

# Global Journalist: President Bush's war on Iraq and the EU response

**Abstract:** This interview from May 1, 2003, features several European journalists describing their countries' responses to President Bush's war on Iraq. They discuss the stance that the leaders of Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Spain are taking, whether they are supporting or opposing President Bush's involvement, and their predictions on the effect it will have on the European Union.

**Host:** [Byron Scott](#)

## **Guests:**

- Robert Van Reinshaw (ph?), Germany
- [Bruce Crumley](#), Paris
- [Simon Tisdall](#), London
- [Patrick Fort](#), Madrid

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

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**Tags:** war in Iraq, Iraq war, Der Tagesspiegel, The Daily Mirror, Germany, Bruce Crumley, Paris, TIME magazine, Simon Tisdall, London, The Guardian, Patrick Fort, Agence France-Presse, Madrid, Tony Blair, Gerhard Schroder, Jacques Chirac, European Union

**Runtime:** 28:05

**Byron Scott** 00:12

Welcome to Global Journalist, the program that insists that even Americans are interested in international analysis and news. This is Byron Scott from the Missouri School of Journalism sitting in for Stuart Loory. This evening, we have four distinguished journalists from Europe and we wish to first of all want to wish them all happy May Day This is the traditional holiday for picnics or demonstrations. And of course, it's a day that is, by definition, no holiday for journalists. But we'd like to welcome them. Robert Van Reinshaw (ph?), the Berlin bureau chief for Der Tagesspiegel, The Daily Mirror, in Germany. Welcome, Robert.

**Robert Van Reinshaw (?)** 00:51

Hi, how are you?

**Byron Scott** 00:52

Good. Bruce Crumley, TIME magazine's correspondent in Paris. Welcome back, Bruce.

**Bruce Crumley** 00:58

Thank you.

**Byron Scott** 00:59

Simon Tisdall, assistant editor for The Guardian in London. Simon again, welcome back. And we're also asking, we're also trying to reach now in Madrid, Patrick Fort, the correspondent for Agence France-Presse. Patrick, are you with us?

**Patrick Fort** 01:14

I'm with you.

**Byron Scott** 01:15

Very good. Thank you. This evening we'd like to discuss the European Union and its status after an event that at least has riveted the attention of Americans over the last several weeks, and that is the war in Iraq. Several members of the 15 member EU have opposed the American intervention, principally the German and French governments and their spokesman. Several, including the Spanish and English governments, have have supported the United States. How is this 15 member rising force in the world soon to become 25 nation member if if the Treaty of Nice is fulfilled. What is its future after this, after the war in Iraq? Let's start with Robert. What is the view from Berlin?

**Robert Van Reinshaw (?)** 02:07

Basically what happens at amazing speed is that the issue of the Iraq War has moved to the back front. The economic situation in Germany is so dire, and the reform agenda that Chancellor Schroder has put forth, is so controversial, that the debate on domestic reform, pension system, Social Security, welfare, labor market, these issues have moved to the floor. And there is a certain amount of, how should we put it. Germany did oppose the war, the government did oppose the war and the majority of the population was opposed to the war, given the fact that the war lasted only three weeks and militarily speaking was successful and did not cost the amount of life that many predicted it would. There's a certain amount of embarrassment on the official German level. So they're very much ready to move ahead and talk about different issues. Issues of domestic reform.

**Byron Scott** 03:18

Okay. And Simon Tisdall from the, from the home of George Bush's greatest ally and friend Tony Blair. What is the view from London?

