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SUBJECT Media Manipulation

TED KOPPEL: It's all been seen on American television: a Soviet commentator criticizing the President of the United States, an American hostage expressing sympathy for his terrorist captives, Libyan television coverage of the aftermath of an American military raid. And in every case the same question has been raised: Is the American media being used as a platform for propaganda?

We're coming to you live tonight from Vanderbilt University in Nashville. Good evening. I'm Ted Koppel. And with us is an audience of some 1000 persons and a guest panel that includes ABC News President Boone Arledge, NBC anchorman Tom Brokaw, Alabama Senator Jeremiah Denton, and Noel Koch, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense.

ABU ABBAS [translated]: America is now conducting the war against us on behalf of Israel. We therefore have to respond against America in America itself.

KOPPEL: Finding one of the most wanted men in the world may be a major journalistic coup. But when a television network agrees to keep his whereabouts secret, is that journalism, or aiding terrorism?

TOM BROKAW: NBC's Henry Champ met with Abu Abbas in an Arabic-speaking country, the name of which we agreed not to disclose.

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: My fellow Americans, I want to speak to you this evening about my highest duty as President, to preserve peace and defend these United States.

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KOPPEL: It may be appropriate for American journalists to raise questions about a presidential speech. But when a network gives live airtime to a Soviet commentator for the same purpose, is that going too far?

WOMAN: An official announcement from the Council of Ministers. There has been an accident at the Chernobyl atomic power station. One of the atomic reactors was damaged. The consequences of the accident are being taken care of.

KOPPEL: Maybe the Soviets should have said a lot more much sooner about that nuclear reactor accident at Chernobyl. But does that justify the American media spreading unsubstantiated gossip as news?

ANNOUNCER: This is ABC News Viewpoint, live from Nashville, Tennessee.

Here again is Ted Koppel.

KOPPEL: We have two additional panelists who are joining us electronically, one from our San Francisco Bureau, Vladimir Posner. He is a commentator for Radio Moscow. And in our Miami Bureau, syndicated columnist Alexander Cockburn, whose offerings are regularly found in The Nation and The Wall Street Journal.

Roone Arledge, as I've said, is President of ABC News. Tom Brokaw is anchor and managing editor of NBC Nightly News. Senator Jeremiah Denton of Alabama is Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism. And Noel Koch has been overseeing efforts to get a coordinated Pentagon response to terrorism.

Now, gentlemen up here, and ladies and gentlemen in the audience, we are going to waste absolutely no time. We've got an extraordinary panel here. I know you are brimming with good questions for them.

Sir, why don't you start things off.

MAN: Mr. Brokaw, I would like to know how it is justifiable to show a known terrorist, such as Abu Abbas, on United States television during a period of time when he is supposedly an outlaw terrorist that is being sought after by the United States.

TOM BROKAW: I'm not surprised that's the first question. We've had a great deal of mail on this particular subject. Most of it has been negative. It has been a painstaking review that we've conducted at NBC. And after a thorough examination of

our original judgment, we have decided that if we had an opportunity to do it again we'd do it in roughly the same manner again.

We decided that the agreement was worthwhile to -- that is, to withhold his whereabouts -- because we thought that the news value outweighed that. That is the first time that we've had a chance for the American people to see this man, Abu Abbas, who we all believe was an instrumental part of the taking of the Achille Lauro, although there were some doubts about his exact role. He fessed up to them in the course of the interview.

Moreover, he made some very serious charges against the American people and against the American President in the wake of the Libyan bombing. And we think that the American public is well served by hearing those warnings firsthand.

There are a lot of people out there who wonder what motivates terrorists, what are they all about. Well, I think in the course of that interview we were able to see the moral repugnancy of his views, the real venality of his thinking. And we thought that the American public would be able to take that information for what it was and have a better understanding of the darkness of the mind of the terrorist.

Now, there are those people who say that we have given him a platform for propaganda or that we have celebrated him in some fashion. My own response to that is that he has been given more notoriety by the response to our interview than he might have had in the interview itself.

KOPPEL: All right. Tom, let's get things rolling a little bit here because the Reagan Administration, several members of the Reagan Administration expressed something very close to outrage, Noel Koch, over NBC's decision. I'm not sure whether that outrage was exclusively over the interview itself or more particularly focused on the fact that NBC chose not to reveal the whereabouts of the interview.

So, here's Tom Brokaw. Take a crack.

NOEL KOCH: I think the concern was over both, Ted: the decision to do it at all, and then the deal. I think the more important or the more egregious decision was to go with the interview at all. And Tom demonstrates that given enough time and another pressure, you can come up with an eloquent explanation for what you have done. But immediately after the event, we found Larry Grossman, the President of NBC, demonstrating an incredible moral myopia by saying that, "We like to interview all leaders." And what one takes from that is a sense of the equivalence between Abu Abbas and the President of the United States and the Pope and any other genuinely legitimate leader.

On the same basis, you might have Charles Manson on. He was a leader, and presumably he was newsworthy.

But it seems to me that this was a very bad decision.

And the great difficulty with the media is that it tends to legitimize. You read something in the newspaper, you don't automatically assume that it's wrong. You frequently assume that it's right, or it wouldn't be there. And the same when you see something on television.

And so that the notion that this fellow deserved exposure and that NBC would give him the time to express his views and to threaten the life of the President of the United States and the lives of Americans, it seems to me -- I'm appalled that we even discuss whether this was a thing that ought to have been done or not.

KOPPEL: I'm hearing a voice out of somewhere. Is that you, Alex Cockburn?

ALEXANDER COCKBURN: Yeah.

This point about legitimacy is rather an interesting one. He said, the last speaker said that somehow it was legitimate to talk to some leaders or terrorists and not to others. And I think it's a good way the press follows the lead of the Administration. For example...

KOPPEL: I don't think he said -- if you'll pardon the interruption, Mr. Cockburn. I don't think he said leaders or terrorists. I think he limited himself to leaders.

COCKBURN: He basically talked about legitimacy. And I think the Reagan Administration accepts some forms of terror, in a way, as legitimate objects of discussion and others as not.

For example, the head of South Africa, Botha, just launched what was undoubtedly a terrorist attack on three countries. Now, I think if NBC had gone to talk to him there would have been no fuss about giving publicity to terrorists.

The Administration is also raining terror, itself, on Nicaragua. But no one says that Shultz or Reagan himself are terrorists.

And I think this is part of the absurdity of the whole situation, that the Administration, and then the press, divides the world in very arbitrary terms into what are construed as terrorists and what aren't.

KOPPEL: Senator Denton, I get kind of a sense that you

might want to jump in at this point. Do you?

SENATOR JEREMIAH DENTON: Well, I'm tempted to take on Alex, there. But I would rather address what my two colleagues immediately present said.

I think it's kind of a tough call as to whether or not the show should have been aired. In my view, were it in the middle of a terrorist event in which Abu Abbas were a principal, the choice would have been a bad one.

As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism, I am concerned that our government has not yet developed sufficient policy, which I'm sure Noel agrees with, and that the public hasn't a full enough understanding of the nature and horrible degree to which terrorism is affecting humanity and our interests around the world.

