

DIPLOMATIC LICENSE

Interviews With Paul Heinbecker, Greg Barrow, Ricardo Alday

Aired March 1, 2003 - 04:00:00 ET

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(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JEAN-MARC DE LA SABLIER, FRENCH AMBASSADOR TO U.N.: It is a very defining moment for the Security Council.

JEREMY GREENSTOCK, BRITISH AMBASSADOR TO U.N.: It was always a last, last, last, last chance (ph).

IGOR IVANOV, RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR TO U.N.: I'm not a swinging vote.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

RICHARD ROTH, HOST: A swinging vote can be as elusive to count on as a hanging chad. That was the Russian U.N. ambassador there noting the intense focus on how countries are leaning in the Security Council on the topic of the day: Iraq. And who knows, a vote, if it happens in the U.N. Security Council, could turn into just as much a cliffhanger as the wacky U.S. state of Florida presidential ballot box squeaker in 2000.

And what about that Council? Usually every member of the 15-nation panel likes to preach unity. But it was a rather testy meeting on Thursday, the first time the full Council debated the U.S.-U.K.-Spain proposed resolution, in effect, endorsing a military attack if there is not total cooperation by Baghdad.

But there is a competing group, including Russia and France, that opposes a resolution. That leaves the swinging six uncommitted, non-permanent members. One of them, Chile, broke with diplomatic niceties to lash out at both power blocks.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JUAN GABRIEL VALDES, CHILEAN AMBASSADOR TO U.N.: This divided Council is, in fact, throwing the decision on the shoulders of the elected members, while the permanent members stick to their positions without making efforts to approximate their views.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

ROTH: Welcome to DIPLOMATIC LICENSE. I'm Richard Roth. With time running short, the Council was divided behind closed doors and before an avalanche of media.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

DE LA SABLIER: On the one hand, you have those who are saying that the time has come to war. And they're asking the Council to authorize war. And the other side there are I see -- and I hope the majority of the Council -- which is saying, no, we have to continue the inspections.

GREENSTOCK: The inspectors cannot in these circumstances disarm a resistant Iraq. It just -- there is no future in the inspectors unless they have the cooperation of Iraq.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

ROTH: One nation is trying to bridge the Council divide: Canada, the U.S. neighbor to the North. The Canadian compromise plan would involve moving up the time for Iraq to be told what it needs to do for disarmament, and then having the Security Council vote on whether Iraq has cooperated. But while the big powers are split on the U.S. resolution, they seem to agree that they don't want to consider with great weight the Canadian option for now. Though countries like Chile and Mexico seem to like the ideas offered.

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VALDES: We are very interested in the Canadian proposal, and we will make consultations with other members on the lines that the Canadian proposal establishes.

GUNTER PLEUGER, GERMAN AMBASSADOR TO U.N.: The Canadian proposal has been circulated among members unofficially. It has so far no status in the Security Council.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

ROTH: Is there a solution, a compromise? Will there be a war? I have the chance finally to ask someone, instead of these questions being hailed at me by desperate anchor people and friends and family.

Joining me now, we're honored to have him, is Canada's United Nations' ambassador, Paul Heinbecker. Thank you very much for joining us, Ambassador.

PAUL HEINBECKER, CANADIAN AMBASSADOR TO U.N.: Thank you for having me.

ROTH: Well let's start off very simply. Can you explain to our audience what the Canadian proposal is?

HEINBECKER: The idea is quite simple. And that is, we have a divided Council. Divided between those who think that time is up and others who think that the inspections should go on indefinitely.

A divided Council is not in the Canadian interest, and we would argue a divided Council is not in anybody's interest. We do think that there may be a way to bring the Council back together again. And the only way that we can see to do that is to pick a date sufficiently far in the future that we can stand Iraq the tests to make sure that they're cooperating on substance, not on process. For example, we need to know for sure the disposition of the VX gas, the mustard shells.

ROTH: I mean, in fact, you're giving them a deadline?

HEINBECKER: We're giving them a deadline, but at the same time, it's a deadline that's far enough out that the Council can make a judgment whether Iraq is cooperating on substance. And it's near enough in time that it keeps the pressure on Iraq to cooperate. There would be -- we picked, for example, the end of March. But it would be for the Council to decide what the actual deadline would be.

And then the inspectors would report back, say, every week on whether or not Iraq was cooperating. If Iraq is not cooperating, the Council can take whatever decision it wants to take.

ROTH: So it's kind of a step-by-step approach, instead of this vast, you've got four months, you've got two months, and you know what you have to do. Just do it.