**Simon Tisdall** 03:31

Well, Tony Blair's been trying very hard not to crow. He has seen a rise in his opinion poll ratings, which is attributed to what's called the Baghdad bounce. That'll be tested today because England and Wales are having local, you might call municipal elections. So we have an instant opinion poll really which may or may not be affected by people's opinions about the war. Blair, of course was opposed by a majority of the British public in taking the course he did, and by a significantly large number of members of his own parliamentary party, and he revealed at last weekend that at one point, he felt he might have to resign and indeed was prepared to do so if he hadn't won sufficient votes in the House of Commons. Unlike Germany, Blair continues to talk about this issue. Unlike Gerhard Schroder, not because he's feeling vindicated, particularly but because he's now increasingly concerned about the postwar ramifications, not least for the European Union. there continues to be a quite a lot of I would say irrational anger at the French, and this has spilled over to others areas of bilateral relations. Blair went to Russia this week to try and patch things up with Vladimir Putin, and was publicly humiliated by the Russian president who poked fun at his, his and America's failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq or indeed to capture Saddam Hussein. But Blair is spinning a new idea or new concept of a unipolar world which is naturally led by America, and which Europe follows in partnership. And this is strongly opposed by people like Jacques Chirac and Vladimir Putin.

**Byron Scott** 05:40

Let's move on to to Paris. Here in the United States, Bruce Crumley, of course, we are now once more safely able to order french fries in public restaurants. Can you talk to us about what's going on in Paris?

**Bruce Crumley** 05:54

Yeah, well, I think I think, the big news this week was, you know, this this meeting of four nations, Germany, France, Belgium and Luxembourg, to sort of decided they were going to create this European military command structure, something that was was denounced by Tony

Blair. It's in a way people ask, you know why is why is Chirac, above all, braving, you know, a US ire, why is he always choosing this time to stand up when he's just said he's going to be pragmatic and seem to you know, again challenge the US leadership and it's if you step back outside of this conflict, you actually see that this is another step in a rather, you know, halting jerking movement to create not only European military defense structures, but just European integration in general. So, I think right now what what the French are trying to do is just get on with businesses, as well as they can, you know, get back to it to the regular normal mode of functioning. And kind of wait and see what what, if anything, the US is going to do as far as come up. But it's a it's a it's a rather curious time and into you know Europe as to answer your question going into this, you know what, how's Europe come out of this? Europe is obviously very divided right now.

**Byron Scott** 07:18

What is the Spanish point of view now, Patrick Fort in Madrid?

**Patrick Fort** 07:23

Well, actually Jose Maria Aznar came into this hoping to have a bigger role in Europe because he was like, kind of hated the old Europe with Germany and France. And so he betted on the American position and actually, it's a good position internationally, because now he's pretty strongly represented as in Iraq, and as an intensive diplomatic activity in Madrid and our issue today, Bush and Blair last week, and this is your lawyer... the foreign minister went to Syria last Monday, but internally people are really against the war and the municipal elections coming up in May could be really disastrous, a disaster for the for the party for the PTO. So it's kind of like a paradox where you want an international position but lost a really favorable internal position where we're now most of the Spanish people are against his position and he's fighting to come back, to bring his party back at the top level in the election.

**Byron Scott** 08:28

I think some of the some of the common threads that I see here that we could certainly equate with here in the United States include the returned concerns with the world economy. Is there a feeling that the Iraq war or the split in the European Union will exacerbate this and if so, will it slow down the planned expansion of the the European Union? What do you think Simon?

**Simon Tisdall** 09:00

I don't think there's a much bearing on on European enlargement which which will go ahead on schedule in May next year when 10 countries will join the union. In terms of the world economic situation well, one consequence of the tension between the European Union and the United States or rather, the Bush administration, may spill over into talks about the Doha Round or the world trade talks. Because there are a lot of quite difficult trade issues between the United States and Europe concerns concerning steel tariffs and agricultural protection and so on, which, which the solution to which may be harder to find not easier because of the current tensions. In terms of the world economy, well, the only real effect here so far has been a fall in the oil price, which I think most people would welcome.

**Byron Scott** 10:01

Has this been, has there also been a fall in the price of petrol then?

**Simon Tisdall** 10:07

That's what I mean. Yeah. The pump price has gone down and well heating of it as well. And one would expect further falls, but I think OPEC's taking steps to prevent that even as we speak.

**Byron Scott** 10:23

Robert Van Reinshaw (ph?) from Berlin, do the Germans feel the same way?