So, I found it fortunate that Tom Brokaw handled the interview the way he did. I believe that his expression, facial expressions, the manner of questioning was such as to bring across the point he mentioned: that there is a continuum; not only a past and a present, but a future in which the United States must confront the principal force and trend in international affairs today. I found that fortunate.

What I found unfortunate was that NBC made a deal. And beyond that, they kept the deal. Now, I wouldn't mind making a deal with a terrorist and then deceiving him, because I think he deserves that.

But I think a point of legality could be raised. It is illegal to give aid and comfort or refuge to a fugitive. That man was a fugitive. A case could be made that permitting him to air his views was some kind of aid and comfort. But certainly to hide his whereabouts -- and I think the government should ask NBC for his whereabouts -- I think could be considered as possibly illegal.

KOPPEL: Let me jump in, Senator, because I want to get a response from Roone Arledge.

We're going to turn the clock back. NBC didn't get this particular scoop. It was offered to you. ABC has a chance of interviewing Abu Abbas. And the deal is, you get him but you don't tell anyone where you got him. Will you accept?

ROONE ARLEDGE: Well, Ted, I think that's unfair to NBC and to us to try to create a hypothetical situation after the fact.

As a general rule -- I could sit here and say no, we

wouldn't do that. But I might not be telling the truth.

[Laughter]

BROKAW: I think you wouldn't be telling the truth.

ARLEDGE: The situation, I think, you have to judge in its context at the time. I totally agree with what Tom has said about the right of the American people to hear our adversaries, no matter how repugnant their views and their actions might be. I think it has been demonstrated over and over again that the American people are wise enough and smart enough not to be taken in by even Abu Abbas, or Adolf Hitler, if he were alive.

On the other hand, I have a problem -- and we've discussed this a lot at ABC -- with the deal that was made. We have a rule where we don't break the law. I'm sure NBC has the same kind of rules in their practices and policies.

One thing that you might do is evaluate the news content and see whether it's worth stretching the rules a little bit. In my judgment, the particular interview that was aired was not.

KOPPEL: Yeah, but you can't. How are you going to do that? The deal has to be made beforehand.

ARLEDGE: No. The deal is not that you put him on the air. The deal is that you go talk to him and you don't say where he is. It's airing it that I think caused the deal to be made.

KOPPEL: Well, I think there's a certain moral ambiguity there. I mean if you're prepared to go talk to him and you know where he is, whether or not you put him on the air becomes kind of irrelevant to the point that Senator Denton was making.

ARLEDGE: We talk to a lot of people, not who are fugitives from justice, necessarily, but there are many times that you have to make a deal with somebody that you will not reveal where they are as a condition of interviewing them.

BROKAW: Let me just say a couple of things about that, if I may, Ted.

KOPPEL: Quickly, if you would, Tom.

BROKAW: First of all, the Israelis have said they know where he is. The Italians have said that they know where he is. And the State Department said in the last week that he was in Algeria at the time of the interview.

KOPPEL: But they didn't find that out until afterwards.

BROKAW: Secondly, the fact of the matter is that we make deals with people all the time based on this business of whether or not there's real news value. He's constantly on the move in that part of the world, and I gather in other parts of the world. And we're at risk when we go into the jungles of Nicaragua to talk to the Contra leaders. Do we then say, because they're fugitives in the eyes of the Sandinistas, we're going to give up their location? Or we go to El Salvador and talk with guerrilla leaders there.

These are the kinds of difficult situations that we put our correspondents and camera crews at risk in. And we simply can't afford to do that.

We think that there are many ways of finding out where Abu Abbas is and that many people could find out.

KOPPEL: Gentlemen, what I'd like to do -- we're going to take a break in just one second. Before we go to the break, I'd like to hear the next question.

Is it a gentleman out there who's going to ask the question? Go ahead and ask it. Then we're going to go to a break and we'll give everyone a chance to contemplate what your question is. And then we'll come right back.

MAN: It is to Tom Brokaw again, and it gets back to the issue that he eloquently sidestepped. It is not giving an individual a platform to reveal his fanaticism, but aiding and abetting his continued escape from justice, a known confessed criminal who's wanted for crimes against humanity. In your hunger to get to that story, you got to close to it and you became in cahoots with a known terrorist.

A second indiscretion, in my mind, that I'd like you to answer is another one committed, it seems, by NBC. There was a recent story, in the same line as -- well, perhaps a little different than the Abu Abbas story -- in which a journalist traveled with Filipino guerrillas. I believe his name as Alpert. And in getting close to those guerrillas, he watched them plan and commit an ambush against Filipino army soldiers. And this was contemplated, watched, and covered for the glory of TV.

NBC, in its decision to air that, seems once again to have gotten too close to the story.

KOPPEL: All right, sir. Both of them very, very pointed and absolutely appropriate questions. And Tom Brokaw will have the first opportunity to address them when we come back from Vanderbilt University.

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KOPPEL: A couple of observations, Tom, just before the break were addressed to you. One having to do, again, with the appropriateness of the Abu Abbas interview. And the other one, an interesting question. I don't know how many people are familiar with that particular story, but I think you had a free-lance journalist/photographer who was in fact with some communist rebels in the Philippines and who was with them when they sprung an ambush on some Filipino troops, and a number of those Filipino troops were killed.

The appropriateness of everything for the ever greater glory of journalism.

BROKAW: Let me take the first one first, in terms of aiding and abetting Abu Abbas.

We didn't aid and abet him in any kind of an escape. We didn't move him around. We were summoned to a particular location, not knowing for sure whether he would show up there. You'll recall that when he was on the airplane that was intercepted by the American fighters and then he was in the hands of the Italian government, he went right through their hands on to Yugoslavia and then on to Iraq, as I recall. He moves around very much in that part of the world at will, I gather.

We are not an arresting agency. We were there trying to, as I say, find out what we determined was legitimate news about his activities, about his role in the Achille Lauro, and about his future plans.

As for the Filipino situation, it was a savage piece of film. There's no question about it. And frankly, I blame myself because we didn't put it in -- what I think is a big problem in our business, we didn't put it in a proper contextual setting. That is, we thought that it was important, shortly after the election in the world about the election of Cory Aquino, for everyone to know about the savagery of the war that continued there. And we did have a free-lance correspondent by the name with Jon Alpert along with a communist guerrilla crew. The fighting continues in the Southern Philippines, especially. This was a savage massacre. No question about it. It goes on all the time. It goes on whether we're there or not.

We don't do it for the greater glory of television. Because, quite honestly, it doesn't necessarily help us if people have the kinds of strong reactions that they've had to some of these pieces of information and pieces of film that we've put on the air. But we do think that it is important that people know the reality of these bloody wars that are going on even in places where they've been able to celebrate a tiny triumph for democracy.

KOPPEL: Noel Koch, you buy that?

KOCH: I don't think I have anything to contribute to that.

KOPPEL: All right. Let's -- go ahead, Senator.

SENATOR DENTON: I would like to emphasize that the man was indeed a criminal. I think you mentioned one example, Tom, like the Contras. They are not criminals, in our eyes. They're not, by law, criminals in the United States.

KOPPEL: I think it was the questioner, Senator. Or, no. It was Alex Cockburn who make the point of the Contras.

