

Global Journalist: Reporters on the Iraq war

Abstract: This show from April 3, 2003 features several journalists discussing how they view the recent progress of the American and British forces in the Iraq war. Jennifer Hamarneh, at the time the editor-in-chief of The Jordan Times, talks about hearing from Matthew McAllester, a reporter who was held captive in Iraq for over a week.

Host: [Stuart Loory](#)

Guests:

- [Jennifer Hamarneh](#), Jordan
- [Reinhard Meier](#), Switzerland
- [Edward Lucas](#), London
- [Dan Sneider](#), California

Producers: [Sara Andrea Fajardo](#), [Augustine Pang](#)

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Runtime: 27:30

Stuart Loory 00:20

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. After three weeks of what most observers thought was slow progress, the war in Iraq has suddenly reached a swift pace for the British and American forces fighting there. American forces are in the outskirts of Baghdad. They have entered a Presidential Palace. They're on the perimeter of the main international airport. They've taken bridges over the Tigris River before those bridges could be destroyed. And the elite Republican Guard of President Saddam Hussein seems to have melted away. Is the end of the fighting near? Or will it go on for some time? Is Saddam Hussein's time as Iraqi leader almost over? Will weapons of mass destruction be used by his forces? Can any of these questions be answered yet? Well, today we're going to ask Jennifer Hamarneh, acting editor-in-chief of The Jordan Times in Amman, Jordan; Reinhard Meier, foreign editor of the Neue Zürcher Zeitung in Zürich, Switzerland; Edward Lucas, acting British editor of The Economist in London; and Dan Sneider, national and foreign editor of the San Jose Mercury News in San Jose, California. Let's start close to the scene of the fighting. Jennifer Hamarneh, can you please bring us up to date on how the war is being viewed from Amman?

Jennifer Hamarneh 02:01

Alright, it was only yesterday that we received news that the coalition forces were approaching very close to Baghdad and then today, we understand they're within 10 miles of Baghdad and poised to take over the airport, which would be a major feat. I can't tell you about reactions to that, because we haven't been out on the street to get them yet, or from the officials. But I think that in certain sectors, you will feel that some people would like to see this over with quickly. They've seen enough suffering, especially of the civilian casualties, and therefore, they would like to see it over with quickly and that if indeed the intent is to bring democracy to that part of the world, then to do it quickly, and then move out.

Stuart Loory 02:49

I should imagine that one indication of how well the war was going for the coalition and how badly it was going for Iraq would be the number of Iraqi refugees who are arriving in Jordan and other countries in the area. Has that number gone up in recent days?

Jennifer Hamarneh 03:09

We haven't received any in Jordan and there was a big, you know, movement to receive people coming into Jordan. And for the most part, all we've received are third-country nationals, which number about 727. 420-something of them have moved on to their own countries, but Iraqis themselves, we've only seen two come across the border. And they were an elderly couple. The husband was seeking treatment in one of the Gulf countries so they let them through and pass them on to I think Bahrain, but we haven't seen any refugees coming towards us.

Stuart Loory 03:43

Let's move on now to Europe and to England, and get a picture from Reinhard Meier in Zurich, Edward Lucas in London, of how the war appears to be going from their points of view, Reinhard, do you want to go first?

Reinhard Meier 04:03

Well, it seems that in the last one or two days, the British and the Americans are making progress. They're very near Baghdad or already in Baghdad. This is difficult to judge from from Switzerland and from Zurich about the the military progress, but I think it will have if it's really an end or a definite or a clear change in the military scene will will be confirmed. I think it will also have an influence on public opinion, which was very skeptical in Switzerland and all over Western Europe in the last three weeks and before the war especially, and if the war comes out more smoothly, there will be an end of or that you can see an end of the pounding of civilian targets and things like that, I think they will be more understanding for for this war and for how for the aims of this war.

Stuart Loory 05:18

This has been a very strange war in many respects. But the main thing is that there appear to have been so far low casualties on both sides. I think the stories here in London today were that so far there have been 78 killed among British and American forces, and the Iraqis have not claimed any great number of civilian casualties on their side. Edward, what do you make of that?

