

## **Global Journalist: Toni Blair is in Washington, While in a National Scrutiny for His Iraq War Involvement**

**Abstract:** This July 17, 2003 program is about UK's Prime Minister Toni Blair visit to the US. While in Washington Toni Blair is facing a national scrutiny. For his government involvement by joining the US on the war against Iraq. The war that claims Iraq has developed weapons of mass destruction. Now his government is in question about whether Toni Blair lied to his nation as his counterpart George W. Bush or not. In addition, Global Journalist is talking with guests about genetically modified food finding their way into the supermarket without adequate labeling, how that affect consumers and how are other countries dealing with it?

**Host:** Stuart Loory

### **Guests:**

- Rachel Melser
- Mary DJeffski
- [Kate Connelly](#)
- [Rose Lukalo](#)

**Directors:** Pat Acres

**Producers:** [Yusuf Kalyango](#) and Sarah Katan

**Mentioned:** Kenya, UK, EU, Toni Blair, President Bush Administration, terrorism, Iraq, GMO, GMF,

**Runtime:** 28:31

### **SPEAKERS:**

Stuart Loory, Rachel Melser, Mary DJeffski, Kete Connelly, Rose Lukalo

### **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. How good was the intelligence that President George W. Bush used to lead this country into war in Iraq? And how was that information derived? Did he or British Prime Minister Tony Blair deliberately lied to the public in making the case for war. Blair, who was in Washington today is in deep political trouble over the issue. And problems are growing for President Bush's as well. Iraq continues to be a situation dividing the United States from other countries around the world, but so it's a deeper, less dramatic issue that of genetically modified foods. There is disagreement between this country and many countries in the world over whether GM is helpful or harmful. And this is another issue that may come up today in the talks between Bush and Blair. To discuss these two issues today we have guests situated from St. Louis, Missouri to Nairobi, Kenya. They are in St. Louis Rachel Melser, biotechnology

business writer for the St. Louis Post Dispatch, in London, Mary DJeffski a comment writer for The Independent, in Berlin Kate Connelly correspondent for The Daily Telegraph of London and in Nairobi, Rose Lukalo Awino, a freelance writer, greetings to all of you. Let's start with Tony Blair's visit to Washington. Mary DJeffski, how much trouble is the prime minister in the United Kingdom? And what is this trip to Washington all about?

**Mary DJeffski** 01:59

He is in a very big political trouble in London because what is lost over the Iraq affair, in all the questions about intelligence and all the questions about why Britain went to war, is the credibility that he traded on so strongly as Britain's Prime Minister. So, that exacerbated his problems. In Parliament, he's been given a very difficult time, he's been given a difficult time on at least two parliamentary committees, trying to explain especially on the issue of weapons, why the weapons that he presented as being such an immediate threat to Britain and to the world haven't been found. And that's really the source of all his political problems currently.

**Stuart Loory** 02:45

Well, his his credibility has been up and down. Before the war started. There was great debate. And then, after the war began, and after it was over in President Bush's terms in May, he seemed to be doing pretty well. Why now? Is his credibility down again?

**Rachel Melser** 03:12

Because I think he had a respect for as long as the war was on, though, was always is during the wars, Great Patriotic support in Britain for the troops fighting abroad. But the moment than main fighting was over, then people started asking about where were the weapons. And because this was the one issue, which had been presented by Tony Blair to Parliament, as the main reason for Britain going to war was the legal justification in Britain, why the troops were going to or why we were supporting America. Those weapons haven't been found. And until and unless they are, this will remain a big problem for Tony Blair.

**Stuart Loory** 03:55

Rachel Melser the weapons haven't been found is this problem for George Bush in the United States?

**Rachel Melser** 04:03

President Bush continues to enjoy some relatively high approval ratings overall, I'm certainly above 60% of Americans say that they think he's doing a good job. Although the numbers who's say that the war was worth fighting have started to drop them. And the questions are continuing to mount for President Bush.

**Stuart Loory** 04:24

Rose Lukalo, the President just got back from a visit to Africa. Did that trip help to boster his image in Africa?

**Rose Lukalo** 04:37

Well, he didn't come to Kenya, there was a mixed reaction to that, particularly seeing as we've just come through an election, which for the first time we've seen is very democratic both within and outside the country. And there was a lot of hope that he would pass by here as a stamp of Kenya's reacceptance as it were. But I don't think it really did much in terms of the continent, his image on the continent because it was very short. Many people described it as a five minute visit tour of Africa. He didn't spend too much time. And he didn't say very much that was relevant, really.

**Stuart Loory** 05:20

But what about the the war in Iraq? How did that play? And how has it continued to play and how has that affected the images of both George Bush and Tony Blair in Africa?