SENATOR DENTON: Okay. Pardon me. But the fact is that Abu Abbas is a criminal. I happen to know that especially personally because he's a criminal by virtue of a law that I got through the Senate, S-2624, which implemented a U.N. convention which makes it a crime all over the world to take a hostage. If he happens to be American, you know, it's a crime against -- by our law and on our books. So he is and was a fugitive. Whereas the Contra would be a different situation.

KOPPEL: Who was trying to get in there?

COCKBURN: Alexander Cockburn.

KOPPEL: Go ahead, Alex.

COCKBURN: The Contras have taken hostages. I think Senator Denton's point once again raises the point of it's purely politics. If news is decided by the political positions, where do you end up? I'm sure that the questioner, if the camera team had been with the Filipino army ambushing the communist guerrillas, I wonder whether he would have been so disturbed.

The Contras have taken -- kidnapped persons, and it wouldn't worry Senator Denton.

SENATOR DENTON: May I answer? He's talking to me.

Alex, the Contras wear uniforms. And I believe a very good case can be made that the revolution, which was supported by the United States, was betrayed. A good argument could be made that they are fighting in a good cause, even if you don't agree with that. Whereas it would be very difficult to make that case in Abu Abbas's.

COCKBURN: Well, Senator, actually, I think they've got three uniforms each, the Contras, if you read the scandals about

their appropriations. But I think it's still -- it's entirely political.

Are you saying, really, that you should decide, or the government should decide where I'm news-gathering on the basis of what political fashion happens to be in vogue at the White House?

SENATOR DENTON: I was just making the point that he is a criminal and the Contras are not. And the media, like every other institution, should be operating in the spirit and letter of the law.

KOPPEL: Well, hold on, Senator.

SENATOR DENTON: I'm not saying they did not.

KOPPEL: Let's examine that question a little more closely. I think the point that Alexander Cockburn is making is a legitimate one. Who decides the criminality of people outside the United States? Because it happens to be in our interest to support the Contras? Their criminality, under just nonpolitical terms, has been established in a number of instances, if you count rape, if you count murder, if you count torture. Why do you draw a distinction between the two in terms of news coverage? Now, that's all we're talking about.

SENATOR DENTON: There's a difference. You asked about who determines whether they're criminals. The law does. We're a nation of law.

KOPPEL: Whose law?

COCKBURN: But Senator Denton...

SENATOR DENTON: The United States law says that to take hostages is a crime, internationally. A war is a different situation. The Contras are wearing uniforms. Terrorists are in a different situation. They are trying to apply pressure to some people to cause intimidation and political results in another area. That is not the case with the Contras. They're operating in a conventional combat situation.

COCKBURN: But Senator Denton, why won't the United States stay with the World Court? If you think you're so legal, why are you fleeing the World Court?

KOPPEL: Fleeing the World Court.

[Applause]

SENATOR DENTON: Why am I fleeing the World Court?

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COCKBURN: Well, the United States had fled the World Court.

SENATOR DENTON: I'm not fleeing the World Court.

KOPPEL: No, the United States. As you know, the United States has refused to submit itself to the findings of the World Court with regard to events in Nicaragua.

SENATOR DENTON: I hope that we rely upon the U.S. Congress, with the laws that they pass, signed by the President of the United States, as our most immediate and most important law. We're going to have a lot of so-called legal operations set up internationally to which we will have to give some kind of varying deference, depending on how they're made up.

KOPPEL: All right. We're going to move on to another area now and another questioner.

Go ahead, sir.

MAN: I'd like to address my question to Mr. Arledge, if I could.

Talking about the freedom of the press and the rights of the press, then why do we have this Russian here? That's what I want to know. He's obviously contributing a lot and obviously knows an awful lot about the freedom of the press. What's he doing here?

ARLEDGE: What is he doing here?

MAN: Yeah. What's he doing here?

ARLEDGE: Do you mean on the program tonight, or in general?

MAN: If we're talking about the press and the ideas of the press -- people tell him what to say. He's not discussing his own topics. He's not saying anything that Mr. Brokaw could say. He is told what to say.

Why is he here?

ARLEDGE: Well, I think he's here tonight because we considered that he would be very controversial and that people would like to talk to him and hear what he has to say, and probably question me and others about why we have him on the air, just as you're asking.

[Laughter]

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MAN: You mean that's why he's here physically.

ARLEDGE: The reason we have him on the air, and other Russian spokesmen, from time to time is to get their point of view.

MAN: Okay. Then why isn't our point of view put on their television?

ARLEDGE: Well, because we can't control what goes on their television. And they are the poorer for the fact that they don't have our point of view on their television. And we think we are richer for knowing what they think on our television.

KOPPEL: This seems like an appropriate time to introduce Vladimir Posner.

[Laughter]

KOPPEL: Vladimir, beyond the fact that neither Tom Brokaw nor I speaks Russian anywhere nearly as fluently as you speak English, why is it that, in fact, American journalists are not invited to participate in discussions, perhaps similar to this one, on Soviet television?

VLADIMIR POSNER: I think there's a variety of reasons for that, one of which is traditional. We have not had many foreign journalists on Soviet television.

But I would like to point out that if you go to other countries, European countries such as France, West Germany, Italy, Spain, you will find that there are very few foreign journalists, and certainly very few Soviets, who appear there. I think it is not so much a question of systems as a question of tradition.

However, I would agree that there should be more American journalists on Soviet television. I had the honor to interview the New York Times bureau chief in Moscow on Soviet television. And we would be interested, I think, to know more of the American view.

And one point that I'd like to make. I don't think I have been invited to go on American television to give Vladimir Posner's point of view, which may or may not be interesting, but certainly is not a major factor in policy decisions. I've been invited to express the Soviet point of view, which indeed should be of interest to, let us say, an American audience.

That's how I'd answer the question.

KOPPEL: You are exactly right. And as someone who has

invited you to come on Nightline many, many times, I have made precisely that point, and would like to make that point to the gentleman who asks the question.

A -- and Vladimir will respond, I'm sure, in a moment. But, A, I don't regard Vladimir Posner as a journalist in the American pattern. He clearly is not. He is a propagandist.

But, B, when he comes on the program, my interest in having him on is precisely because he represents the Soviet Government's point of view, and because we still operate under the illusion in this country that we are the stronger for it when we get not only the opinions of those who agree with us, but also the opinions of those who disagree with us. It is that, precisely, that makes our system a little bit different from the system in the Soviet Union.

[Applause]

MAN: Do you think this is like making us better people, or something to that effect? Is that the idea behind this?

KOPPEL: I think the idea behind it is to make you better informed. And the fact that you may not like what you hear has nothing to do with educating you. You don't have to like everything that educates you.

SENATOR DENTON: I'd like to agree with the young man. I can emphathize somewhat with our being richer and they're being poorer because they don't hear from us. But that's not the main difference in our system.

We have U.S. strength in our principles. I suppose the Soviets think they have theirs in their principles. Whoever abandons their principles becomes weaker. Ours, I guess, would be belief in God, family, free enterprise, government being the servant of the people, and our foreign policy being relatively benign.

KOPPEL: And freedom of expression, I think you would also add.

SENATOR DENTON: No. Wait just a moment. That's one of many freedoms, sir. I'm talking about five basic principles upon which our government is based. One of the advantages of that is in the Bill of Rights, which is the freedoms. But the principles of the government are those.

