

Global Journalist: International view as UN Security Council debates Iraq War

Abstract: This conversation from March 6, 2003 features several journalists from around the globe describing how their countries' governments view the Iraq War as the United Nations Security Council continues to debate the matter. One of the guests, Bulgarian journalist Milena Dimitrova, was completing a Professional Development Year at the University of Missouri when she appeared on the show.

Host: [Byron Scott](#)

Guests:

- [Semih Idiz](#), Turkey
- [Milena Dimitrova](#), Bulgaria, completed Professional Development Year in journalism at Mizzou
- Eoghan Shortt (ph?), Spain
- [Ignacio Rodriguez Reyna](#), Mexico

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Byron Scott 00:08

Hello, and welcome to Global Journalist. This is Byron Scott sitting in for Stuart Loory, and we welcome you to the show that insists that even Americans are interested in international news. This evening, we're going to discuss with four distinguished international journalists, the upcoming debates, continuing debates, I should say, in the Security Council of the United Nations resuming tomorrow with the latest report of Hans Blick, and with the active participation among others of the Secretary of State of the United States, Colin Powell. These journalists are from nations that generally have not been focused on in at least in American coverage, nations that are critical to the debate, either because of their position on the Security Council or their position relative to the impending conflict itself in Iraq. Our guests today are Semih Idiz, columnist for Aksam, the Istanbul-based, I'm sorry, the Ankara-based newspaper, and he is speaking to us from Istanbul; Dr. Milena Dimitrova, journalist for the Bulgarian news weekly 168 Hours, currently a visiting professional here at the Journalism School at the University of Missouri in Columbia; Eoghan Shortt (ph?), who I'm going to probably call Ian at some point during the during the show, being half-Irish myself and, who is an editor of the international department of EFE, the Spanish national news agency, he's speaking to us from Madrid; and finally, Ignacio Rodriguez Reyna, managing editor of El Universal, the newspaper in Mexico City. Semih, let's start. Let's start with you. Can you bring us up to date on what the position is of Turkey not only relative to the debate in the United Nations, but also the debate in, about the presence of American troops in Turkey? I believe we've lost Semih. So let me go. Let me go then to Ignacio. Ignacio, Mexico is was characterized in a report I heard today as a neutral in this debate. Could you give us the the view from Mexico City?

Ignacio Rodriguez Reyna 02:39

Hi, how are you? Good morning. Well, I couldn't say Byron that we are neutral, actually, and almost every daily paper in Mexico City, has said today the kind of headline generally common headlines saying that we are a posit to the war. So, I wouldn't say that they we are neutral. Mexican government has established that the he is stalled in the problem that he is waiting for the resolution of Mr. Briggs that I would say that the mostly not just the government, but the society itself is against the war. So we don't find any any, any cause and we don't have a substantial substantial arguments that indicates that we have to go to the war and even that the government haven't decided yet, which would be the vote in the United Nations Security Council. I would say that in Mexico there is a, there's a kind of a general sense against the war.

Byron Scott 04:00

Milena Dimitrova, if you could give us the standpoint from from Bulgaria.

Milena Dimitrova 04:07

Yes, unfortunately I haven't the great news from Bulgaria because on Wednesday, the Iraqi ambassador...treated Bulgaria with a monstrous revenge, and especially a town Burgas, which is actually very close to Istanbul, because he said 7 million people, Iraqi people, are armed, well equipped and ready to fight, say the ambassador. And he said we thought Bulgaria is a friend

country but if you collaborate with the United States, a monstrous revenge will reach you. Of course, the reaction of our foreign minister and and our the Minister of Defense, was immediately, but I don't think that's just occasional because I've seen that in the in German media developed, there was another threat from the Saddam Hussein to the United States. Saddam thought a great defeat for the Americans if they would dare to attack his country.

Byron Scott 05:18

Semih Idiz, your country has been greatly in the news relative to this. I wonder if you could bring us up to date?

Semih Idiz 05:27

Well, as you know, we had this vote on Saturday, which rejected a motion that would have allowed American troops into Turkey and Turkish troops abroad, which in this case means Iraq. And this has, of course, set the political scene in turmoil here. And we understand that it is set the American military planning in turmoil also to a certain extent. But our Chief of Staff yesterday spoke up on behalf of the motion that would allow the Americans in so there is now another chance that it might come to vote. But of course, this is all going to take time. And it seems from my perspective that the the Turkish deadline, or rather, the deadline imposed by the Turkish democratic process and Mr. Bush's war deadline don't seem to be in sync at the moment. So there might be some problems there. But other than that, it is the number one issue in the political debate in Turkey, of course, and it's a very major decision to be made by Turkey.