**Robert Van Reinshaw (?)** 10:29

Well, there's a two fold connection between the Iraq War and the economic situation. First issue would be that the Schroder government has been using Iraq to blame the dire economic situation that this country is facing on the war on the international situation indirectly on Bush. Schroder for months has been saying that the extremely sluggish growth was mainly due to international, the international situation, and that the Iraq War was certainly dampening any hopes of a economic recovery. Now with the war over, and the impact of it somewhat limited, the Schroder government has to look for different scapegoats. They have to blame somebody else on the economic situation. Of course, it is a certain willingness to look at the structural reform needs in this country. The second connection is that there is a visible amount of fear in this country, that there might be some kind of economic retaliation by Americans. When it comes to public procurement, when it comes to individual decisions, consumer decisions. Germans are afraid that American anger over Germany's position during the Iraq War might spill over into people not buying cars in the US, people not giving contracts to German companies when it comes to public procurement. These are the two points where the economic situation and the Iraq war are connected from the German perspective.

**Byron Scott** 12:16

Bruce Crumley, do the French also feel this way?

**Bruce Crumley** 12:19

Well, I mean, of course anybody who had opposed the war and has now seen the ire of, you know, the American public and media and administration are concerned, I just, thus far, I don't think there's a lot of proof that the war itself has had an economic impact other than on stock markets. And because stock markets as we've seen over the past five years, are generally impacted by a hybrid lemming groundhog type mentality. One day they're euphoric, the next day, they're, they're terrified and you don't quite know what, and that all kind of plays into the global and national psychologies and mindsets with with how people view, you know, the

likelihood of recovery, the likelihood of downturn, what have you. Like one thing in Europe is the Europeans can look at as a kind of a relief as I think already, the Euro has other creation of the single currency, the Euro has protected them in some degree or staved off anyway. The US, the effects of the US slow down, getting to Europe, they're now here, but I think they've got they've gotten here a lot, a lot slower than they would have. And I also think the other thing that's interesting is that in France, also I think this the distraction and the attention that was turned to Iraq and Jacques Chirac's role in the in the pre war diplomacy, really masked to a large degree some of the internal problems, certainly economic, and there's been this, his conservative government has been reform-minded, and I think some of the Almost unavoidable reaction, French reaction to any reform has kind of been minimized due to the focus on Iraq. Now I think when that's over, we're going to see a lot more scrutiny paid to domestic issues, and we may see his government and indeed Chirac himself suffer as a result.

**Byron Scott** 14:24

We're going to take a little break right now and we'll come right back. And we'll begin with, when we come back with Patrick Fort from Madrid. Just reminding you this is Global Journalist from KBIA. We're back and I'd like to remind you this is Byron Scott, sitting in for Stuart Loory, and we're discussing with four European journalists the question of the EU, after Iraq, and I'd also remind you that if you'd like you can also listen to this show later on the Internet at KBIA dot org or global journalist dot org. Patrick Fort, how what is the perspective from Spain on on the questions we've been discussing?

**Patrick Fort** 15:12

Well first of all like the economics is not really an issue right away right now because the Spanish opinion thought it was very immoral to go out to work for an economic pump to get cheaper gas so nobody's really talking about it but when you talk when you when you talk with a with a with people from companies, they're hoping that that they go to get some some work in Iraq and they really happy Aznar had the position to move into Iraq where where they didn't have any business at all and hoping they're gonna get better market shares than the French or the Germans. But then here internally on the impact of the war, there hasn't been much yet and I don't think they will be because the war was really too short to have any negative problems. The bigger issue here is the situation in South America, which which is much more important for the Spanish economy, what's happening in Argentina, what's happening in Brazil is much more important for for Spain and what's happening in Iraq in the Gulf, where even if the gas is cheaper, if there's a big economic crisis that comes from South America, it'll weigh much more on the on the Spanish economy than what's happened in Iraq.