HEINBECKER: Yes. The issue here is the inspectors are just about finished with the report that clusters the key remaining disarmament issues, the things the inspectors believe must be done if they are to be able to certify that the weapons of mass destruction programs are either over, or all of the material has been

accounted for. They would put that to the Iraqis, the Iraqis would then have a specified amount of time to respond in a way that was credible.

It would be pass or fail. It wouldn't be A+ or B- or D+. It's pass or fail.

ROTH: Why couldn't I have that in school for every one of my courses? The U.S., though, doesn't seem to appreciate the Canadian ideas. And the others, like Germany and France, seem to say, well, listen, Canada is not on the Council. Are they being rather high-handed with your ideas?

HEINBECKER: I don't think so. I think we didn't expect to -- with the positions they've already taken -- to embrace their ideas at the first opportunity. So, eureka, why didn't we think of that ourselves?

What we did think was that, if the Council is heading into deadlock, and if there are people on both sides who see, as we see, and believe and as we believe, that this is highly undesirable, that this is a very dangerous thing, that we're going to need the U.N. to be effective in the future. We're going to need the U.N. to be effective on terrorism; we're going to need the U.N. to be effective on North Korea, and on any other unknown crises, which are certain to come. If we're going to need an effective U.N., then we ought to be very careful about causing it damage.

ROTH: What is the threat? What is the risk to the U.N. if the U.S. goes to war without Council authorization, or if there is a weak authorization with many extensions?

HEINBECKER: I think the danger is the following: The people will -- if the U.N. is perceived to be, on the one hand, irrelevant, or perceived to be, on the other hand, a rubberstamp, in either case the U.N. comes out of this crisis diminished. What we need to be able to do is get out of this axis of irrelevance and diminishment and try in some way to come out of this united and enhanced, get the disarmament done in Iraq that we all want to have done, and then be ready to move on and able to move on to whatever crisis follows.

ROTH: You're on the inside to a point. Is there going to be a veto threat, do you think? Will this deadlock remain, or will there be a compromise in the Security Council?

HEINBECKER: I think people thought at the beginning that this was going to be a relatively easier outcome than is proving to be the case. At a certain stage, people were saying, yes, yes, of course there will be opposition. But in due

course, people will all make an effort to get along and they will all go along with whatever...

ROTH: It was the last time it happened, 15 to nothing in November.

HEINBECKER: Fifteen to nothing in November, and people are also mindful of the international criminal court decision in the summer. But in this particular case, positions have been hardening, visibly hardening. We've heard the word "veto" used several times. Apparently...

ROTH: Friday, Russians foreign minister, Ivanov, saying they're considering it.

HEINBECKER: Yes. It was yesterday. We heard Mr. Ivanov say that they were considering using -- in fact, it was more than just considering. It was basically a threat.

This may or may not materialize, but these are signs that people mean business. This is not to be taken lightly. When we hear the threats of veto being made, they have to be taken very seriously. Were there to be a veto, or were the resolution simply not to pass, which is also a possibility, because at the moment it doesn't look like the votes are there even just to pass...

ROTH: Would the U.S. withdraw if...

HEINBECKER: I don't know what the U.S. would do. You would have to ask them. They would have to make a judgment about what was in their best interest in the circumstance if they thought the resolution wouldn't pass.

ROTH: So where does your idea stand right now? I mean the non-committed seem to like it, but is it, as one U.S. diplomat predicted, oh, it will be dead very soon? Or is this the only compromise out there?

HEINBECKER: This is the only compromise that we can see out there. If the diplomacy, which is going to take place in the next few days, doesn't produce an outcome, if it leads us in the direction of deadlock, if it leads in the direction of veto on the one hand, or withdraw of the resolution on the other, it may be that people who think they really do need a second resolution -- and there are a number of U.S. allies in that case, in that position, who think they need a second resolution -- if that were to happen, this may be the compromise, or something very much like this may be a way of bringing it all back together again.

ROTH: I want to get back briefly, as with time limited here. Time is running out on everything, it seems. Your idea to have the U.N. inspectors tell Iraq what they

need to do is sort of an (UNINTELLIGIBLE) to the U.S. and others, because it seems to preclude any other area where Iraq may have something, which has not been in the minds of the inspectors. Isn't there a risk in that?

HEINBECKER: There is a risk in that, but it surely could be written in such a way that you would be able to say, yes, we need to know A, B, C, D and E. And if the Iraqis were to say, oh, but they haven't thought of F, so we don't have to tell them that, we're not saying that this is the end of inspections or this is the end of a U.N. presence. They would stay there.

And in our view, they will stay there in enhanced numbers. It would be a strengthened inspection process; it would be -- there would be ongoing monitoring and verification done electronically and by surprise visits. What we're not talking about is giving Iraq a clean bill of health and walking away. We don't see that happening under any circumstance in which the U.N. is involved. We think that the way this has to happen is that we're going to have an enhanced, strengthened and still active inspection and ongoing verification monitoring system.