Edward Lucas 05:54

Well, I think it is a remarkable achievement and if one compares it with any previous war, the last Gulf War or any any war before that, far more people, certainly civilians, have been killed. It just wasn't possible to bomb a city, the way we bombed Baghdad now where you can destroy the telephone exchange but leave the school and the hospital next to it with a few broken windows or nothing at all. And it's a we are seeing for the first time what this revolution in military affairs that the Americans have been talking about what that really means. We couldn't really see it in Afghanistan, because it wasn't very much to bomb that was a sort of very different capitalization. And we're two weeks into the war I think it's no one can begin to start drawing some preliminary conclusions about what it's how it's going. The fog of war in the first 10 days or so it may be quite quite quite hard to see anything definitive. And I think on the whole the the results are pretty good. I mean, there is an awful lot of things haven't happened that people who were anti war very confidently predicted would happen. You know Saddam didn't set all the oil fields ablaze, he didn't leave, he hasn't used weapons of mass destruction. None of his armed forces have shown any sign of being able to mount any really dangerous resistance to coalition forces. So I think the balance after the first two weeks is pretty good. And I think British public opinions um, you know, which was quite skeptical about the war, is broadly speaking, satisfied with the way it's going.

Stuart Loory 07:24

Two weeks ago, it looked like Tony Blair might not last in office and now he's he's looking rather strong, isn't he?

Edward Lucas 07:32

Well, I was always a bit skeptical about the idea that, I thought nothing nothing short of a really gruesome military defeat would threaten his Premiership although still, the war didn't achieve its objectives, it might be the he would leave office of his of his own accord, but they were way way way away from that, that the rebellion by the labour backbench members of parliament was painfully embarrassing, but he didn't really threaten to be lethal to the government survival and know the fighting started and the majority of the British population backs, backs the war wants it to be over quickly, which all the signs are pointing to the fact that it will be.

Stuart Loory 08:14

Dan Sneider, is that happening in the United States as well? You're right down the the coast from San Francisco, which I guess is one of the hotbeds of anti war sentiment in the United States. Is there any change noticeable in the attitudes toward the war?

Dan Sneider 08:33

Well, you know, we conducted a poll in Silicon Valley, which is where we're where we are located, San Jose sort of thing we are, we're the newspaper of Silicon Valley. And we found actually something, this was a poll we published this past Sunday and the support for the war here is significantly less than in the rest of the country I think. We had only 48% of the people who back the war compared to more than 70% Nationwide, and almost that many who objected to it, and there was, I think, very, very strong skepticism generally about the war, the support for the president is about 40%, which compares to almost 70% nationally. So we may be the exception rather than the rule as far as American attitudes are towards the war. But I would say even here, of course, everybody hopes for a quick end of this war. And I think that if, if that takes place, and I remain, you know, a little bit cautious about that, because I think as we've seen the last couple of weeks, this war has been full of some twists and turns and I don't know that we're, we're, we're yet out of the the twist and turn part of this of this conflict. But if it if it concludes quickly, I think that will tend to, to shift public opinion to a certain degree.

Stuart Loory 09:50

Yes, Dan, I am outside of the United States and I don't see all of the coverage in the United States. I have watched several live briefings by people like Donald Rumsfeld or, or general Vince Brooke. And there seems to be a lot of criticism of the way the the media are handling the story in the United States and a lot of unhappiness from the government and military officials. Do you get a lot of pressure put on your reporters or even on your editors from the government?

Dan Sneider 10:34

No, not from the government. I think, you know, we get pressure put on us from our readers from, from both directions here. As you said, this is a pretty strong bastion of anti war sentiment so and as well there are people who strongly support the war. So, we tend to get the kind of reaction where people when people read news they don't like, for whatever reason, they they accuse us of being the, the problem, rather than the news that they're seeing, and I think to some degree, that's what we're seeing from the government. I find a little bit hard to take seriously the Pentagon's carping about media coverage when they're the ones who created the structure for media coverage. I listened the other day to General Myers saying, well, you know, "these reporters, they have only a soda straw view of the of the war." Well, the soda straw was provided to us by the Pentagon. So, it says if that's the problem they created it.

Stuart Loory 11:25

This is the so-called embedding of hundreds of correspondents How is that embedding working? In the first days of the war, everybody was pretty happy with it, is that still generally the situation?

Dan Sneider 11:38

You know, I started out a little worried about it, afraid that we were, afraid of two things. One, that you know, we were going to get too narrow a perspective at times, and also that our reporters would naturally feel a sense of comradeship with the people that they're with. And you know, those problems exist in, last night, for example, we had a dispatch from our reporter who's with the third Infantry Division and right up at the front lines, and it was a story that was written heavily using the words "we" and "our" in describing the movement of the third infantry's column. And there was a discussion in our newsroom, well, should we take that out or leave it in? Doesn't it show that he's somewhat identified with these? And ethically, you know, this is the perspective he has, the man has spent three weeks, you know, in battle with these with these guys. And it's natural that you're going to get that kind of identification. But for the most part, I think the reporting has been tremendous. I mean, we had a story yesterday on our front page, which described in great detail the killing of this Iraqi family in a Toyota on a near Nasiriyah, I believe, and many readers objected to that. It was a very powerful story, but I think we've gotten some great reporting on in no matter what the circumstances were.

