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29 May 1990

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FOR YOUR BULLETIN BOARD

Dear Reader:

I have enclosed an article from the New York Times which should be of interest to any number of folks at C-SPAN. If you're still the homey little place I visited in 1988, put this on the board; if you have expanded (as your address change indicates), copy it and pass it around. If you don't think this is important, go find a job someplace else, and let me have yours!

MAY 31 REC'D

1950-90

News Agency Is Forced to Walk Fine Line on Beirut Hostage Story

By FRANK J. PRIAL

Since Terry A. Anderson, the chief Middle East correspondent for The Associated Press, was kidnapped more than five years ago, the editors of the news agency have been faced with a quandary: how to cover the Middle East thoroughly and objectively while pressing news contacts in the region to help obtain the freedom of their correspondent, who is held hostage by Muslim extremists.

Arab gunmen kidnapped Mr. Anderson on March 16, 1985, in Beirut. The kidnappers later identified themselves as members of Islamic Holy War, a Shiite Muslim group with ties to Iran.

Since that day, the A.P. has tracked down every rumor or lead that might advance Mr. Anderson's release. Larry Heinzerling, nominally the news agency's deputy director of world services, works full time on the Anderson case.

In its effort to help Mr. Anderson — and by association the 15 other Western hostages — the agency has not compromised the news report it provides to its 15,000 clients around the world, A.P. officials say.

Reporting and the Abduction

"Absolutely not," said Louis Boccardi, the agency's president and general manager, when asked if there had been compromises. "I can't think of a single instance when a question arose about withholding — or for that matter about running — a story because of the Anderson situation."

As chief correspondent of United Press International, Leon Daniel monitors his competition intently. "I've seen absolutely no evidence to suggest that the A.P. has ever pulled its punches because of Terry Anderson," he said.

But in November 1986, Walter Mears, who was executive editor of The Associated Press at the time, circulated a memo warning correspondents and editors off stories that could "hurt the people who have been kidnapped."

"We will do no investigative reporting about the inside details of efforts to gain freedom for American hostages still held in Lebanon," he wrote.

Mr. Mears, who now writes a political column from Washington, said at the time that the news agency would indeed delay or withhold an article if it meant that Mr. Anderson would be freed. Later, he said that his memo had been taken by some writers at the news agency to refer to all its coverage when he had referred solely to the area of hostage negotiations.

Some former and current reporters and correspondents at the news agency contend that concern for Mr. Anderson may have affected the way the agency covered the Iran-contra affair.

Some time before the Iran-contra affair became public, reporters in the agency's Washington bureau discovered and were writing about Oliver L. North's secret activities on behalf of the Nicaraguan rebels. Two of those re-

porters, Robert Parry and Brian Barger, both of whom later left the agency, said their North articles were killed or weakened. Executives at the agency have denied the accusations.

While the two reporters were writing their contra articles, their bureau chief, Charles L. Lewis, was meeting regularly with Colonel North to discuss the hostage situation. "I met with North six or eight times between late 1985 and March 1986," said Mr. Lewis, now Washington bureau chief for the Hearst newspapers.

'Journalism Didn't Suffer'

The first meeting came after Larry Speakes, President Reagan's spokesman, made a statement about the Administration's hostage policy. "We thought he was wrong," Mr. Lewis said. "So we called him up. He sent us to North." But Mr. Lewis said, "Central America never came up."

Mr. Mears and Mr. Boccardi have said that dealing with Colonel North created no conflict because they were never told of arms shipments to Iran or of diversion of funds to the contras. But Mr. Lewis acknowledged that meeting with Colonel North as the reports of his clandestine activities became known was "a pretty hairy experience."

"I never felt all that comfortable," he said. "I think that the A.P. will look back on this period as one of great internal frustration. It has been a balancing act, wearing different hats at different times, and I know it lends itself to perception problems. Still, the bottom line is that journalism didn't suffer one bit."

Don Mell, now a photo editor at Associated Press headquarters in New York, was with Mr. Anderson the morning that he was kidnapped. Since then, he, like Mr. Heinzerling, has devoted much of his time to his former colleague's cause.

Talks With Arafat

"The only way the kidnapping has really changed our coverage is the fact that since April 1985, we've had no real American or European presence in Beirut," Mr. Mell said.

But he acknowledged that editors and reporters never really ignore what one of them referred to as "the T. A. thing."

Mr. Mell has been traveling with Peggy Say, Mr. Anderson's sister. Supported financially by the agency, she has traveled widely, urging heads of state and other world figures to use their influence to help free her brother and to speak out on his behalf.

"We traveled all over," Mr. Mell said. "We took ourselves out of the editorial side of the story," he said of the news agency managers who accompanied Mrs. Say. "We saw people off the record, and when you do that you can't go back to the office and write a story. We saw Arafat and a lot of top Syrian Government people. It was done on the basis that we were not there to write stories."