Byron Scott 06:28

Okay. And before we go to our general discussion, Eoghan Shortt (ph?), from Madrid, Spain is a co sponsor of the United Nations and British resolution in the Security Council on Iraq. Could you tell us the situation in Spain?

Eoghan Shortt (ph?) 06:45

Yeah. Well, Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria is, of course one of President Bush's closest allies on the subject. However, he has against him what seems to be majority of Spanish public opinion plus the United opposition of the opposition parties in, in the Spanish parliament. If you remember the demonstrations that were held against the war on the 15th of February, well, more than 2 million Spaniards took part in these demonstrations, perhaps the greatest show of opposition of any of the countries that took part in these demonstrations that day. And so we have a very, very divided country and, and serious political problems for Mr. Aznar.

Byron Scott 07:42

So this is a difficult time to be a citizen of the world but quite an exciting time to be an international journalist. Unfortunately, those are dichotomous I suppose. Is it difficult for all of you to to cover these issues, knowing the very strong feelings of your, of your country men as

well as your as your governments along the whole spectrum of the debate? Let's begin with Semih, what about what about the situation in Turkey?

Semih Idiz 08:21

Yeah, well, if you're asking if it's difficult to cover, of course, from a professional, journalistic point of view. These are the days we journalists are created for us. Of course, these are exciting times and seeing the things unfolding. We do have a sense that there's history in the making in the sense that is a very unilateral approach by America. And this is also disrupting the international balance as it appeared after the Second World War. So within this part of the world, we're really worried and but at the same time, watching very carefully what the outcome of all this is going to be, the war itself is the least of our worries. We're really worried about what the dynamics, the political dynamics that will be set into force after the war and how things will shape. So, from a journalistic perspective, it's not difficult to cover, although there are very great difficulties in reaching the right information at the right time. But other than that, I think we're aware that history is in the making here.

Byron Scott 09:19

And in Spain,

Eoghan Shortt (ph?) 09:21

Well, we're a news agency, our job is to present the present the opinions and present the the facts as objectively as we can. I think that is, there's no no problem at the moment, perhaps, perhaps all the media are going to have problems in covering a war once it starts, because we'll all have access to the official spokesman of the participating government, but it may be difficult to get good raw, reliable information out from Iraq itself.

Byron Scott 09:59

Yes, Milena?

Milena Dimitrova 10:00

Yes, Byron, I think I think we remember that one, just one month ago, we realized how important is the watchdog mission of journalism, just investigative reporting. But now, for all of us, much precious is the right journalism, the core journalism to inform right now, in the same very second.

Byron Scott 10:25

And what is the situation in Mexico City for for journalists there, Ignacio?

Semih Idiz 10:30

Well, I think, from my country, it would say that, I would say that that probably is a very exciting time, of course, I think we are in a turning point in the general panorama in the war. But from the journalists perspective, I would say that the for our our main goal, our main challenge, would be to be informed to the people. And the problem for us being so close to the United States is that we are so difficult to find an independent point of view. I would say that the mainstream media, especially the TV and big paper, like New York Times, Washington Post, the LA Times, I think they are not informed to the people and then then trying to impose I would say too impose a point of view upon the rest of the world. So for us, it's hard to get an independent media far away from the government's position. And we critic, a critic view of the scenario. So for instance, we get Fox News or we get CBS here on cable, and it's terrible to see and to observe how the media is going in the in one direction got to the work, informed the people, the American people, trying to create an idea that there is no other way that the weapons and the attack on Iraq and in Mexico is for historical reasons. We have a kind of a, I would say fit not not fair, but we we are absolutely against the war. And we are starting to get especially the media and the public opinion, we're so tired of the, I would say this kind of a general line in the journalists, in the American journalism saying we have to go to the war, Saddam Hussein is a dictator, which is a dictator, I think there is no doubt, but we don't see any arguments, any proof that we have to go to the war. So it's difficult to try to oppose these general tendency to try to push in favor of war.