If we equate security to freedom of the press, we're making a grotesque mistake. There's freedom of the press. There's freedom of religion. There's freedom of being able to choose your place of work and the kind of work. All of those

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freedoms depend upon whether or not you have security, whether or not you have survival.

And I think the young man's question is in that direction. And I agree with him.

KOPPEL: Senator, in that case, let me focus on free enterprise for a moment, because we have to go to a commercial break.

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KOPPEL: We are back live once again from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. And let's go right to another questioner.

MAN: I'd like to direct this to Mr. Posner, also.

Why does the Soviet Union keep their citizens, as well as other nations', in the closet as far as news is concerned, especially when potentially dangerous events happen that affect everyone, including other people of other nations?

POSNER: I happen to think that the Soviet Union does not keep its people in the closet. I suppose you're alluding to Chernobyl. I said, and later on my government has admitted, that we made a mistake in not announcing the news quickly enough. We should have done it sooner. Although I would also have to say that we didn't really know what was happening, except that it was an accident, the scope of which, the magnitude of which we did not quite know. We followed up with, I think, extensive coverage, and are doing the same thing.

It is my feeling -- and of course this is something that I cannot prove -- but it is my feeling that, by and large, the average Soviet citizen is a well-informed citizen and generally knows more about you than you do about him.

KOPPEL: Before we get into -- well, go ahead, sir, if you want to follow up.

MAN: He is well-informed, yes. But is he told the exact truth about matters that happen?

POSNER: I don't think that you can call someone informed if he's not told the truth. That is being misinformed. I was using the word informed.

KOPPEL: Well, what happened, Vladimir -- if we can go back to the initial stage of the Chernobyl incident -- what happened was not that your government admitted that it didn't

know what was going on. It was not that your government suggested that within a day or two it would tell people what was going on. What happened during those first couple of days, when it began to speak of the incident at all, is that it told the world and its own people that everything was under control. It clearly was not.

POSNER: As I recall it, initially there was no announcement for two days, or thereabouts. One of the reasons for that was that the report from local people did not correspond to the facts. Now, this could have been -- it was probably a bureaucratic decision down there below not to report something unpleasant, hoping that they could handle it themselves.

The first announcement did not really reflect what was happening. Later on the scope became evident.

I have spoken to Soviet scientists soon after this disaster occurred. What they were telling me was, "There has never been anything like this. We don't really know what it is. We don't know what caused it. We may never know."

But it is my feeling that, by and large, the Soviet media afterwards gave a very, very full picture of it. Nobody said that we did it the way we should have. We admit the mistake.

KOPPEL: Noel Koch?

KOCH: Well, I think we should not completely discount the explanation of bumbling bureaucrats hiding information. They do it here all the time. But you get a different perspective here, in that our bureaucrats normally can't keep their mouths shut, and in the Soviet Union they can't open them.

What I find curious is that it took two days, because of difficulties of communication and gathering information, to tell the world that this problem was coming at them. And it took what one imagines must have been an inordinately brief period of time to communicate information of the civilian aircraft from the Eastern part of Russia to the Western part of -- from the Eastern part of the Soviet Union to the Western part of the Soviet Union to get permission to shoot it down. That could be done very quickly. But something that involved the lives of so many people on this globe took a great deal of time to communicate.

KOPPEL: Let me pick up on the last part of what Mr. Koch just said, Vladimir. I think the question that is raised by a great many people who are familiar with what the Soviet Union does and does not reveal is that if that cloud of radiation had not made its way over to Western Europe, if in fact the Swedes

and the Danes had not raised initial questions about some kind of a nuclear accident, the question that I think lingers in many of our minds is whether we would ever have heard word one about it.

What do you think?

POSNER: I think that we have to look at the concrete history of things that have happened in the Soviet Union, major disasters.

KOPPEL: 1957.

POSNER: I look back to, say, 1966 and the major earthquake in Tashkent. That affected nobody but Tashkent and Uzbekistan, far from any Western country, which was announced widely in the Soviet Union.

KOPPEL: There was a similar...

POSNER: A major disaster could not be ignored. I don't see how it could be possible, and I don't think it would have been.

KOPPEL: There was in fact -- and as a matter of fact, Alexander Cockburn wrote a first-rate piece on it.

Alexander, maybe you'll fill in some of the details if I leave them out.

But there was a very similar incident that did in fact happen in the Soviet Union in 1957, wasn't there, Alex?

COCKBURN: Well, I'm afraid I must defer. It's actually my brother you're talking about, who did a film about a Soviet nuclear accident. And I think he advanced substantial proof and evidence, indeed, there had been an accident. And I'm sorry to say that the Soviets weren't very forthcoming about it.

KOPPEL: Vladimir.

POSNER: What could I say to that? I'm a journalist who knows quite a few people and who gets most of the rumors and who's traveled a lot in the Soviet Union. And I will have to say that I am not aware of that accident. Now, maybe it's been so well hidden that nobody's ever heard about it in the Soviet Union.

But I will say that there have been disasters that have been restricted to the Soviet Union, have threatened no one, and have been reported widely in the country. And I think that that would have happened in this case, regardless of whether or not the radioactivity had been limited only to the Soviet Union.

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KOPPEL: Senator Denton, a quick comment. And then we have to take another break.

SENATOR DENTON: Sure.

Mr. Posner's presence, while I can academically agree with the rich-poor thing, did refer to what I mentioned earlier. There is a tendency, I believe -- and I'll charge this of the media -- to establish a sort of moral equivalence between the Soviet Union and the United States. And our people need to understand that that is false, that there isn't a moral equivalence. Or else we're not going to come up with enough means to defend ourselves against what they are and what they are about.

The cartoon that is often shown with two hands pushing missiles into the middle of the table, one with the stars and stripes, one with the hammer and sickle, otherwise identical, is not a true portrayal of the international situation. And when he is able to explain bureaucracy in the Soviet Union persuasively, just like he's one of the boys in the United States, is a contribution, perhaps, to our richness, but also, perhaps, to our confusion as to the tremendous difference between the two systems and the need to worry about what they're trying to do to us.

KOPPEL: All right. And we will come back with your question and many more questions when we return.

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KOPPEL: And without further ado, let's go to our next questioner.

WOMAN: I can't see a whole lot of difference in the way the Soviets handled the nuclear disaster news and the way Senator Denton would like for our media to handle nuclear news.

Senator Denton, isn't it true that you have characterized people who are anti-nuclear as communists?

SENATOR DENTON: No, ma'am, not at all.

WOMAN: I seem to have remembered reading a very good article in the Reader's Digest that you did just that. And I can remember many times hearing articles, or reading articles and hearing broadcasts when radiation has been released in the United States, and it's always followed with a disclaimer: no harm to the public. Always. And that is simply not so.

The media is being manipulated by the nuclear industry. And if there's anything that this accident has shown, it's

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finally come out that not all the deaths are those that can be counted. We are now hearing anywhere from 8000 to 100,000, and I heard an account of even more, projected from this Chernobyl accident.

I want to know how many deaths now are accountable and how many do the Soviets project worldwide will be as a result of this accident.

KOPPEL: Ma'am, to whom are you addressing that question?

WOMAN: Mr. Posner, first. And then I want Senator Denton's response to a follow-up question, please.

SENATOR DENTON: Well, you didn't give me a question. You gave me an accusation.

WOMAN: Well, I'm going to give you a question after the answer to this question.

