of soldiers were abused at a shopping center. They're called warmongers. It's not like a widespread thing. It's not like Vietnam yet.

Stuart Loory 10:56

Did this actually happen in Vietnam or during the Vietnam War?

Ben English 11:02

It was, it was a huge thing in Vietnam when many of them were coming back through the airport, they had things thrown at them. And I was denigrated essentially as symbols of everything that was wrong about Vietnam, it was sort of a bit of a stain on our history, if you like, I think, or at least on the peace movement, in hindsight that they they blamed the soldiers themselves, but um, so that the armies and had a huge effect on the morale of the Defence Force as well. So the army is very, very wary of that happening again.

Stuart Loory 11:42

Okay. We have to take a break 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. I'd like to bring up the question of oil. Andres Izarra, Venezuela's oil exports are way down because of the conflict that's going on in your country, between the president, Hugo Chavez, and a lot of the people in your country who are out of sympathy with him. As a result of that, there's a story here in London today in one of the British newspapers saying that the United States' imports of oil from Iraq, mind you, have gone way up. What is the situation in Venezuela? Are the oil exports going to be resumed again anytime soon and in previous numbers?

Andres Izarra 13:08

Well, that's really hard to tell, especially when the lack of independent confirmation of how much actually how much oil do we produce at this moment. If we follow what the government is saying, we should be nearing the 2 million barrels a day. We have an OPEC quota of 3 million barrels. So that put us downfield for another movement that we have not been able to put into the market because the oil strike. The government has been able to bring up the oil production up to 2 million barrels. So there's really no reason to think why they shouldn't be able to reach their 3 million barrels per day quota. When will that be reached? That still is unknown. The government is screening a huge sabotage that happened after these people were on strike, walk out of the refineries and other production sites for the oil industry. And we in fact have been able to confirm pipelines that has been damaged, tanks that have been left with the asphalt to dry, which has collapsed much of the production system and other acts of sabotage. So as long as the government is able to come over those obstacles to bring back production, Venezuela will be back to its normal OPEC quota.

Stuart Loory 14:44

Wendy Bronker (ph?), is this story about the American purchases of oil from Iraq reported at all in Netherlands, and if so, how is it viewed? Is it viewed with any sense of cynicism or wonderment?

Wendy Bronker (ph?) 15:06

Well, to be honest, I haven't read anything about it, although have looked through most of the paper, so no, not much is written about it.

Stuart Loory 15:14

And Eric Due in Japan, one has the feeling that one of the reasons Japan is so interested in the Middle Eastern situation is because so much of its oil comes from that part of the world.

Eric Due 15:31

Yes, that's right. And at this point to actually today, they the government issued an announcement that it would not only free up its stocks in the event that war erupted and, and there was a perceived shortage, but would also initiate a bartering of oil stocks among the private sector that makes sure there was still plenty of oil and at an affordable price. That's one of the worries, I guess here is the not only the availability but the price. And with the yen value fluctuating almost on a daily basis, at this point now being well, a little bit stronger than it was a few months back, there's, oil is a strong, is a strong motive to sort of be very interested in this whole issue.

Stuart Loory 16:30

Ben English, tell us a little bit, if you would, about why Australia is, as you put it, so gung ho, on this issue. Is it just that it it wants to be supportive of the United States and the United Kingdom? Or are there other issues involved here?

Ben English 16:53

There's a few issues involved. John Howard and the coalition government are conservative. It's a conservative government. So traditionally, it has been a big supporter of the United States policies per se and particularly of the Republican Party. And George W. Bush. They're close friends, George W. Bush and John Howard, they get on very well. That's not just that's not the main factor, the main factor would be September 11, perhaps, woke us strands up to the concept of terrorism in the West. And the attack on Bali on October 12 certainly jolted us more than ever, and I think there's a sense in Australia that, that, basically, that we're next, and that something ought to be done. And there's a certain sense of there's a Nexus in Australia, at least within this, this government, that if we don't stand up to Saddam, or people like Saddam, then then terrorists will be encouraged. And so therefore, we have to take a strong stand. The other thing is, Australia has a long history of strong support for the US. Going back beyond Vietnam. There's a strong sense in this country that the US saved Australia in World War Two, and that, in a sense, we still owe them.

Stuart Loory 18:16

The investigations of the the Bali bombings have shown a link with al Qaeda, haven't they? Have they shown any link at all that would implicate Saddam Hussein?

Ben English 18:36

No, no, there's no there's no link that's been established. And the views that I just shared with you aren't necessarily those of Australia as a whole, but certainly of the Australian Government. Having said that, I think that you'd find that a majority of Australians would, would accept that while there might not be a direct link between Saddam and Al Qaeda, they wouldn't find it a stretch to believe that he'd be happy to horse trade with, with terrorists.

Stuart Loory 19:11

You know, there are some indications that the the march toward war is slowing down a little bit. The Bush administration seems to be softening its bombast it is accepting the idea of some delay. And even Tony Blair here in London, is now talking about not doing anything until mid March. Does that give any of you the the feeling that war still might be avoided? Wendy, do you want to take that?

