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REMARKS

Bob Interesting developments in the "monitoring" game here in Cyprus. With more publicity like this we may be able to get lost in the background.

GKB

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Nicosia Cyprus Life July 1982

(monthly)

Special Report

DATELINE CYPRUS

ZCZC CPJ
UU ACP FSO
:PROMETROWEST EXNICOSIA
CYPRUS FOR PLANET EXLAKES
PLEASE ONPASS TO DAILY PLANET
ATTN - LOU GRANT:

NICOSIA -- BEIRUT'S PROLONGED TUMBLE INTO CHAOS HAS REDUCED A CITY THAT WAS ONCE THE CENTRE OF THE ARAB WORLD INTO A DANGER ZONE. SINCE THE CIVIL WAR BEGAN IN 1975, BEIRUT HAS EXPERIENCED A STEADY DECLINE IN STATURE AS PEOPLE, BUSINESSES AND MONEY HAVE FLED THE DESTRUCTION WROUGHT BY RELENTLESS FACTIONAL FIGHTING AND INVASION.

LEBANON WAS A MICROCOSM OF THE ARAB WORLD AND ITS DESTRUCTION HAS COMMANDED THE ATTENTION OF WORLD POWERS AND RAISED THE LEVEL OF INTERNATIONAL TENSION. ALMOST ANY EVENT IN LEBANON WAS A HIGHLY NEWS WORTHY STORY, AND THE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA WAS THERE IN FORCE TO COVER IT.

THEN THE UNDERGROUND GROUPS WHOSE REGULAR ACTIVITIES INCLUDED CAR BOMBINGS AND AIRLINER HIGHJACKINGS CHANGED THEIR TACTICS. THEY BEGAN TO KIDNAP FOREIGNERS AND DEMAND CONCESSIONS FROM WESTERN GOVERNMENTS IN EXCHANGE FOR THEIR RELEASE. DIPLOMATS, EDUCATORS AND JOURNALISTS WERE THEIR TARGETS. BEIRUT WAS NO LONGER SAFE FOR THOSE WHOSE JOB IT WAS TO REPORT ON ITS DANGERS. A NEW MIDDLE EAST MEDIA HEADQUARTERS HAD TO BE FOUND. THE CHOICE FOR MANY NEWS AGENCIES AND REPORTERS WAS CYPRUS. MORE/GL

In July 1980, two British press correspondents working in Beirut, Jim Muir and Tim Llewellyn, received threats against their lives for their reporting of events in Lebanon. The threat was passed in Damascus by Syrian sources to British diplomats who routed the message through London and then on to the British embassy in Beirut. Muir and Llewellyn experienced an anxious wait of three days for Beirut airport to reopen before they could catch a flight out of

Lebanon.

Little did the international press corps know at the time that the experience of Muir and Llewellyn was indicative of what was to come. By March 16, 1985, the day Associated Press correspondent Terry Anderson was kidnapped, the foreign news agencies realised it was time to bail out of Beirut. Their chosen alternative as new operations centre was Cyprus.

Lying as it does 100 miles off the Levantine coast, Cyprus, a Middle Eastern country with a Western culture, democratic values, a stable go-

vernment and an excellent telecommunications system was an obvious choice. Today, it is the only place from where one can enter Beirut easily, via daily ferries to the Lebanese Christian-controlled port of Jounieh, making reporting on the perpetual strife in Lebanon still possible - for those who are still interested and willing to take the risk.

For some time, Cyprus has been the best transit route for Middle East correspondents who cover events in both the Arab world and Israel. Many news agencies, whether they be television

or press, and particularly the American ones, keep their main bureaux in Jerusalem. To get from Israel to Damascus, Baghdad or the Gulf and vice versa, the easiest thing to do is change planes in Cyprus.

During the 1980s, Cyprus has grown steadily as a regional business and commercial centre, offering a high quality of life and good telephone and telex connections to those who chose to do business from here. Now it has become the new Middle East media base for some of the world's largest news reporting organisations.

During this past year the Associated Press and Agence France Press have established their Middle East bureaux in Nicosia. Reuters, which has split its Middle East bureau duties between Cyprus and Bahrain, has significantly upgraded its operations in Nicosia, but has yet to decide how big its operations in Cyprus will be. Cypriot sources have informed *Cyprus Life* that Reuters has rented two full floors in the newly completed Paraskevaides Foundation Building, much more space than the present two Cyprus reporters, two Lebanon reporters and two engineers need.

With exception to the Turkish military occupation of the northern 40 per cent of the island and the political problems that that creates, Cyprus is the eye in the Middle East hurricane and is a logical and reasonably convenient spot from which to cover the Middle East.