**Rose Lukalo** 05:39

As always been skepticism in Kenya, as to the reality of these arms, you know, the existence of the arms. So, I don't think it's really a shock. It is being covered extensively here. But it's not really a shock that we're not seeing the evidence. and we're waiting to see how it plays out and what answers are coming out of from the two leaders. And we're listening very closely to the statements being given in the US.

**Stuart Loory** 06:11

The the president, of course, is under attack for saying in his State of the Union speech that nuclear materials to build weapons of mass destruction in Iraq came from Africa. That's what he said in his speech. The British apparently gave him information that the nuclear materials came from Niger, and now all of this is of course denied. And there are indications that the intelligence reports were bogus reports. How has this played in Africa?

**Rose Lukalo** 06:52

um..., it's not being given a very high profile actually, very often when, I remember even in the case of when they were looking for arms and Sudan was mentioned and no arms were found there either. So, we're kind of used to being blamed for, you know, as the source of some of these things. It hasn't been played out very, very, in a big way in the media here. And I don't think people are taking the statements very seriously.

**Stuart Loory** 07:23

Kete Connelly, how about in Western Europe? Is this still an issue there now?

**Kete Connelly** 07:29

Yes, it will have become so in the last few days. And it was interesting that once the war has begun the debate here in Germany about whether their weapons of mass destruction or not, more or less disappeared, and in the last few days with these intelligence reports, coming the facts coming tonight with these intelligence reports were perhaps misleading and has been given a great deal of attention as has Blair's visit to Washington. The Germans are fascinated that the idea was that the relationship between Washington and London, which we've focused on so much in the last few months has now cooled so much. And I think there's a certain feeling here as well obviously of Shodhan Froideur that

sense of we told you so. And that there is very strong feeling here is that Blair is is not going to write this out.

**Stuart Loory** 08:24

Yes, Mary DJeffski, the question of where the nuclear materials came from, if there were any nuclear materials, has been dealt with by the Blair government, as if they really did come from Niger and that the President was wrong to disavow that. What's going on there?

**Rachel Melser** 08:53

Well, yes, I think there was considerable annoyance in London with the statements out of the blue administration that the British intelligence was flawed and unreliable. The British line is that the documents which have been described as forgeries by the IAEA, and now by the White House. London has never really tried to defend those very hard. What it has done is it's insisted all along that it had at least one other source for the information about the uranium coming from Niger. And it says it hasn't identified the source. And it says it's not prepared to the been various rumors going around that maybe it's France, maybe it is Italy, somebody who didn't want to be identified. But the British line is that this information third party information, is given in confidence and that the British are not, therefore authorized to pass it on. Even to Americans with whom they have an official intelligence sharing agreement or Indeed, to the International Atomic Energy authority. So, they're sitting on it, they're not telling us what it is. Though they do seem just in the last couple of days, they seem to be slightly less about the authenticity of this third source than they have been before.

**Stuart Loory** 10:21

Rachel Melser in Washington, all of this is still denied. They now say this information was wrongful information, and bogus. Why are they apparently denying what they say they got from the British, when the British say that it's good information.

**Rachel Melser** 10:41

I think at this point, the Bush administration is just trying to deflect attention from itself. First, turned attention to the US intelligence community casting doubt on how, seriously the report was verified, and another focusing attention again away towards the grid. So, I think this is Just part of the continued effort to remove the issue from President Bush, especially as we head into an election season.

**Stuart Loory** 11:08

And is he willing to cast dispersions on his best ally in this whole thing?

**Rachel Melser** 11:19

I think that remains to be seen. I think there are a lot of eyes focused on Washington as Tony Blair prepares for land and people are waiting to see what will happen.

**Stuart Loory** 11:30

And do we have any idea of what is going to happened? Mary DJeffski, do we have any idea of what Blair is going to say in his talk to Congress? He's only the fourth British Prime Minister to ever address a joint session of Congress here?

**Rachel Melser** 11:47

Yes. And that occasion is being presented here in particularly those terms, that it's a great honor being accorded to the best ally of the United States through the war with Iraq. The problem is that because of the intelligence, that's the main reason, but also because of the prisoners that are British citizens down in Guantanamo Bay. There are these two sources of discord between the British and the Americans. And so, we will be watching very carefully to see what Mr. Blair says to Congress. Among the advance suggestions are that he will actually steer a bit away from the Iraq issue, and that he'll probably concentrate on the Middle East, where of course there is currently very little discord between the British and the Americans.

**Stuart Loory** 12:39

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.globaljournalists.org](http://www.globaljournalists.org) or here in mid Missouri by calling us at 573-882-9641. Before the break all the discussion was about Iraq. Now let's change the discussion the the terms of the discussion a little bit and talk about genetically modified foods. Rachael melser. That is a big issue throughout the world. The United States apparently wants to continue to use genetically modified foods and the rest of the world continues to oppose the United States on this issue. What is this discussion all about? And will the United States agricultural industry continue to go forward with its program for using GMF in its products which it will sell around the world.