ROTH: OK. Paul Heinbecker, Canada's ambassador to the United Nations for two and a half years. It seems longer. Maybe in a crisis time seems to stand still.

Thank you very much. You said that history is going to judge the U.N. and probably the whole world what happens with this dilemma. Thank you very much for being here.

HEINBECKER: Thank you.

ROTH: Canada is not the only country seeking a solution. Outgoing Security Council president German gave going away gifts to the squabbling five permanent Council countries. A set of binoculars to look forward. Russian Ambassador Sergey Lavrov cradling the binocs, said, "Now we are all inspectors."

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ROTH: Russian Ambassador Lavrov, who handles the media crush best of all at the Council, when you can catch him. Speaking of media, joining DIPLOMATIC LICENSE now, two United Nations-based correspondents, Greg Barrow is with the BBC. Actually our new neighbor on United Nations press row.

And Ricardo Alday is with Notimex. Ricardo was with us before. He moved to Washington; a city of snow this weekend. Notimex a Mexican news agency -- thank you both.

Let me start with Greg. Greg, the Council was very fractured on Thursday behind closed doors. Is it going to turn into that the deal is never going to be struck at the Council and it really doesn't matter what's said behind closed doors there anyway? That capitols will just seal it up or it will break down not here?

GREG BARROW, BBC: I think that's a vain hope at the moment, Richard. I think what we saw this week was an almost public display of the Council tearing itself apart, and that's being reflected pretty directly in what we're seeing happening in the capitols of the Council members. It's not a very happy sight whichever way you look at it at the moment. And it doesn't look like they're going to bridge this gap easily.

ROTH: Ricardo, what's your take on the Security Council, fractured or just wounded?

RICARDO ALDAY, NOTIMEX NEWS AGENCY: No I think -- I agree with Greg. I think it's fractured, I think it's increasingly showing (UNINTELLIGIBLE) divisions that have been all along over the past two or three weeks. And I think everything is still up in the air. It's very hard to say what's going to happen, of course. But the following two, three, four days next week, whatever happens next week with the Blix report might be very influential, particularly with the swing votes.

ROTH: You know I think Blix is -- he's a Swedish diplomat and attorney. I mean he's been playing this excellently. I mean, one week, it's a negative slam on Iraq. Then another one he's knocking Colin Powell's intelligence information and he's able to gain more and more time. Greg, what do you think?

BARROW: Richard, he seems to swing like a pendulum from day to day, and it's very difficult reporting, as I'm sure you realize. That one day we say it's positive, one day we say it's negative. And it just seems to feed those positions at the rival camps on the Security Council. So this, in a sense, adds to the polarization than the splits. And I think he's just trying to steer that very difficult path between the two extremes and leave it to them to make up their mind, but they clearly can't make up their minds together, at least.

ROTH: I mean weren't they fighting over what day he should present his oral report?

BARROW: Well, yes. I mean they're fighting over everything at the moment. I think there is one camp which ones to extend this for as long as possible and throw this process down. And the other camp, led by Washington and London, which is trying to speed it up rapidly.

ROTH: Ricardo, you're a Mexican news agency base there. What's the Mexican point of view? Earlier this week, reports -- whether accurate or not -- interpreting President Fox's comments that Mexico was leaning to the U.S. camp, and this was a week if anybody tilted people ran screaming.

ALDAY: I think that's a very good point, Richard. Mexico is still very much been the (UNINTELLIGIBLE) with Blix. Mexico has been inclined to maintain a very ambiguous position. Folks can say one thing one day and then a very totally different song the next day.

There has been pressure (UNINTELLIGIBLE) Washington, on the one hand. On the other hand, he has the increasingly opposition from Mexican public. I think this past week there was a poll that 93 percent of Mexicans were against the war. So he's trying to find a balance in it, and he's just not having a very easy time with it.

ROTH: So, Greg, I hate this question when I'm asked, and I'm sure you get asked, does the U.S. just have four votes? Will they get enough for a resolution and will it ever happen?

BARROW: I think if we have the vote today, they probably would get enough. And I think the real key is how much pressure is being put on those swing votes. I'm sure Ricardo would have something to say about what's happening with Mexico. He's already told us a little. But the impression you get is that these poor non-permanent members of the Council being pushed and pulled in either direction, and they really haven't decided yet.

And on top of this, they have got this issue of public opinion back home. It really is significant. If they don't feel that they've been presented with the kind of evidence by Blix or by Washington to tell the public that this is the right way to go, they're going to have a real struggle voting in favor of this second resolution.