Wendy Bronker (ph?) 19:51

I don't think it will be avoided though because of the past few weeks it has become so clear that the US wants this war to start someday pretty soon. So I think the only problem is that although I don't want the war, I think the problem now is that it takes so long before something started that has become a problem for NATO, for instance, the past few weeks, because it takes so long. Different participants, they noticed that the situation's becoming even more complicated. Everybody has got a saying in this and so it's it's become by the time is running out. I think it's become more complicated over the past few weeks. Everybody has a word in it. And so it drags on, it's becoming even more difficult. But if I know that the two camps you had, the US and Europe there was a big gap between them, the gap is becoming smaller. And you can also see this back in in the NATO now the gap between NATO is becoming smaller as well. So as soon as the gap becomes smaller between one of two parties, it has an effect on other participants as well.

Stuart Loory 20:57

Andres Izarra, how do you see it?

Andres Izarra 21:01

Excuse me, can you repeat the question?

Stuart Loory 21:04

The question is whether or not the the drive toward war is slowing. And whether that means that there is some possibility that war can be avoided.

Andres Izarra 21:15

Well, I see it that way, especially after the big marches all over the world last Saturday. I mean, it's hard to push a war when you have so much popular sentiment against it. I also feel the arguments that the US government is posing to the war, they're weakening, and they don't have the support of the United Nations as a whole. So it seems to me that on the short term, there won't be an attack. But of course, we would still have to wait for the further developments during the next week.

Stuart Loory 21:59

Eric Due, what about in Japan? How is it viewed?

Eric Due 22:03

Well, I think it's, I think still, you know, people are, are wary that it's going to start. Although, like my other colleagues have mentioned, there does seem to be some sentiment wearing away at it. And today, especially with the UN coming out and basically rattling off dire statistic casualties to statistics should a war erupt. But I think basically, you know, in Japan, the the news media is pretty much figuring that it's a done deal unless, you know, Saddam was to trot out all the weapons that that America and Britain and Australia suspect he has. I mean, short of that, if a war does erupt, of course, you know, Saddam's rhetoric reported in our paper and other papers is that the first, you know, the the Americans who land on Iraq soil will be, you know dealt with in the most horrendous manner suggesting that he has the weapons that he claims he doesn't. And so I think you know, a lot of people in Japan pretty much surmise that he is hiding something and that this can't just be, you get two sides, you know, the army just can't walk away, walk back to America and forget that this ever happened.

Stuart Loory 23:32

Ben English, I take it that John Howard has not softened his rhetoric to the same extent that Tony Blair has.

Ben English 23:43

No he hasn't. And I think just to pick up on the previous speakers, I think there's a sense here that unless that essentially everything's coming to a head in the next 10 days, and that we're going to see a resolution from the UN, the words of which, you know, obviously still being worked out. There'll be a deadline set. And that will be game set and match. That the deadline is what might be the 11th hour get out for Saddam. I think that's a sense in Australia is that we're heading towards the the point where there's no more gray gray areas. It's either Saddam comes forward and comes clean on the weapons or else and and if he doesn't, then there's the inevitability of war.

Stuart Loory 24:38

Wendy is, is the Netherlands going to provide any military support through NATO or otherwise to this effort?

Wendy Bronker (ph?) 24:51

Now, even before the NATO decided what they were going to do, the Netherlands decided they were going to send patriots to Turkey so they're doing something already and I think if it comes to a war, I think the Netherlands will support the thing as well. The they will even maybe send troops as well.

Stuart Loory 25:08

Did it do that in the first Gulf War? I say did the Netherlands do that? Did it give military support in the first Gulf War?

Wendy Bronker (ph?) 25:18

Yes. Yes, it did. But I don't know how how much exactly, because I haven't looked back for that exactly. But they did support. They did support it, but I don't know exactly how much.

Stuart Loory 25:30

Ben English, if I can come back to you. Have any troops left Australia yet for deployment in the Middle East?

Ben English 25:38

Yes, they have. Australia already had a couple of frigates in the Gulf who were helping out with the the enforcing of the sanctions, but the main deployment was about three weeks ago when the Kanimbla left with about 600 troops on board including SAS troops. We have just been witnessing a huge controversy here about, about soldiers refusing their anthrax in, their anthrax injections for, excuse me, I'm trying to just get get my train of thought here, so taking anthrax, I've lost the word for it.

Stuart Loory 26:26

Yeah. But at any rate the troops have been employed, or deployed, I should say excuse me. Yeah. And, and presumably, they are, they are somewhere in the Middle East in Saudi Arabia or Kuwait or elsewhere and, and ready to go.

Ben English 26:47

Yeah, this, this, I mean, our SAS troops, they're essentially the the the elite commander. They're a shadowy group of elite troops. There have been reports that they're already some of them are already inside Iraq, they helped out with, with the the operations in Afghanistan. So yeah, they're already deployed.

Stuart Loory 27:14

And do you still have troops in Afghanistan or are they all out now?

Ben English 27:18

We saw, no, we don't have any more in Afghanistan at the moment and thing, they've withdrawn.

Stuart Loory 27:24

Right. Okay. I'm sorry to say that we are out of time. Our guests today have been Andre Izarra, a freelance journalist in Caracas, Venezuela; Eric Due of the Japan Times in Tokyo; Wendy Bronker (ph?) of Radio Netherlands in Utrecht, Holland; and Ben English of The Daily Telegraph in Sydney, Australia. Our director is Pat Akers, and our producer's Sara Andrea Fajardo. For all, I'm Stuart Loory, Global Journalist will be back next week.