**Byron Scott** 16:27

I was traveling in Europe a few weeks ago, and I spent some time in Munich, I spent some time in Salzburg, and some other cities. And I saw a pattern that I'd like to have you all, either confirm or criticize at this point. I saw a pattern that everyone I talked to was saying, first of all, this will not affect the EU one way or the other, speaking of the war in Iraq, and secondly, they tended to see Iraq, the Iraqi intervention, as Mr. Bush's war and not necessarily America's war. Who wants to speak to that?

**Patrick Fort** 17:08

Here in Spain, the public opinion is clearly thinking that this is Bush's war. And they've been talking a lot about the petrol lobby from Texas and about the gun, the military complex and they talk a lot about the people who are around Bush like advisors, and obviously there's been a lot of talking about that the press here is really against the war even if the government is for the war and it really looks like it's Bush's war. And then on the other hand, since Aznar was supporting Bush, they've been trying to, to like change the position a bit but really get from here, but it looks Bush's war and it looks like America's war and the Spanish people, 80% of the people were against the war and they still right now, even though it could be good for Spain in the future, on internationally wise, but it's really it was really, it was millions of people on the street here and people really like were insulting Bush, hating Bush, screaming slogans against Bush and really he's probably the most unpopular leader here. And even though Saddam was a was a dictator, which is really unpopular here right now.

**Byron Scott** 18:30

Simon Tisdall, what about the view from London amid the Baghdad bounce that you spoke of earlier?

**Simon Tisdall** 18:36

Well, ownership of the war is very clearly attributed here to George Bush, and, you know, three or four senior officials around him, notably, the team at the Pentagon, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, intellectual author of this. There is a very clear conviction that had a few hanging chads gone a different way in Florida a couple of years ago, this all wouldn't have happened. There's a very clear, I would say unanimous opinion that the European Union, none of the countries of the European Union would have been advocating or indeed getting involved in such a war had not been from that further from the lead shown from the White House. And Bush personally was a big problem for Blair during the run up to the war because he really doesn't go down well with with British and I would guess also European continental opinion. Every time he opened his mouth on British television, and that's President Bush, I mean, he kind of felt Tony Blair was gonna have to make up some ground. He really grates with British voters I think because he appears at once uninformed and reckless.

**Byron Scott** 19:57

Is this the impression also among the French, Bruce Crumley?

**Bruce Crumley** 20:01

With the difference that, you know, the French by and large probably don't understand all the nuances and you know intonation and what have you that an English native English speaker would, therefore when you have Blair and Bush standing next to shoulder to shoulder on a podium, there's not that striking contrast where you have on the one side a very, very well spoken you know, well read and and and dignified speaker and on the other side, you've got

this guy that sounds sort of like a frat boy, a Texas frat boy who's telling you why he's about to punch you in the nose and why you deserve it. It's so there is that I also think the French also make the distinction between the administration and the public opinion, or the public opinions, because I know it's divided within the US. I do think there's a certain amount of fear about the ramifications for Europe in the long term, and I do think there's a feeling that especially with Blair's opposition to this meeting in Brussels that maybe he has gone native among the colonists, if you will, that he maybe has actually made the change, he's no longer trying to temper join in temper Bush in a war that he believes in, but maybe now is really kind of more like in an American mindset and I do think there's a real concern that you know Aznar and Berlusconi and some of the other leaders in Eastern Europe who will be joining really do see more of a future with an alliance with the US than as a European distinct European unity as such, I think there's a real problem. The other thing I just mentioned very quickly is there seems to be something happening on the continent that I think also happened in Britain and that is a real strange digestion of what's happened, of the situation that the ends did in fact justify the means that somehow people are asking, Well, maybe Chirac was wrong in opposing, as though a principal stance suddenly becomes the wrong move because the war went as well as everybody could have ever hoped. And that's something I also think plays into the kind of self doubt about whether even the majority of companies who oppose the war, maybe now are thinking, you know, maybe maybe there's, it was a big mistake, and there'll be consequences to pay in the future.