Stuart Loory 12:58

Jennifer Hamarneh, you had, I think his name is Matthew McAllester, the Newsday reporter, and his colleagues come into Jordan, after being held in captivity by the Iraqis for over a week. Did you get a chance to, to talk to any of these people and get an idea of how they were treated?

Jennifer Hamarneh 13:23

Yeah, some of our staff reporters went to a presser that they gave yesterday afternoon. And they were happy to be back in Jordan, that's for sure, feeling safe and in good hands. And they just expressed relief to be back, you know, on their way back home, they spent so they spent a week long week long in Baghdad in detention, and insane they were able to call their editors and their families to tell them that they were well, but I think there wasn't too many complaints. I

mean, we were really, people were quite fearful about their state, you know, whether they were still alive, whether they were being mistreated, but it seems that they were just tired and worn out and seemed alright when they came back.

Stuart Loory 14:06

The stories in the British press today about that interview were were considerably different there. McAllester talked about how he had to turn his back away from other prisoners being beaten in front of him, political prisoners. Was that exaggerated?

Jennifer Hamarneh 14:29

Perhaps he gave a separate interview to them that, perhaps he gave a separate interview and we didn't have that in our report because ours was taken from a press conference with all of them with several of them who had returned, so maybe he gave a separate interview.

Stuart Loory 14:46

Okay, yeah, 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 dot global journalist.org](http://www.globaljournalist.org) or in mid Missouri by calling 573-882-9641. We spent the first part of this program talking about what has been happening in Iraq. Let's now talk about what might happen. Let's start by assuming that the fighting is going to wind down rather quickly. What about the future? Colin Powell was in Brussels talking to European leaders about what part the United Nations or the or Europe NATO might take in rebuilding Iraq? Reinhard Meier, how is all of this going to work out do you think?

Reinhard Meier 16:05

Well, there seems to be a difference in, in a map between, between the Europeans and especially the British and the Americans. The Americans want first, I think they want to control the whole country or as far as possible, not give that control out to other agencies and, and not to the United Nations, whereas the Tony Blair has stated that he wants to have a strong role for for the UN. And I think the majority of the Europeans would be more happy and more, more at ease if if some international body would would be would have a strong role and that it would not be just a more or less an American show, because this would create more the image of an American occupation, and I think, and this will be put together with images and perceptions of colonialism and things like that, especially, not only in Europe but even more in the Arab world. And I think it is very important for the Americans that they not create the, this disperception, that they want to say somehow to control for a long time, the whole of Iraq and even maybe even the...I think it's very important that they that they convince the world opinion that they are not for their own purpose there, that they only want to wanted to really liberate Iraq and the Iraqi people and then they will be some of an international responsibility for.

Stuart Loory 17:53

Edward Lucas, Tony Blair spent some time in Washington last weekend apparently raising this issue with President Bush and the administration. Did he make any headway?

Edward Lucas 18:09

What he said he meant to get the issue back on the back on the agenda. But I think there's a lot of posturing here. But there's no way that the UN can operate in Iraq in any meaningful sense until the country's secure. And it will only be secure if the Allied coalition military objectives have been reached. I think the UN's obviously the best body to do a lot of the legwork, it may not be the best body to organize the sort of policing and security. And that's what we've seen in Afghanistan. You have a separate military body for doing that, and then the various agencies and so on, trying to sort out humanitarian questions. So I think that to some extent, the public tussle may seem more acute than the underlying pragmatic issues. But there is some degree of disagreement between Washington and London on this. And I, I also think it's worth mentioning the question of Syria, which at least some of the hawks in Washington seem to be thinking that Syria should be next on the list, so to speak. And that's something that gets the British government quite upset. And they said with quite unusual bluntness yesterday, that they had no interest in going after Syria, and they didn't think there was any point in talking in bellicose terms about Syria. So that I think perhaps is a more is another simple effect. It's going to be some time before the UN question really arises in Iraq. Whereas if the Pentagon thinks that Syria is supplying weapons to Iraq, then it may be a question that that question may need to be addressed more more quickly.

Stuart Loory 19:53

Jennifer, did that story get much play in in Jordan in the Middle East? The story about Syria?

Jennifer Hamarneh 20:01

About the accusations of Syria, Yes, it did. It did. And people were quite worried about it because they thought, alright, if the pot finger is now going to be pointed at Syria, and you know, on, then we're looking at a much larger scale operation. And people are quite concerned about that. I mean, Iraq is large enough is enough to deal with there, to start moving into other directions and even speaking of it is very frightening to them.