**Rachel Melser** 14:04

Well, first of all, I think it's it's maybe a little bit of a misnomer to say the rest of the world is against this issue. There are certainly some countries that have very strongly come out in favor of genetically modified foods and, have joined the US and in support of it. Most notably Australia, Egypt, Canada, Argentina. So there are some some other countries that are on the United States side in this. The issue tends to center around concerns over over health and environmental consequences of using genetically modified foods, at least on the surface. There are those are the issues that have been raised by some very vocal environmental activist groups. Greenpeace has been active around the world on this issue, for example, although there's certainly a hint that there are trade issues that are really the behind this. The United States exports quite a bit of grain to Europe and to other foreign markets. And it's concerned that if growing opposition to genetically modified foods and strict labeling policies throw up barriers to that, then it could result in a quite a large loss of income to American farmers. As far as the agricultural companies are concerned down Monsanto, which is based here in St. Louis is the world's leading provider of genetically modified seeds and genetic traits which they sell to seed companies for use in their products. And they're very committed to the technology into continuing down the path. They've talked about taking the current, the current group of genetically modified traits, which tend to be things that benefit farmers, things that protect against disease or allow them to use pesticides safely, and moving into more consumer benefits. Plants that are modified to increase vitamin content for example, or improve tastes or appearance. And there's even talk of using of using corn and other grants to produce pharmaceuticals, to produce to produce polymers for industry. So, I think there's quite a bit of interest among American industry.

**Stuart Loory** 16:17

Kete Connelly the European Union is ambivalent on this whole question. And at the very least, it seems to want genetically modified foods to be labeled as such. Is there any chance that they are going to ease their policies in Europe?

**Kete Connelly** 16:38

I think the point is that they feel that people are they that the Europeans still need to be convinced that there are too many questions, unanswered questions about GM food and the dangers and the threats of it. And also, I think the feeling is that these companies like Monsanto and advented haven't really helped themselves by selling these products very well, in Europe, they've pointed out they've, for example, in in Britain, they've planted the wrong type of seed in rapeseed fields across the across Britain. There's also recent, the recent World Food summit, which the United States tried to suggest that by not using GM food, that the European Union was actually encouraging famine in Africa. And I think that some until people are convinced that it can be a benefit to them and be as safe and and environmentally and for people to help that they're not going to buy it. On the other hand, once talking about a lot about informing the consumers that consumers are ill informed and therefore scared of the unknown. There was a survey in 1999 and which show something like 35% of people said that ordinary tomatoes didnt contain genes but genetically modified tomatoes did. And another 30% didn't know as to whether this statement was false or not. So, there's lots of confusion about this and the feeling that it needs to be clarified. People need to be better informed before any steps are taken.

**Stuart Loory** 18:17

Rose Lukalo there's a lot of concern in Africa over genetically modified foods coming from the west? Is this a problem that is going to be dealt with or will opposition just continue or what?

**Rose Lukalo** 18:38

This recognition, this recognition of the potential of genetically modified foods in a fight to improve food security which has we've always been vulnerable in this part of the world. But the sense in Africa is that we're going we're moving too fast. The US is pushing the world's too fast, and particularly on our continent where we lack the tech resource to participate in creating these new these foods. It's a bit unfair and what has happened the issues very topical now because the southern Africa, which had drought for most of last year and into this year food shortages into this year, was actually sent confinements of genetically modified food. Five countries, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Zambia all received consignments of genetically modified maize, only them be rejected it and I think it was a bit unfair to impose these foods on countries that really do not have a choice. They're in the in the throes of hunger. There's no choice left to them. I think many countries support Africa on this. We're not saying that the stopped genetically modified foods, stop the you know the experimentation and the development of these foods but we really do need to know, what are the health implications? What are the environmental concerns. There's also the issue of trade which has been touched on, because the the Southern African case is the real risk of this food, these genetically modified foods finding themselves finding their way into the food chain. If for example, those farmers feed that grain to their cows, they will be barred from exporting anything to the to the European market. So, there's a whole chain of interrelated facts that needs to be examined more closely, before these foods are just dumped on the continent.

**Stuart Loory** 20:38

Mary DJeffski is that examination taking place in the United Kingdom?

**Rachel Melser** 20:43

Yes, it is. Generally the British government has been more friendly, more receptive to the idea of genetically modified food than many of the other European government. Public opinion on the other hand is quite hostile. Labeling is considered as an absolute precondition before American genetically modified food products should be marketed in this country. The government's position, though, was recently undermined just in the last week, because an official report which they had commissioned, came back saying that the benefits whether to farmers or whether to consumers in this country, from genetically modified foods labeled or not, was highly questionable. And this, I think, was not the argument that the government was expecting to hear. And so the actual urgency with which the government has been presenting the case is rather declined.