"It is at last starting to become a regional centre," Muir told *Cyprus Life*. Since his arrival on the island, Muir has worked out of his home in Nicosia, reporting on Lebanon, the Gulf War and occasionally Cyprus. He is best known for his reports on BBC Radio, and those printed in the *Financial Times*, *Middle East International*, and the *Middle East Economic Survey*. Since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, Muir has been able to return, via ferry, to Lebanon for some on-site reporting, and now does so frequently. For him, Cyprus has best served as a location from which to monitor Arab radio broadcasts.

"It's been a good base for me, but had I not known Arabic it wouldn't have been," Muir said. Llewellyn, meanwhile, will soon be seeing a lot of time in Cyprus as the BBC's new Middle East correspondent. He'll be replacing Gerald Butt who will become BBC Jerusalem correspondent.

Cyprus as an operations base began to appeal to Beirut-based publications as far back as 1976, when the Lebanese Civil War was at its height. One of the most significant early shifts out of Beirut was made by *Middle East Economic Survey* (MEES), the authoritative oil newsletter.

"We had no choice," MEES Executive Editor Ian Seymour told *Cyprus Life*. "We are weekly, our business is by subscription, and we relied on the mails. We missed several issues because of the fighting and started mailing from Cyprus before we moved here.

"In the beginning we thought we would just come temporarily. I remember that AP and Reuters came too when the airport (in Beirut) closed for six months. But it soon became clear that Cyprus was the best place to operate from," Seymour said. "What is missed here is a resident



Ian Seymour of MEES

community wrapped up in oil and banking that was based in Beirut for area coverage."

If MEES were not based in Cyprus, Seymour said, it would operate out of London, and that, he added, would be a "much higher operational cost." Some companies thought Athens would be a good alternative, but Seymour disagrees, "From what I've heard from people who moved to Athens, it wasn't satisfactory at all."

MEES relies heavily on the telephone as a means of acquiring its information from its numerous contacts in the region and like most of the other news organisations *Cyprus Life* talked to are happy with the quality of service the Cyprus Telecommunications Authority provides. Although CYTA places a 20 per cent surcharge

on all communications bills, Seymour and others said they don't mind the surcharge too much because the quality of the service is extremely good.

"We have extensive personal contacts and with this sort of communications base you can do what we need to do on the phone," Seymour said. His one displeasure is with the "abrupt" increases in mail postage costs and hopes that a more graduated system of determining postal charges will someday be implemented.

Apart from the fact that journalists can live in Cyprus without an acute fear of being kidnapped, the communications system is the essential attraction.

"It's got the best communications of any country I've ever been in," *Cyprus Life* was told by Associated Press bureau chief Nick Luddington, who was one of the AP people to come to Cyprus from Beirut in 1976. "They take good care of us," Luddington said about CYTA. As CYTA's third-largest subscriber, that's understandable. Luddington said that AP doesn't mind the 20 per cent surcharge as long as it gets the service it wants.

Like MEES, the one drawback AP faces is the fact that Cyprus is not an Arab country. "We're not able to do what we used to do in Beirut, there are a limited amount of Arab sources here," Luddington said. But, he admitted, Beirut isn't the best place either. "In terms of one Middle

One crucial element Cyprus has to offer the foreign press is no censorship and the freedom to move about the island without restrictions.

Freedom to express one's opinion is a long-standing tradition among Greeks and is strongly practiced on the island. Although the local television and radio station is government-owned, the press is completely in private hands. There are nine daily newspapers serving a total population of under 700,000, plus several weekly tabloids and magazines. Anyone who can afford to indulge in publishing in Cyprus is more or less free to do so.

These circumstances make Cyprus all the more attractive to the international press. There are few other places in the region where journalists are so free to operate.

Since the military coup in Turkey in October 1980, there have been numerous incidents there in which local journalists have been imprisoned for their reporting and newspapers closed. The Turks are also highly sensitive about international coverage of the Armenians or the Kurds, whom they prefer to describe as 'Mountain Turks.' Telecommunications can also be a problem.

In Syria, the media is government-owned and the government can at times take offence at what is said. Communications also leave something to be desired. Jordan, too, lacks good communications and expects correspondents to impose self-censorship, despite the government's Western inclination.

Israel is difficult logistically, and correspond-

ent reports are subject to censorship by the military authorities. And, though you wouldn't think so, Israel has some serious communications problems - not so much internationally as internally.

While Cairo may offer the best alternative as an Arab information centre, the communications and lifestyle problems its 12 million people face knocks it out of the picture as a news-gathering base. And while it does offer relative press freedom, the Egyptian authorities have been known to clamp down. One of Anwar Sadat's most memorable last acts as president was his appearance at a press conference waving two confiscated NBC video tapes that had been stopped at the airport.

Elsewhere in the Middle East the authorities are just too sensitive. For them, the old adage 'No news is good news' is best - unless it's bad news about a rival.