Byron Scott 13:09

All right, we're going to have to take a short break right now. This is Global Journalist on KBIA. Alright, we're back. This is Byron Scott again sitting in for Stuart Loory and reminding you that if you'd like to listen to this show on the worldwide web, you can click and direct your browser to globaljournalist dot org or off the KBIA website KBIA dot org. Our guests today are discussing the situation in their countries around the debate in the Security Council regarding regarding Iraq, and I'd like to turn to some of those political and historical pressures that Ignacio was discussing just before the break. Milena Dimitrova, Bulgaria has actually recently undergone the censure of Jacques Chirac of France, who, some of us some of us read as a threat to its to its military, its military base and also its membership candidacy in the European Union. Could you comment on that for us?

Milena Dimitrova 14:24

Well, I wonder how much this situation in new global separation changed the world. That's why I was really I am really dubious about the exit for tomorrow Security Council. Although the predictions are that maybe Colin Powell will be talking will be talking about the, how quickly the times the time goes on. But Bulgarian representative there, Stefan Tafrov, said today that there is no chance for compromise in the Security Council about Iraq. I would be rather glad to talk about how this Iraqi crazy split and change it already the world. We are unfortunately closer to a world conflict. We have new enemies instead of partnership. And nowhere people and population are agree with their government which is a completely new situation. That's a dizzily crazy crisis, even collapse in the International institution like NATO United Nation, even Security Council. See, NATO was unable to protect its member...hope Semih would agree with me.

Byron Scott 15:42

I'm informed that Semih is is not with us. We've lost the connection to Turkey once again. Oh, Semih you are back on.

Semih Idiz 15:51

I am, yes, I'm very sorry. We have a loose line here somewhere.

Byron Scott 15:54

Oh, that's alright. International telecommunications are almost as bad as international political communications I'm afraid.

Semih Idiz 16:02

Even worse, maybe.

Milena Dimitrova 16:05

I was talking about, we, unfortunately we get habits to attend everything worse last days. And we get unfortunately habits to spy to be suspicious to snooping, be alert and aware about possible terrorism attack. That's why I think that the biggest world problem right now, according to my modest opinion, is that governments don't have consensus with their people nowhere in the world.

Byron Scott 16:35

Yes, let me, I think Milena was about to ask you, Semih, whether you agree with that, that there's in several, I think you've all mentioned that there is a disconnect between public opinion and, and governmental policy in your nation. So yeah, go ahead. Semih.

Semih Idiz 16:55

In the Turkish case there is that of course, although I put the Turkish government's position in all this in a rather different situation to the other governments because of the very nature of Turkish politics and the nature of this government, but where the melting pot has occurred, occurred in Turkey, where the public have met the political clouds is in the parliament, and the very negative approach to the prospect of war translated itself through the democratic process into the Turkish Parliament's decision last Saturday, which said, if we authorize American soldiers coming to Turkey, and authorize Turkish soldiers to go abroad, ie to northern Iraq, then it means we are endorsing war and we don't want war because we don't believe that there is a cause for war. So in that sense, the public has not been totally deprived of a political voice in Turkey. Now, though, there are of course developments where the public may have to think twice about certain things, but that is the way it worked out initially.

Byron Scott 17:54

And Shortt, I believe you were the first one to bring up this, this disconnect. Could you tell us more from the Spanish viewpoint?

Eoghan Shortt (ph?) 18:02

Well, I think to understand the Prime Minister Aznar's position, you have to realize that he's built up a very strong personal relationship with with President Bush, and Mr. Aznar himself, which creates stress at times on the fact that Spain too has suffered terrorist problem because as you perhaps know, that in in the Basque region of northern Spain, there has been a terrorist group seeking independence of that region for the past four years. Yes. And, and hundreds of people have been killed in that and Mr. Aznar in an interview the other day with the Los Angeles Times he said that, he reminded readers that Bush had promised to help Spain in the fight against terrorism in the year 2001. And Spain, therefore, must return the favor as it did after the 11th of September, and yesterday in Parliament, he said that he would, Mr. Aznar said that he would never turn down a request for help against terrorism from from any world leader. So I think that, perhaps is the basis of Mr. Aznar's position. However, he has not, even though the Spanish people and the opposition also do suffer the the bass terrorism, in this case, the they do not go along with his reasoning, that, therefore, we need to attack Iraq, but the opposition argues that you do not combat terrorism by starting a war and they fear that the war in Iraq will only exacerbate the dangers of worldwide terrorism.

Byron Scott 19:45

I'm going to put each of our panelists on the spot here and it's perhaps it's perhaps unfair, in which case, please don't hesitate to say so, but I may ask each of you, what position you think your nation will take in this debate in the United Nations? What what their final vote for would be? Let's start with Mexico, Ignacio.