**Stuart Loory** 21:40

Rachel Melser apparently American food manufacturers are opposed to the idea of labeling, why is that?

**Rachel Melser** 21:50

They're opposed to the idea because they say that the standards that have been set and particularly traceability rules which would say that genetically modified foods need to be traced from farm to fork, from the seeds that are planted all the way through the production process into shipping and distribution, which just be impractical and too expensive for them to cope with. So, that's that their main objection?

**Stuart Loory** 22:14

Well, but we do have a lot of labeling in the United States and a lot of information is given to consumers. Why not in regard to genetically modified foods continue that procedure?

**Rachel Melser** 22:30

Well, there's certainly some some opposition or at least some concern on the part of Monsanto and the other companies that are engaged in producing genetically modified foods, that by putting something on a label, it's perceived as a warning, and it won't be seen as simply information, say as a calorie count would be, but it would be seen as some sort of a caution that that consumers should, stay away from. So, I think they're really pushing for educational efforts to be to be setped up into wait at least until they feel that consumers will make an informed choice and not one, based on, you know, perhaps rumors or concerns that that they don't think are founded.

**Stuart Loory** 23:13

Kete Connelly is European Union taking this into consideration when it says that it wants labeling of foods, is it thinking in terms of a warning or thinking in terms of educating the public?

**Kete Connelly** 23:28

I think that it's some that there, there are two, I think both arguments are being taken into account at the moment the consumer is winning out. I think there's a strong feeling amongst lots of Europeans, particularly in places like France and Germany and Greece, that, you know, this is a chance for people to show that they will make it the choice for whether they buy something in the supermarket or not, if it's labeled or not. And I think that the EU realizes that it has to take both these both these arguments into account in any legislation that it will pass.

**Stuart Loory** 24:03

We, in the United States are developing a choice between organic foods and chemically treated foods. Rachel Melsler, is the debate over genetically modified foods, a similar kind of debate? Or is there something different about this?

**Rachel Melsler** 24:26

I think that there's something a little bit different about it because genetically modified foods cover such a wide range of types of applications. I mean, we have we have had a couple of incidences in the United States where, for example, a corn that was being bred for to produce a non food product a pharmaceutical product became accidentally mixed with some corn that was going to be used for feed and I think that that certainly woke some people up and two possibilities. So. there is concerned about how these different products are handled in a little bit different way. But I think there's also not a very good understanding of the organic industry, I think people perceive it to be very natural and very healthy. But in some cases, studies have shown that organic foods actually are treated more heavily with different types of pesticides and chemicals to ward off the types of problems that the genetically modified foods are designed to deal with.

**Stuart Loory** 25:23

Can genetically modified foods do anything to prevent outbreaks of mad cow disease or hoof and mouth disease or the kinds of things that have been such a problem recently in the United Kingdom Rachel you go first on that and then Mary DJeffski?

**Rachel Melsler** 25:42

Sure, they really count, I mean, it's really two separate issues but certainly the the issue of hoof and mouth and Mad Cow play and all of this because I think it's really affected the way that consumers in Europe and in the UK view food technologies in general, we've heard that there's a general lack of trust of the regulators and the governing agencies that allowed this outbreaks to occur. Or in the United States, I think there's more general trust of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Food and Drug Administration to to keep a lid on things and make sure that things that aren't safe on reaching consumers or grocery store shelf

**Stuart Loory** 26:21

Mary DJeffski?

**Mary DJeffski** 26:22

Yes, that's a very good point, I think in Britain, especially because of the Foot and Mouth outbreak which was so serious, and because of mad cow disease, that apparently now over, there is a very great



suspicion of scientific involvement and change and things which are beyond the consumers control that government regulation and government monitoring isn't sufficient to prevent this. And we don't want to genetically modified food introduced with the approval of the government, because that trust is simply broken down.

**Stuart Loory** 26:59

Okay, we've got Just a few seconds left and Kete Connelly, I'll give you the last word on how the European Union is going to treat this question?

**Kete Connelly** 27:10

Well, there's a big, there's a big PR problem here, as well, because I think the feeling that Europeans have is that Americans maybe eat things that are thinking very carefully about what they're eating. If you look at the case of these companies now that have literally said they're going to put their cut their consumers or their customers on a diet by giving them smaller portions. And I think that the European Union could succeed in producing a law that suits all the different views with in EU.

**Stuart Loory** 27:39

Yeah, Kete, I'm sorry, I've got to cut you off. But we are out of time. Our guests today have been Rose Lukalo Awino in Nairobi, Kete Connelly in Berlin, Mary DJeffski in London and Rachel Melser in St. Louis, our directors Pet Acres and our producer Sarah Katan and Yusuf Kalyango for all I'm Stuart Loory, Global Journalist we'll be back next week.