**Byron Scott** 22:27

It sounds to me as if what several of you are saying is that if anything can slow down the development of the European Union, it's the United States and in particular, George Bush, Robert Van Reinshaw?

**Robert Van Reinshaw (?)** 22:38

Well, self doubt the legal term, certainly, there's very little self doubt in this country. There are only a few voices coming out of the intellectual community, who basically question in retrospect, the fervor with which the Iraq War was opposed, and now ask, maybe it wasn't such a bad thing after all to topple the dictator. In fact, that there are some voices of the very few, in general, there's not a big questioning of Germany's opposition to the war. As I said before, there's a certain amount of embarrassment over the fact that dire predictions didn't come true and that it went so smooth militarily speaking, in terms of the government Schroder certainly did not get any bounce out of his opposition, even though his coalition is strongly supportive of his anti war stance and 85-90% of the population supported this anti-Bush stance. He's in the very low 30s in the polls right now, which is due to the economic situation. The Iraq War, opposition to the Iraq War, might have helped Gerhard Schroder to win the last election September of last year, but it certainly does not help him at the moment. In terms of whose war was it? The feeling in Germany very clearly is that it was George W. Bush's personal war. The motifs ascribed to him have shifted as much as the American reasoning has shifted, why one should get in. There are people here a lot of people here who believe it was simply for geostrategic or for oil interests. Other people believe that religious fervor motivated Bush and then there's a camp of North who believed that it was basically revenge for finishing daddy's job and revenge for the fact that supposedly there were attempts at the life of the outer George Bush, organized by Iraq. This is the mix of motives ascribed to Bush, but there are very, very few people in Germany who are debating whether or not a democratic US president wouldn't follow the same cause of action.

**Byron Scott** 25:06

We're beginning to run out of time here. But I wanted to give each of you the opportunity to quickly say, what's next? What's next for the for the EU and its development in all of these, in all of these countries, first in Germany?

**Robert Van Reinshaw (?)** 25:24

Enlargement will not be slowed down by the fallout from the Iraq War. The question is, to which extent will the formation of European identity be a process of juxtaposition visa to the United States? to which extent will an emerging Europe define itself as something opposed or different to the US? That is going to be the overarching question in terms of the day to day proceedings, it'll go ahead as planned.

**Byron Scott** 25:55

Going quickly in France.

**Bruce Crumley** 25:57

I think the future of the Europe is two-fold. First, there are some, there's some things that are going to go ahead no matter what, enlargement and continued construction. On the other hand, I think the future of Europe lies in just how serious just how dramatic these differing of opinions will be. If they decide that it was, these are wounds that will not heal, then they will not heal. If they decide to move on, they'll move on and they'll limit the, you know, the stake that affects that the stake the US has driven in the heart of Europe.

**Byron Scott** 26:31

Okay, we're down to our final minute. In Spain?

**Patrick Fort** 26:34

Well, I think the enlargement's gonna continue because everybody wants to continue on economics, on economic terms, but politically wise, I think there's gonna be big problems ahead. They want to have, to only speak with one voice and I think that'll be impossible in the next few years.

**Byron Scott** 26:48

And finally, in England?

**Simon Tisdall** 26:49

I think Europe's in two minds, I agree with my colleagues. Part of it wants to work under work under American tutelage. Another half wants to create a rival center or different center of power. You see that schizophrenia (?) in Poland, for example, last week, they're joining the European Union, but they just bought a lot of F 16 fighters from America.

**Byron Scott** 27:09

And that's also another topic for another show. And I want to thank you, gentlemen for taking part of your May Day to discuss this with us. Robert Van Reinshaw, Berlin bureau chief for The Daily Mirror newspaper in Germany, Bruce Crumley, TIME magazine's correspondent in Paris, Patrick Fort, the correspondent for Agence France-Press AFP in Madrid, Simon Tisdall, assistant editor of The Guardian in London. This is Byron Scott saying good night for our director Pat Akers, and our producers, Sara Fajardo and Augustine Pang this has been the Global Journalist. Good night.