Semih Idiz 20:15

Well, it's very hard question Byron because you know, Mexico is one of the members of the, no permanence of the Security Council and we had been under great pressure from the Bush government. Just a couple of days ago, the President Bush, in an interview, said that they would be retaliations again in the Mexican government Mexican economy, if we know or not, so good friends with the United States. Of course in the historical relationship that we've had, it is, this declaration had really initiated a hot debate within Mexico. And I would say that the main effect consequence of this pressure, as you know that the ambassador here in Mexico is the one of the closest friends of Mr. Bush. He is really pushing hard saying that we are not just friends but neighbors and that Mexico needs a lot of the American support. And I think this pressure is going to have the ground result. I would say that if it is lying goes home, the entire society and the entire political establishment, even the opposition parties and parties in power, I would say that it turn out in the vote against the resolution presented by the American president.

Byron Scott 22:03

Alright, let's let's cut across then to Turkey. Semih Idiz, among the stakes here are \$15 billion in proffered American foreign aid. How do you think Turkey will end up in this debate?

Semih Idiz 22:23

Well, the aid is, of course, very important. And there's nobody in Turkey who will say that it isn't. But I think there's a belated awareness in Turkey that this is much more than money. And I think that this is what the parliament both reflected, that if the if it's the political considerations weighed against the economic considerations, Turkey will vote for the political considerations. The stakes are very high for Turkey, of course, so the region the and that is because there's a new formation that's going to come out of this in the region, you know, a new Iraq with all the ramifications and implications. If the Americans do not have a good control over the situation, this is going to be a very unstable Iraq where we have very different ethnicities and very different religions vying for power and fighting against each other. And that is not a welcome prospect on anybody's border, let alone Turkey's. And I think for, to be quite honest, that it is this consideration which will eventually put the Turks alongside the Americans in this because as the Americans have been putting it from the start, you really can't secure your own interests if you're not in and I think that this is a realization that's going to dawn on the Turkish public and on Turkish parliament, and I suspect that they will vote for the arrival of American troops into Turkey. And just as a bit of up to date news from here from Turkey, I can also say that it must be in anticipation of this the development over the next week or so, maybe 10 days, that some American forces have started taking the initial positions on the border in Turkey on the border with Iraq. So obviously the general, yeah, so obviously, in a place called Mardin, so obviously, the expectation is in that direction. But unfortunately for the Americans who are rather impatient at the moment, the Turkish democratic process has to play out here.

Byron Scott 24:04

Democracy is always messy and time consuming. But we're actually running out of our time. So I'm going to ask Eoghan Shortt to give us a very brief summary on this question from Spain.

Eoghan Shortt (ph?) 24:29

Well, Spain is right behind America on this in the Security Council. Question, perhaps now is given yesterday's opposition from France and Germany and Russia to to to the second resolution, will there now be an attempt, as Britain seems to be proposing, to give an extra few days or or some additional time for Saddam to disarm? And then the question would be, would Spain go in behind that initiative? We just don't know. Spain today is still saying that they still think there's a possibility of agreement on that second resolution, despite yesterday's position from France, Germany and Russia.

Byron Scott 25:11

Okay, and finally, Milena Dimitrova from Bulgaria.

Milena Dimitrova 25:15

That's exactly I think it would be the problem because we are close to a schizophrenic situation tomorrow in the Security Council on the one first hand, United States and the great in England insist to have new resolution for a war. But on the other hand, Russia said that it like, constant member will not hesitate to use it's right a veto. So I'm really dubious about what kind of exit we'll have tomorrow.

Byron Scott 25:47

And I think all of us will be focused on that debate in the Security Council tomorrow and the and the actions taking place in the United Nations in the next few days. I want to thank our journalists for their for their opinions for their analysis, I'm sure it is going to help a great many of us in understanding the complications of the next few days. I want to thank Semih Idiz from Aksam in Turkey. Thank you. Milena Dimitrova from 168 Hours in Bulgaria, Eoghan Shortt, from EFE, the Spanish national news agency in Madrid, and Ignacio Rodriguez Reyna, managing editor El Universal in Mexico City. Thank you all for your participation. I also want to thank Gus Pang and Sara Fajardo, our producers. Rada Ravi (ph?) in charge of our website, and finally Mary Furness, our director and audio engineer today and I want to thank you all for listening to Global Journalist. This is Byron Scott, good evening.