Political inclinations are not a problem in Cyprus. The only sore point in Cyprus is Turkey's military invasion and occupation of the north. Foreign reporters are free to report on Cyprus and can cross into occupied territory after having first notified the Press and Information Office that they intend to do so, but this doesn't necessarily mean the Turks are happy to have them. When a journalist reaches the Turkish checkpoint he is required to state his business. If he - or his passport - discloses the fact that he is a journalist, chances are that he will be asked to come back a few days later when someone from the Turkish-Cypriot press office can accompany him.

East centre, you can't cover the Middle East anymore." In view of the fact that all other alternatives leave something to be desired, Cyprus is working out to be the best location, Arab or not.

For AP, the last straw in Beirut was Terry Anderson's kidnapping. "After that AP decided to move Americans out of Beirut," Luddington said. "Now, no non-Lebanese work in Beirut for AP."

AP took the decision to move its Middle East desk to Nicosia last August. It set up its new, larger premises in November last year and Luddington arrived on the island in January to oversee its operations as a media base and correspondent travel centre. About 12 correspondents are working out of the Nicosia bureau, plus another five or six working in other departments. And on the same premises is ANSA, the Italian news agency, EFE, the Spanish news agency and KYODO, the Japanese news agency.

The Nicosia dateline is becoming one of increasing importance for AP. According to Luddington, about 25 per cent of the agency's top ten daily news stories are being filed from Nicosia. This bureau is gathering news from everywhere in the Middle East but Israel, and correspondents and stringers from satellite offices in Beirut, Amman, Bahrain and Cairo supply news copy to the Nicosia office.

AP's Iran desk is in Nicosia and covered by Scheherezade Faramarzi. She monitors Iran radio broadcasts and the wire service (received through short-wave radio), and watches Iranian television with the help of a satellite receiving dish. And due to direct dialling Faramarzi is able to get through to speak to people in Iran.

Good communications is also a main factor for Agence France Presse coming to Cyprus. "They are very good but very expensive," Sammy Ketz, the Frenchman who heads the AFP bureau in Beirut, said about communications in Cyprus. "If they would reduce this surcharge for the press, then more and more would come here."

Ketz, who will go back to Beirut, has come to Cyprus to set up an office occupying a whole floor in the new Barclays Bank building that will accommodate 40 to 50 journalists working shifts. So much electronic cable has been used in their offices that the floor has had to be elevated. In one corner a room has been left empty to accommodate a huge computer that will be installed when and if AFP reaches some agreement with the government about the surcharge on communications bills.

Ketz said that because AFP considers the surcharge too expensive, it will have all its Middle East correspondents file over lines running directly to Paris. The stories will then be transferred to the Nicosia office for editing. "If we could get the surcharge removed, we would make direct lines to Cyprus," he said.

Like AP, AFP decided last August to shift its Middle East headquarters to Cyprus. The Arabic desk will move to Nicosia from Cairo, and the English and French Middle East desks will move here from Paris. All of AFP's Middle East information from Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Iran,



Scheherezade Faramarzi tuning in to Teheran at her desk in Nicosia.

Both the Press and Information Office (PIO) and the Cyprus Telecommunications Authority (CYTA) have welcomed the fact that Cyprus is apparently becoming the new Middle East media base. Obviously, this development is bringing a lot of money into the island due to the services that news agencies and journalists require, not to mention rents, family and home expenses, car rentals and purchases, and entertainment costs. But setting sheer financial gain aside, this development could prove to mean a lot more to Cyprus in the long run.

First of all it qualifies CYTA's long-standing claim that the communications facilities on the island are excellent. Cyprus has used its telecommunications systems as a major selling point when attempting to attract offshore companies and banks to the island. Now it has the chance to prove how good those facilities really are. And despite the government-imposed surcharge of 20 per cent on communications bills, most agencies and journalists are willing to pay without complaining too loudly because the service is good. But this means that the services have to stay good as demand, if anything, only increases.

It also puts Cyprus closer to the eye of the international press. Although most reporters are here to cover events elsewhere, anything that happens here concerning the Turkish occupation will attract their attention. The recent women's march on the Green Line, which Muir covered for BBC and which received photographic coverage in the *International Herald Tribune* via Reuters, is evidence of this. As Mr Kypros Psyllides, Director of the PIO, told *Cyprus Life*, "We very much rely on the international media for coverage of the Cyprus problem. Instead of us going to them, they have come to us. It will definitely help to internationalise our problem further."

In the last two years Cyprus has seen several incidents involving hijackings and armed attacks by Arabs against British base personnel.

These events, too, attract international attention, but, according to Psyllides, the Cypriot authorities hope that rather than sensationalising an incident, the presence of so many reporters will mean that the facts in cases such as these will be reported more accurately.