SENATOR DENTON: Well, may I answer your accusation, ma'am?

WOMAN: I would rather have this answer first, and then...

[Laughter and applause]

KOPPEL: Ma'am, I'd love to have you as a panelist. But as you can see, the chairs are all taken.

[Laughter]

WOMAN: Thank you. Maybe we can make it another time.

KOPPEL: Some other time.

Why don't you just address your question wherever you like? We'll keep it to one question. You did make an accusation to Senator Denton, and why don't you follow up on that. And then we'll go to Vladimir Posner.

The accusation, as I understand it, has the full institutional force of the Reader's Digest behind it.

[Laughter]

KOPPEL: But the Senator denies it. So where do we go?

SENATOR DENTON: I not only deny it. I am sure that the

Reader's Digest never said that about me. And I never said that.

WOMAN: Do you want us to call names?

KOPPEL: No, ma'am. I'll tell you what.

Senator, is your honor satisfied on this issue? Can we move on?

All right. Pose your question, if you would, ma'am, to Mr. Posner, if you can remember what it was.

WOMAN: Well, my question is, how many deaths are countable now? How many are projected, long-term deaths?

And my follow-up question to Senator Denton was, is this the way that you want to affect news in America, because you have been so critical of the news media, as well as critical of those of us who ask for a shutdown of the entire nuclear industry?

KOPPEL: I'll give you this, ma'am, you're tenacious. But let's -- Vladimir, go ahead. If you would pick up on the question. Is it now known? Are there accurate projections that are now being made as to how many deaths are expected and how many people have been affected by this terrible incident?

POSNER: Ted, I've been in the United States since the 13th. I've not been back in my own country. All the news I've been getting from my country has been on American television. I would hesitate to say that it's all absolutely accurate. I have heard projections from Dr. Gary [sic] that up to 100,000 people might come down with cancer somewhere along the line. And I would tend to think that if we've moved 92,000 people out of that area, that project sounds, you know, very terrifying, but nevertheless pretty true.

On the other hand, according to what I've read, there has been no threat to people living far from Chernobyl, let alone outside of the Soviet Union.

However, I cannot say that I'm fully prepared to answer the question, because I've not had the possibility to check with Soviet sources.

KOPPEL: Fair enough.

Senator Denton, if the lady will permit me to rephrase her question somewhat -- and if you're not happy, I know you'll let me know.

[Laughter]

KOPPEL: I think the essence of what she's saying is that, in a curious way, you would like the American media, under certain circumstances, to be just as obedient as the Soviet media to its masters. But we really operate in a different way in this country, don't we?

SENATOR DENTON: I think the lady said, would I like to have the media not report nuclear disasters, and things like that, because I have criticism of the media? I think that is a rather irrational question.

The other day, for example, at Browns Ferry, a nuclear plant, I was called by a friend and told that there had been a bad fire and some explosions there. I immediately went to the Federal Government and to the state government and to the people on the scene to find out what had happened. I called for a full investigation, and so on. I'm all for open information in the United States.

But, ma'am, if you think there's anything like -- in the Soviet Union like there is here with media, you're terribly mistaken.

And I do criticize our media in some respects, but not in the respect that I don't want them to tell about accidents that happen to nuclear plants.

WOMAN: Well, I'd like...

KOPPEL: Ma'am, I think you've had a fair crack at the microphone. We have a lot of other people here. One of them is perhaps our most faithful viewer, Reed Irvine, who heads up an organization called Accuracy in Media.

Reed, go ahead.

REED IRVINE: Thank you, Ted.

Mr. Arledge and Ted, you both said earlier that you have Vladimir Posner on to express his views, or express the views of the Soviet Government. The fact is that Mr. Posner doesn't express views, for the most part. For the most part, he tells disinformation, or lies. And Sam Donaldson has said that that's all right because the American people, the audience can tell when he's lying.

But when he was on with David Brinkley he told some whoppers. David Brinkley apparently couldn't tell. He didn't correct him.

He was on tonight and he's told another whopper tonight, and nobody has really corrected him.

He was on...

KOPPEL: Why don't you take this golden opportunity to do it, then. Which whopper are you talking about?

IRVINE: Well, let me finish.

He was also on the Donahue show and he told several...

POSNER: I would like to be corrected, if possible. I'd appreciate it.

IRVINE: Fine. Let me correct you on, specifically -- for example, you said on the Donahue show that your government...

KOPPEL: No. Just now. Right now.

IRVINE: ...was very considerate, very considerate of those people in the Chernobyl area, very considerate because...

KOPPEL: Reed, you're going to have to permit me to try to keep some order here. You have made the specific charge that Vladimir Posner has told an untruth on this program tonight. There is a unique opportunity for you two to have it out over that untruth. Go ahead.

IRVINE: Well, I'll have to confess, Ted, it's slipped my mind right now.

[Laughter]

IRVINE: I noted it when he told it and I should have noted it down. It's been so long that I -- and I was so intrigued by the other discussion, I've forgotten it.

Let me tell you what he said on Donahue, which is related. And that is that he said that they were very, very considerate of those people in the Chernobyl area because they evacuated them. Donahue, or no one has mentioned the fact that they didn't evacuate the first 49,000 until 36 hours later. They didn't evacuate the rest of them until a week later. Exposing them, therefore, in the meantime, to very severe radiation, which will help increase the chances of their getting cancer.

Nobody has pointed that out.

He said on...

POSNER: May I answer the gentleman.

IRVINE: One other, Mr. Posner, and you can answer them both.

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You said that the Soviet military, air force, had tried for 4 1/2 hours to get the Korean Air Line Flight 7 to identify itself, three years ago. Korean Air Line Flight 7 was only over Soviet territory for 58 minutes, and you said they were trying for 4 1/2 hours. There's no evidence that they tried at all to get it to identify itself, according to the tapes.

No one stopped you or correct you on that.

KOPPEL: I'll tell you what. I don't really want to let this get into a debate over particularly issues like that. But at the risk of having you feel that we're not being fair -- Vladimir, go ahead and respond to both of those, if you would. And then we'll try and move on.

POSNER: Right. I'll do it as briefly as possible. I'd like to say two things.

Number one, the evacuation out of Chernobyl and around it began two hours after the incident. You cannot evacuate 98,000 people in a very short time. I hope you never have to deal with that particular case. You will find it extremely difficult.

IRVINE: That's another lie. It didn't begin until 36 hours after.

POSNER: That is not true at all.

And number two, there are many American sources, including if you read The Nation and others, that indicate the Soviet version, as it's called, of what happened with KAL corresponds exactly to the facts. Therefore, you would have to say that there are many American journalists who are also liars.

Take it up with them.

IRVINE: I remember what he said now. And he said that the officials in Moscow didn't know what had happened at first, what had happened at Chernobyl. The paper reported today, the Washington Post reported today that they sent a team of doctors down to Chernobyl four hours after the accident happened. One of your top officials has said that Gorbachev himself was informed that very day. And you're lying when you say that they didn't know.

KOPPEL: All right.

I'll tell you what. Let me -- and Roone is not going to thank me for this. But this began with a question to you or me, and I pick you. The question was, as I recall it, whether it was

appropriate to have Vladimir Posner on after the President made his speech with David Brinkley.

Was that...