ALDAY: Yes, Mexico -- Mexico and Chile tried this week, unsuccessfully, I think, to grab the attention of all the swinging vote countries and tried to see if they can put up a front in which they can maintain themselves just in the middle. And tried to, as they say, bridge their positions between the so-called French side and the American side. They haven't been successful so far, and I think my feeling -- talking from the Latin American vote, Mexico and Chile -- they're just trying to buy

time and see if something comes up in the coming week or in the coming days; namely, something in the Blix report that can be used as an excuse with the public opinion and then openly side one way or the other.

ROTH: That's right. I mean it's an amazing story. I mean you almost have a three-sided block in the Council, and if the U.N. is ignored, does it become irrelevant if the U.S. attacks? Or is it like Kosovo, and people will forget about it after a while, especially if the military support works well for the west -- Greg.

BARROW: I think that's a question that should be directed at the White House, really. If Washington decides that it wants to make the U.N. irrelevant if it doesn't get this vote and it wants to go its own way, it can very quickly make the U.N. irrelevant. I think we are living in a world where there is one superpower. If that superpower decides that this building and the people who work in it are not in its best interest, then I'm sure that it can decide to go the opposite direction. And there are certainly some people within Washington who would like that.

ROTH: I mean President Bush was wooed (ph) by Secretary of State Powell to come to the U.N. Then Powell, in the last few weeks, maybe after the French so-called terror meeting that turned into an Iraq debate seemed to join the so-called hawks, do you think that the U.S. has underestimated in the Council opposition to the war or just played the diplomacy card incorrect?

BARROW: It looks like they played a lot rougher than they should have done. And I think that's got people's backs up. I think it's the style that seems to have irritated people, as well as the substance. And when you have the combination of the two, I think that's when people dig their heels in.

ROTH: Ricardo, I would like to know where you think this is going in the month of March.

ALDAY: I think, Richard, it's very much up in the air, as we have been saying all along. It's going to be very interesting with the change of the presence from the Germans to Guinea. How that is going to play in the actual dynamics of the Council deliberations, on the one hand. On the other hand, there is -- I sense that there is an increasing feeling almost everywhere in the world that the United States has already taken (UNINTELLIGIBLE) and it's just a matter of time.

ROTH: Yes. President Bush's comments don't seem to help the international dialogue. One minute he's saying, let's have some backbone. The next minute he says, we'd like to have the U.N., but we don't necessarily need a second resolution.

I've got to hold the dialogue there. I've got to thank Ricardo Alday of Notimex, on your right. Oh, he's on the left now. I'm in the middle. And on the right, it's Greg Barrow, of the BBC. I'm sure you've all heard of them. Thank you very much.

OK. Well, we've told you about the Canadian compromise plan, the German binoculars, and then there's an offer from Council member Spain. It's Ambassador Inocencio Arias with a room with a view for Saddam Hussein.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

INOCENCIO ARIAS, SPANISH AMBASSADOR TO U.N.: Honestly, I would give him my house in Spain. I mean it. I would give him my house and part of my salary if it would solve the problem and we don't see any bombs. I mean it.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: What is this?

ARIAS: That's serious. I mean I know he's not going to (UNINTELLIGIBLE), but I certainly will give him my house in Spain.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Where is it?

ARIAS: In the south in (UNINTELLIGIBLE).

(END VIDEO CLIP)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I see you only want to do this on the record.

ARIAS: I don't mind. If I have to say something off the record, I will tell you.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: All right. And off the record, I want to remind everybody, means that you cannot use it, you cannot quote anybody. Background means that you can quote his excellency as a western diplomat, a senior western diplomat, something of that sort.

ARIAS: Don't mention the bow tie.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

ROTH: The colorful Spanish ambassador to the U.N. Have bow tie, will offer great quotes.

Last week we presented a clip from the U.S. comedy program "The David Letterman Show." We were just giving our international audience the view of U.S.-based comics about the United Nations. Not all of them, just some of them. Some viewers, though, opposed the airing of the clip.

Believe me, we don't agree with knocking the U.N. all the time. But it is comedy. Don't believe me? Here's NBC's Jay Leno.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JAY LENO, TALK SHOW HOST: It looks like the United Nations drawing up yet another resolution to send to Saddam Hussein. I think is what, the 300th one we've sent now. Apparently the U.N. has a secret weapon to kill Hussein. It's called old age.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

ROTH: Well, if you feel like sending us an e-mail with your thoughts on that clip or anything else from this week's program, e-mail us at diplomatic.licence@turner.com. And that is DIPLOMATIC LICENSE. I'm Richard Roth in New York. At the United Nations next week, possibly Hans Blix' oral report. Thanks for watching.

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