Reinhard Meier 20:30

I think, which is much more important for for public opinion here in Europe is not the not the question of Syria. But it on a political level is the question of the Palestinian question and the Israeli Palestinian conflict. And many people here really expect that after the end of the war in Iraq and the regime change there that the President Bush, everybody is now waiting, will President Bush adhere to his sayings that he will really address them and then get engaged in insulting that question or at least in in providing some success and some progress in between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Stuart Loory 21:19

I think what I'm hearing from all of you is that the end of the fighting is not the end of everything, that it's really only the beginning of a long row ahead. Dan, is that getting much attention in the United States?

Dan Sneider 21:37

Well, yeah, I think people are looking ahead very much so and thinking about what's going to happen. I think the, we don't know what the political cost of this war is. I mean, I can see military victory and obviously even closer perhaps than we thought it might be the case. But I don't know what the political cost of that military victory is going to be. What is the occupation of Iraq going to look like. I, I pretty much dismiss the idea that, let me put this way, I think if people think that this administration after winning a pretty dramatic military victory in Iraq, over the objections of much of the world, is now going to invite the United Nations or Europe or any organization into administer Iraq with it, they have there, they're going to be very, very disappointed. They're not going to do that. They're going to run this country the way they have already, they've been spending months and months thinking about how that's going to take place, and they're going to do it the way they want to do it. And we'll see what happens. And then the question will be, what's the response of the Iraq population.

Stuart Loory 22:42

There's a story, which says that not only is the administration going to do it, but the Defense Department is going to do it. Donald Rumsfeld is, is mounting a campaign to keep Colin Powell out of any decision making on the future in Iraq.

Dan Sneider 23:06

I think Colin Powell's leverage inside the administration has drastically reduced. And I mean, he'll play the role he does play to as an interlocutor with others. But I think that the policy is not going to come from there. And I think that's clear that this is going to be pretty much shaped by the forces that are that we are pretty much aware of, those of the Vice President and Don Rumsfeld and others, and and I think that they're, as I said, they're going to proceed in the way they they had already predetermined to do so. And then I think, are we inheriting a West Bank in Iraq? Or are we creating the model for democracy? That remains to be seen and I think if it's the if it's the former, it has huge implications, obviously, for not only for us, but for the region, but for the rest of the world.

Jennifer Hamarneh 23:54

There's a question that's being asked on this side of the world, which is, why is it in the early days they haven't brought in the people that they're considering from the Iraqi opposition outside of course of the country to start coming in and start talking and start leaflets and start gathering, which leads people to believe that, you know, there is no intention to release Iraq to an Iraqi leadership, but that it would be some sort of, you know, governorship for a very long time to come. And this is the impression that people have here.

Stuart Loory 24:29

Well, but apparently there is an Iraqi shadow government in waiting in Kuwait waiting to get into the country.

Jennifer Hamarneh 24:37

We haven't heard anything about it. There's no movement there. There's a discussion and revelation of who these faces and names are.

Reinhard Meier 24:46

But is that really necessary? If you think of, of the situation after the second world war with Japan and especially Germany, there was no federal government there, but then they gradually developed. I think it's more a question of, of the political will of the occupation power and of victorious powers if they really want to, to develop a country, which has its own government then to create maybe their own parliament and things like that. It took quite a while in Germany, a couple of years. But nevertheless, it was quite clear from the beginning or from the after the first couple of months that they wanted to develop a new type of government, a new type of political system there.

Dan Sneider 25:36

You know, I don't think that the Don Rumsfeld wants a long term occupation of Iraq. I think quite the contrary, I think they'd like to make it as quick as possible. I think the issue is, will they be able to do that? Will they be able to leave, leave the field, you know, from a military point of view, I think, you know, in the time period that they would like. That's the discussion that's going on here, there's some skepticism.

Stuart Loory 26:01

And will they be able to put in place a government that will bring some stability to Iraq? Edward Lucas, is the the British government, is Tony Blair happy with with the planning that's being done? We have just a few seconds left.

Edward Lucas 26:22

I think that people are much more skeptical in London about the Iraqi opposition than they are in Washington. The Iraqis have made a big effort to cultivate contacts and friends in the Pentagon, people like Richard Perle and so on. That hasn't happened in London. I think we're much more skeptical about their abilities around the country.

Stuart Loory 26:39

Right. Okay. I'm sorry, but we are out of time. Our guests today have been Dan Sneider of the San Jose Mercury News, Reinhard Meier of the Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Edward Lucas of the

Economist, and Jennifer Harmarneh of The Jordan Times. Our director is Pat Akers, and our producers Sara Andrea Fajardo and Augustine Pang. I'm Stuart Loory, Global Journalist will be back next week.