IRVINE: No. The question is, do you have anybody at ABC, or NBC, who is competent to catch this man's lies and correct them on the air, so he doesn't disinform the American people?

KOPPEL: All right.

Roone?

ARLEDGE: Well, I think tonight's a good example. Reed Irvine, you're certainly attacking his credibility and calling him into question. I think...

IRVINE: But I'm not with ABC, Roone.

ARLEDGE: No, I understand that. And when Mr. Posner is on Nightline, I have every confidence that Ted Koppel is not going to let him get away with unfounded statements. And we almost always have someone on who balances him or disagrees with him.

We have found that having Soviet spokesmen on our programs adds a dimension, adds their point of view, whether we agree with it or not. The fact of the matter is, we have to live with these people. They do have a different perspective on things than we do. We have a different perspective from them. And to have Vladimir Posner or Georgi Arbatov or whomever else we have had on from the Soviet Union I think is an educational process, and a good one. And I think on the occasions that they say things that our other guests take issue with, it's immediately pointed out.

IRVINE: But they should be introduced, Roone, not as people who are giving the viewpoint, but as paid liars. Then it would be...

KOPPEL: I'll tell you what. I suspect if we introduced even Vladimir Posner, who seems like a very congenial fellow, if we introduced him every time as a congenial liar, I suspect he might not come on after the second or third time.

[Laughter]

KOPPEL: There is one larger point that I think needs to be made, and perhaps we can use this as a transition into the next segment because we're going to take a break in just a

second. And that is that, by and large, when we do live television, whether we are interviewing a Vladimir Posner or whether we are interviewing someone who represents the government of Chile or Nicaragua, or for that matter the government of the United States, it would take a greater knowledge on the part of our anchormen and anchorwomen than I'm afraid any one of us has to be able to catch every misstatement and every untruth at the time.

What we're really dealing with -- and I think you, Reed Irvine, as a student of the media, know this as well as anyone, is a continuum, where over a period of days or weeks what is covered in the media eventually comes close to approaching the truth. That's at least what we strive for.

We'll be back with more from Vanderbilt University on Viewpoint in just a moment.

* * *

KOPPEL: ...Go ahead, sir.

MAN: The question is for Mr. Brokaw or Mr. Arledge.

A few weeks ago ABC News and NBC News ran pictures of what was supposed to be the Chernobyl plant at the time of the accident. It turned out that those pictures were fake, and the networks had to apologize for it a few days later.

The question is, how did this happen? And should we be concerned about other things being on the news that really aren't what they're supposed to be?

KOPPEL: Tom?

BROKAW: Yes. You should always be concerned about things on the news not being what they're supposed to be. I mean if you look at the news on any given night, read your newspaper in the morning, listen to a radio station, read any news magazine, you ought to do so with a healthy dose of skepticism as you approach it. We tell the truth as best as we can find it out at any given moment.

In the case of those pictures that we advertised on one evening, both on ABC and on NBC, as being from the Chernobyl accident, taken at a distance, as I recall, of eight miles by some itinerant Yugoslav tourist, we later found...

[Laughter]

BROKAW: We later found out, to our embarrassment, that

it was a cement plant in Trieste.

[Laughter]

BROKAW: You know that because we told you that. And as soon as we found it out, or as soon as we had a suspicion of that, we went forward and made it public.

That will happen from time to time. When we know that we have been taken, it is not in our interest to cover up that kind of thing. It is in our best interest to be -- as quickly as we can, to come forward and tell you. And I frankly think that in broadcasting we do a much better job of correcting errors than they do among our brethren in the print, for example.

KOPPEL: Yes, Alexander Cockburn.

COCKBURN: Well, I think it really reflects also back to the last segment when there seemed to be a lot of self-congratulation about how the American press has a free-for-all and the Soviet press is captive.

The Libyan bombing was justified by, supposedly, coded cables intercepted which said that the disco had been bombed in Berlin on orders from Libya. The press accepted this, pretty unquestioningly. And it was used by the Reagan Administration as the main rationale for the raid. Now it appears that this coded intercept is rather in question, that it might have been -- the German papers are now saying it was a neo-Nazi raid. Other people say it might have been the Syrians.

Now, has there been much discussion now? There wasn't very much discussion then. I don't think it was a very good advertisement for the inquiring capacities of the U.S. press.

KOPPEL: I hadn't heard the neo-Nazi one. It is true that the charge has now been made that the Syrians were also involved. I don't recall it being presented as being one or the other.

But Noel Koch, you're a lot closer to that than any one of us.

KOCH: Well, I was not aware that there was any question about the validity of the cables that were released. It is an enormous undertaking for a government to reveal intelligence, and by revealing that intelligence to reveal the means by which it was acquired. And so I can assure you that there would have been no dishonesty in the release of that sort of information.

I'm not aware that anybody has called it into question.

I haven't read the German newspaper that says it's a neo-Nazi plot. So beyond that, I can't speak to it.

COCKBURN: Well, I must tell Mr. Koch that the British Government has been asking for the Arabic originals of the intercepts, and the U.S. Government has refused.

As for the neo-Nazi thing, it's in Der Spiegel, which is a very reputable German magazine. Of course, the disco was basically for black people. And it would seem -- people have always said that it seems fairly odd that that would have been picked on by the Libyans.

KOCH: I found myself in the unhappy position of having to say that you haven't the vaguest idea of what you're talking about, without explaining exactly why that's the case, unfortunately.

COCKBURN: Well, that's not a very satisfactory answer.

KOCH: I agree.

KOPPEL: So do I.

Let's move on to the next question.

MAN: This question is for Mr. Brokaw. And then I'd like Senator Denton to respond.

Do you think that the media is leak-happy?

BROKAW: No. I think many elements of the American Government is leak-happy. And we happen to have large catchers' mitts, wherever we...

[Laughter]

BROKAW: ...where they're accumulating those leaks.

Now, let me make something very clear to this audience. A leak does not come dripping out of the Pentagon or the White House or the State Department and automatically end up as a pool -- if I can carry this metaphor out, painful as it may be, Ted -- on the evening news programs or on the morning news programs or on the front page of a newspaper. A leak is treated like any other piece of information. It is examined. We go back and look for other sources. We test it against what else we know and what else is going on.

But, obviously, we are going to listen to those people in the government who have something that we think that you need or want to know about what is going on in your name.

KOPPEL: Senator Denton?

SENATOR DENTON: I agree that the government is leak-happy. And this is not, you know, just senators or congressmen. It's officials in the Administration, high- and low-ranking. It is staffers on the Hill. I believe something should be done about that, in the interest of national security.

I, then, don't think two wrongs make a right. If the media then publish a leak which is destructive of national security, I think they're doing wrong. And I think it's a sad point to which we've arrived when the President of the United States has to plead with a publisher not to publish a certain thing. And I think it should be taken at face value and shouldn't be argued for very long; and we should believe the commander-in-chief, because he does have the information at hand, the media does not, to judge the significance and so on.

Do I mean that that means you have to be muzzled all the time? No. But I do think the balance is a bit more on irresponsible publishing of leaks that might hurt the national security than otherwise.

And I think this discussion about terrorism, the fact that we all hate it, the fact that we might all come to see that the Soviet Union, in supporting it, undeniably, unquestionably, around the world, might indeed be something a little bit worse than the media has comprehended -- have comprehended to date.