The government usually maintains a cooperative attitude with the foreign press when events of international interest do arise. But it is only fair to guess that the government is concerned about the growing numbers of foreign press people here. Small incidents could easily get worldwide coverage, and potential holiday-makers and business partners could jump to an unfavourable conclusion about Cyprus.

Earlier this year the 'Waite Watching' (the phrase used by journalists regarding their vigil for Terry Waite) that took place at Larnaca airport brought reporters from all over the world to Cyprus. The PIO is considering setting up a press room there, but CYTA has yet to study establishing a 'voicecast centre' at the airport. It believes the facilities it provides already in the case of emergencies are satisfactory.

CYTA told *Cyprus Life* that the telecommunications requirements made by foreign news agencies has been "quite extensive, covering the whole spectrum of telecommunications services - telephone, telex, facsimile, data transmission, private leased circuits, paging, and TV programme transmissions."

So far, the following facilities have been requested: 23 telephone lines, eight telex lines, one telefax line, 69 working national lines and 112 reserved national lines. In regard to international circuits: three high speed data (9.6 Kbit/s), two telegraph (50 Baud), and two radiotelegraph (50 Baud).

Temporary telephones and telexes, as well as occasional TV programme transmissions have also been provided at times. At present, the Satellite Earth Station 'Makarios' can handle simultaneously four 'receive' and three 'transmit' TV programmes.

Special Report

When a reporter is not working out of an official bureau, he needs somewhere other than a bar to go. In Cyprus there are two offshore service companies that provide journalists with all the tricks of the trade. They are MEMO (Middle East Media Operations) which was established in 1981 by veteran British journalist Chris Drake, and the Levant Bureau, which is run by Dutch journalist Hettie Lubberding.

Keith McCormick manages MEMO, which he describes as a "coordination centre" for news organisations that need someone to assist them in covering events in the Middle East. It services mostly the American and British news organisations.

"Cyprus is the perfect place for our particular operation," McCormick said. "Foreign journalists don't need any assistance in Cyprus since the PIO takes care of all that. It's through the Middle East that we work, coordinating journalists' activities there. So we use Cyprus as a base, because of its excellent communications - and if proof of that is needed, one has only to look at the astronomical bills we pay for telephone, telex and facsimile. We also have offices in Beirut and the Gulf."

Among those agencies that look to MEMO for assistance are *Newsweek*, NBC News, the BBC, ABC Australia, *US News and World Report*, and *The Los Angeles Times*.

The Levant Bureau takes care of numerous Scandinavian and Dutch news agencies. Ludderding, who has been in Cyprus working as a

journalist for eight years, has seen the place develop, but she says it is the communications facilities alone that make Cyprus a good media base.

"In the way of facilities Cyprus has nothing special to offer except the communications. It's safe, it's easy to get connections. It's the only place in the world where you can get to Beirut. When the Terry Waite thing was going on at the airport, the various crisis teams sent here by news organisations were very impressed with the facilities that the Cyprus government provided. But there is no local story, nothing to keep a major newspaper or TV station going. There's no community that generates information, there aren't enough embassies and there's no university, research or good libraries. Everything is being made up for by the communications facilities. Although as a base, it's perfect."

The Levant Bureau got its start in early 1982 by sharing office expenses with a Danish correspondent. Now some of its regulars include *Dagens Nyheter*, a leading Swedish newspaper; FLT, a Swedish news agency; *Jyllandes Posten* a Danish newspaper; *Asahi Shinbun*, a leading Japanese newspaper; SVT (Swedish television); NRK, the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation; ITN, Britain's Independent Television News; and, said Lubberding, "People from everywhere."

There are also a good many other correspondents and agencies based in Cyprus. But not all correspondents want to have their name in print - unless it's in the form of a byline.



AP's Nick Luddington

Safety and freedom of movement has been another prime consideration of those who choose to work from Cyprus, whether they are individuals or whole agencies. Cyprus offers a quality of life that few countries in the region can match.

"If you're not going to work with bachelors, Cyprus is better to live in than any other place in the Middle East," Nick Luddington said. "It's a very nice place to have a family. You have to be a little less dependent on outside stimuli - it's not as interesting as Cairo - but if you enjoy any personal interest at all it's a good place to be."

Both Muir and Seymour described Cyprus as "a good place to come back to." And Muir, who knows how stressful the job can be, likened it to an "oasis of tranquility."

Even the best reporters like to put their feet up now and then.

the Gulf and maybe Israel will move through its Nicosia bureau. Ketz said that there is also a chance that AFP's North Africa coverage may shift to Cyprus as well.

The move by AFP is so huge that the French embassy here has had to take measures to open a French language school for children between the

ages of 6 and 11 whose parents work for AFP.

For the first year there will be between 15 and 20 children," Ketz said, "and then more." Ketz explained that without a school, AFP would be faced with a very high turnover rate of correspondents, with the exception of those who had no children or were not married.



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