And I would have to say, Ted, if we're going to get equal time -- I understood that we were going to have breast-beating about the media tonight, to some degree -- I wouldn't agree with you we're necessarily going to get the truth in a long period of time in the media, because the media are not typical of the American people. They have a point of view. We've come to new journalism, advocacy journalism.

I respect journalists as much as I respect missionaries. I started out to be a journalist myself. But we've long passed the who, what, why, where, all that. We're into advocacy and new journalism.

Up until 1980, the public, from roughly '75 to '80, characterized themselves as slightly conservative. The media, 1972, 81 percent for McGovern over Nixon; '64 to '76, no Republican more than 19 percent in a presidential vote. This is 240 print and broadcast journalists representing major media, the New York Times and so on.

The beliefs that they have. Eight percent are regular churchgoers. That does not -- what they see as the truth is not

what the United States sees as the truth, nor is, I think, it necessarily an accurate portrayal of the truth.

So, I would disagree with you. I'd think it's a controversial point as to whether or not we get the truth now through the media news. I believe you each believe you're getting towards the truth, but we have...

KOPPEL: Senator, could you move in a little closer to your mike there?

SENATOR DENTON: We have a profit motive driving and we have our own beliefs driving and we have advocacy journalism driving, and I don't think that necessarily results in as much truth as we should have.

KOPPEL: Roone Arledge is the president of one of the largest, most powerful news organizations in the world.

Advocacy journalism, motivated by the profit margin. the charge that we, as journalists, are really unrepresentative of the American public. Just take a crack at those three. And then we'll take a break.

ARLEDGE: I think, Senator Denton, that there was a time -- I think those statistics that you quoted are from the early '70s, aren't they, something like that?

SENATOR DENTON: One of them's '80 and one of them's '82.

ARLEDGE: I think there was a time when it probably was basically true that a lot of the people in a lot of professions, including journalism, came out of colleges at a time when there was a liberal slant to their thinking. I think that has clearly changed in this country. The country has changed. It's more conservative. I think young people are more conservative.

But more than that, I think that once you go into journalism as a serious profession and when you work for one of the major responsible news organizations in this country, the very first thing you have to learn is to put aside whatever your own views may be; or the first time we catch you doing it, you're going to be fired.

Now, I'm not talking about a columnist. If we have George Will on the air, people know pretty well where he stands, and he says what he thinks. But if we have a correspondent covering a story and we have any reason to believe that that person has an interest or has a bias toward that story, we take them off.

We have just removed several of our top reporters from covering NASA, for example, because they want to be in the program of sending journalists into space. And as far as we're concerned, that destroys their ability to be objective, because they have a point of view. We have done that in any other cases.

If there is a bias -- and I think it is no longer demonstrable that it's liberal -- it is certainly unintentional and has withstood the dragnet of our searching out anyone who may have a bias.

[Confusion of voices]

KOPPEL: Gentlemen, forgive me. I've got to jump in. We absolutely have to take break.

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KOPPEL: And still a number of issues on manipulation of the media that we haven't yet addressed this evening.

Let's go to the questioner up in the balcony.

MAN: My question is addressed to Mr. Arledge and Mr. Brokaw. And this deals with national security.

What advantage, if any, do you see in reporting, and thereby disclosing, very sensitive and highly technical details about American defense installations and their capabilities?

BROKAW: Well, we don't. If we think that national security is truly threatened by that, we don't.

Let me just tell you that during the hours preceding the Libyan raid we had access at NBC News to a certain amount of information that led us to conclude, it turns out correctly, that a raid was in the works, planes were in the air, ships were moving in that direction. We didn't interrupt the network. We didn't go on, even in the first feed of NBC Nightly News, which is at 6:30 Eastern Time, and say that a raid is imminent or it's about to take place, even though we had every reason to believe that that was going to happen. And so we didn't do that.

There are any number of instances that I can cite to you that we have withheld information that we have either stumbled on to or people have transferred to us or that we have found in a deliberate fashion.

KOPPEL: All right. But Tom, you have the case -- and Senator Denton referred to it just a moment ago -- you have the case of President Reagan calling Kay Graham over at the Washington Post. You have -- I think it was William Casey who had long

conversations with senior members of the Washington Post staff. All for the purpose of trying to convince them that a story that they were about to publish would be damaging to the national interest.

And the Senator's question, and it seems like a reasonable extension of this gentleman's question, is (A) why does the President have to go that far? And (B) we now have another situation where the CIA -- I believe it was just today -- in the Pelton case, is warning the press and saying, "You guys have been going too far. And if you move beyond what comes out in the courtroom with any of the information that you use, we're going to prosecute."

Now, that seems to come very, very close to what the British call D notices -- that is, prior restraint on publication.

It's a big area to discuss. Well, pick up on it.

BROKAW: Well, my guess is that there was a fair amount of discussion between Ben Bradlee of the Washington Post and the President and William Casey of the CIA because it was unclear about whether or not that material was known or not that the Washington Post had in its possession, and just how much it might damage national security and how much of it was in the national interest to know what was going on.

We had a situation at NBC in which one of our correspondents, James Polk, made reference to something called Ivy Bells, which was an American defense communications intercept of Soviet messages by submarines inside Soviet harbors. Casey threatened to prosecute us. There were a number of references to that going back eight or nine years.

KOPPEL: Okay. But the question, Tom, is real simple. Let's assume for the sake of argument that that is big news. Everyone would like to know about these operations.

BROKAW: Right.

KOPPEL: But let us also assume that it is damaging to U.S. security interests. And the question that I think is being asked here, in a variety of ways tonight, is: You guys in the media seem to place news above national interest.

COCKBURN: Ted, could I come in here?

KOPPEL: Well, I'll tell you what. Let Tom and Roone Arledge respond, and then...

BROKAW: Well, I would just say, very quickly, if the

case can be made by William Casey or by the Defense Secretary, by the President of the United States, or any other person in charge, that what we're about to disclose is a clear and present danger to American national security interest, then this news organization, NBC News, will be inclined not to broadcast that simply to have it out there.

There have been instances where that has happened in the past, and I'm sure that it will happen again and we'll have those conversations with people, once the case has been made.

But very often what happens is, Ted, that it's very murky, or that it's already been disclosed in a number of other ways: technical journals, or that it's out in other news organizations, or it's there somewhere for people to know, it's part of the public arena already.

KOPPEL: Roone?

ARLEDGE: First of all, I agree with Tom. Well also, at ABC News, knew about the Libyan bombing some hours before it actually took place. Jack McWethy, our national security correspondent, had that very firm. And we obviously did not report that.

But I think there's an assumption here that I want to challenge, and that is that authority, whether it's the President or the Defense Department or the Secretary of State, or whomever, is always right on this and that they -- because they have access to information, they are right, and somehow news organizations are unpatriotic if they report things.

There's a classic example. One of the best was when President Kennedy had just taken office and the New York Times learned about the Bay of Pigs invasion, that it was imminent, and they were going to report that. And President Kennedy called the publisher of the New York Times, very similar to President Reagan calling Katharine Graham, and urged him, in the national interest, not to publish the story about the invasion of the Bay of Pigs because it would imperil the national security. The New York Times agreed. The Bay of Pigs was a disaster. And President Kennedy admitted afterwards that the worst mistake he ever made was asking that it not be published. Had it been published, that disaster would never have occurred.

So, to assume that the government is always right and the press is always wrong, I think, is a wrong assumption.

KOPPEL: Alexander Cockburn, you wanted to get in on this.

COCKBURN: Well, actually, I was going to raise the same point about the Bay of Pigs that Mr. Arledge did.

And I'd really ask, given what Brokaw and Arledge are saying, whether they think if the Bay of Pigs situation had arisen, was arising now -- it seems to be very akin to the Libyan thing -- whether they think they would have done the same as the New York Times.

ARLEDGE: I'm sorry. Who did he ask?

BROKAW: If we were in the situation now, Alexander, and President Kennedy called us, would we do the same thing?

COCKBURN: Well, it sounds from what you're saying that you would say, "We'll hold the story."

BROKAW: I don't know whether we would or not. It would depend on the situation. It would depend on the conversation. That's the point. It depends on the case that is made at the time. I don't think that you can have a hard and fast standard that's going to apply to every given situation and to every argument that's going to be made on both sides.

KOPPEL: And let me just throw this conversation over to the other side of the table here. We also have had situations in our not too distant past where Presidents have used, or people high in government have used this rubric of national security to cover up their own indiscretions. Watergate is just one major example that springs to mind.

Why should the media, which, after all, is really there to be skeptical, simply believe something because someone waves the flag of national interest or says, "You're about to blow a big secret here"?

Noel Koch?

KOCH: Well, Ted, I think what we're seeing is a reflection of the fact that this is a very chaotic relationship. It is an adversarial relationship, but not totally. There's cooperation in certain areas. This is the sort of thing, it seems to me, that bothers Alexander Cockburn, is that there's any cooperation at all.

There's no simple answer to this. There's no cut and dried approach to it. I know of a number of things that the press is aware of and that the press, or the media, has not used, sometimes because of their own discretion, or sometimes they will come and ask, "Is this dangerous?" and sometimes we will learn that they're aware of something and we will ask them not to

reveal it and they will not, and sometimes they sit on stories that would be very interesting for rather extended periods of time.

So, there's not a total lack of responsibility on the other side, as we try to present, or as some people try to present.

We also -- we do use the press. There's no question about this. There are leaks which are sometimes beneficial, sometimes extremely self-serving.

The difficulty with leaks is that we in government live in an environment -- and this is our fault. I don't mean that it's this Administration's fault. It's a continuous thing -- in which we classify everything. We classify information to keep Congress from finding out about it. We classify information to keep each other from finding out about it. And by this route, we desensitize ourselves to the importance of any information at all, whether it's, you know, what is its value to an adversary? And once you have done that, you've put yourself in an environment in which people no longer have any compunction about dropping information to the press.

I might say, Ted, that what I find interesting is how much appears in the media that is a result of leaks which is absolutely false, because you people go and talk to individuals who are flattered by being talked to. On the question of terrorism, for example, I don't think there's more than ten people in the Pentagon that know much about the subject and that deal with it on a regular basis and can speak about it authoritatively. And most of what turns up in the media, in the press on terrorism, particularly out of the Pentagon, is absolutely false. We let it go. We don't mind. It's disinformation. But it's not disinformation that we've originated. It's information that you've invited on yourself by talking to people that have nothing else to do but give away what they heard or what they think they heard from the guy standing at the next urinal.

KOPPEL: Well, at least now we know where it's coming from.

[Laughter]

KOPPEL: We've got to take a break. We'll be back with our final segment in just a moment.

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KOPPEL: ...You have a question?

WOMAN: Yes. I'd like to ask Vladimir. Where is he?

KOPPEL: He's out there in San Francisco.

WOMAN: Very international.

Vladimir, when are you going to have Ted Koppel on Russian television?

POSNER: I can give you two answers. One is, when Ted speaks Russian. That would be a good one.

[Laughter]

[Confusion of voices]

POSNER: But anyway, what I said at the beginning is I think we should have more American journalists on Soviet television. And I also have been trying to make that happen.

KOPPEL: All right.

WOMAN: And I'd like to ask Senator Denton how he feels about the Senate being televised.

You're going to do terrifically well, Senator Denton. Don't you begin doing this right now in the Senate?

SENATOR DENTON: Doing what?

KOPPEL: I think she was asking about the fact that the Senate is now going to be televised.

Can we keep it in the general area of manipulation? Who's going to be manipulating whom when the Senate is televised live?

SENATOR DENTON: I think a lot of senators are going to decide they know a lot more about lot of issues than they previously thought.

[Laughter]

WOMAN: And when are we going to manipulate a woman on the panel, Mr. Koppel?

KOPPEL: Well, that's -- I was afraid that I was going to pause long enough to let you ask that question.

[Laughter]

KOPPEL: You're absolutely right. And I don't mean to

make light of it. We fell into the trap that we have fallen into before on this program. And I guess if I promise it publicly, then that will at least insure that the next time around we won't do it. I promise you that the next time we will think not only in terms of whom specifically we want, but we will definitely focus on the need to have at least one, and maybe more, women on the panel.

WOMAN: But you're all so handsome.

[Laughter]

KOPPEL: I think we're starting to run out of luck here.

I'll tell you what, folks, we are literally down to our last couple of minutes. The subject, difficult as it may be to remember, was media manipulation. I certainly feel manipulated here this evening.

[Laughter]

KOPPEL: Let's try one more round. Let's go to Miami and Alexander Cockburn.

And final thoughts, Alex?

COCKBURN: Yeah. I think one thing we really haven't talked about is not so much manipulation as secrecy. This is the most secrecy-crazed Administration in decades. And I think what's happening is the more the pressure from people like Casey goes on the media, the less likely that there will be innovative and energetic reporting of the sort that could have happened at the Bay of Pigs, should have happened in Libya, and so on.

KOPPEL: All right.

Roone Arledge.

ARLEDGE: Well, I think on the general subject of manipulation there is no question that we are manipulated, we try to manipulate people. There is a battle that goes on in Washington, in particular, on a daily basis between the Administration and the press as to who can get the most out of whom.

On the question of whether terrorists manipulate us, I think that the ultimate bottom-line historical judgment will be that they did not, that they have not benefited from whatever appearances they may have had.

On the other hand, I think, clearly, so many people are

concerned about this that we have to be very vigilant about it. And everyone here tonight has been very articulate about it.

KOPPEL: All right.

Noel Koch, a quick thought from you, please.

KOCH: I think, Ted, I would like to close -- you know about two weeks ago there was Jefferson lectures by Professor Kolakowski from Poland. No longer from Poland. He's not allowed back in his country. But he made the point that in politics, and I think by extension the media, we should not cast ourselves into a value-free universe in which we treat every idea as equal, every individual who presents ideas as equal. And I think that's the sort of universe that the press tries to reach out for, the media tries to reach out for. And I think it's very dangerous for the country because the assumption that's drawn from that is that one man's views as good as another's. And we know that that's not the case.

KOPPEL: Gentlemen, I thank you all very much.

Winston Churchill once made the same observation, saying he refused to draw moral equivalence between the arsonist and the fire brigade.

And on that note, our thanks to our distinguished panel and to our audience here at Vanderbilt University for their contribution to our broadcast tonight.