IN AN AGE OF ALMOST INSTANT communication, where, if there is slaughter in Rwanda and Burundi, it's on television within minutes — the same in Somalia — it forces the foreign policy-makers (the president, the secretary of state, all of us) to react sometimes more quickly than wisdom would prefer.

Sometimes we ought to be thinking about some of these issues, but particularly because of television, and particularly because of this very network we're on — CNN — the speed with which these things are reported sort of demands an answer from the government, from policy-makers, almost instantaneously, and that's not always good. But whether it's good, bad, or indifferent, we're stuck with it. And my view of it is that we have had to learn to live with it.

Lawrence Eagleberger
Former U.S. Secretary of State

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Gathering & Producing International News

I've heard it denied by U.S. government spokespeople, but I'd say the way CNN reports the news as it happens puts pressure on governments. They have always had to react to major international events, but now they have to do it faster. They can't fall behind the CNN curve. Everyone else has seen the event on CNN, so everyone wants to know, "What's the government's position?" 1

During his stint in Baghdad covering the Persian Gulf War for CNN, Peter Arnett became one of the world's most visible reporters. Ten years earlier, when Arnett joined CNN, most Americans had no idea what the brash, aggressive reporter from New Zealand looked like, even though his coverage of the Vietnam War for the Associated Press in the 1960s and '70s was equally controversial — certainly in the eyes of the administration of U.S. President Lyndon Johnson. The difference between the two reporting experiences was that Arnett's reporting from Baghdad was accomplished using live television.

Since his famous Baghdad assignment, Arnett has divided his time between field reporting for CNN, writing a book, 2 and giving lectures. During a conference on media coverage of war, 3

1 Bruce Jacobs (producer, CNN International), interview (January 1997).
Arnett compared the U.S. government's reactions to his reporting of the conflicts in Vietnam and Iraq. "In Vietnam [the U.S.] could bomb the breadth and length of the country at will and have briefings on the daily body counts in the field without concern for public reprisals back home." By the time of the Persian Gulf War—and no doubt partly as a result of the U.S. death toll in Vietnam—"there was fear of the public learning that a single U.S. soldier might be killed."

The accelerated speed of coverage is believed by some to accentuate the impact that journalism has on policy-making. Prior to television—and particularly live television—information came by the diplomatic pouch or by secure telephonic communications. Arnett pointed out that information in the post-Cold War world now comes live from the crisis zone via independent media, unfiltered by governments or their military debriefers. It now is part of the television reporter's responsibility, whether in Haiti or Lebanon or Bosnia, to interview all players on location and report directly to the viewing public—including governments and their diplomats who themselves rely on the visual media as a principal source of information about what is happening in the world.

International news coverage is reshaping government-press relations and giving the media an even greater role in forming public opinion. During the Vietnam War, President Johnson convinced most of the U.S. press corps that coverage of the war should remain limited as a matter of national interest. It was on this basis, Arnett noted, that President Johnson could justify having the Federal Bureau of Investigation develop a file on him "to see if it could find something it could use against me as a reporter."  

CNN's predisposition toward live coverage has raised the spectre of a "CNN Factor" that would cause governments and other international bodies to make decisions based on immediate media reporting and resulting public reaction to events. Now, instead of trying to hide information from the media, a government is just as likely to use the CNN cameras as a "way of telegraphing its position around the world." Writing in the Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics, U.S. State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns described how such coverage has made CNN a player in diplomatic circles:

CNN has become so pervasive in its worldwide coverage that it is sometimes an actor itself in global politics. Take a breaking news story, such as a coup or natural disaster in any part of the world, and chances are CNN will have a reporter there to cover it within minutes. CNN is so good that it regularly beats our own embassies and consulates to stories. Its broad coverage of events day in and day out is the best way for diplomats and citizens to follow world events.

The CNN phenomenon is so widespread that it has revolutionized the way diplomacy is conducted in the modern world. First, CNN makes it easier for diplomats around the world to follow what is happening. I turn on CNN International at 7:00 A.M. in my office and keep it on throughout the day. Its jingles and theme music provide the backdrop in government offices and palaces from Santiago to Seoul.

Working as a writer and producer for CNN since 1993, Bruce Jacobs said he believes he has been witness to a "quicker pace of international relations" as a result of CNN's immediate coverage.

CNN is a primary source of information. When we're live with breaking news, you can't get the information any faster. We're there as it happens. We're there as 100,000 Rwandan refugees walk down the roads out of Zaire. We're there as hostages walk out of the ambassador's residence in Lima, Peru. We're there as the Gulf War breaks out. If reporters see something on CNN in the morning, they may

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7 Arnett, lecture (26 April 1996).

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5 Ibid.
ask the U.S. State Department spokesman about it that afternoon. One would hope Nicholas Burns would have an answer or position on that matter by then.

Do the pictures from places like Zaire or Bosnia or Rwanda affect government policies around the world? I've heard a lot of government denials about the effects of CNN pictures on policy. I've heard the U.S. State Department say the government had a policy on a crisis well before Chrissanne Amanpour arrived on the scene. It can't be stated as a fact, but in my opinion, watching how governments react to news events and pictures, I'd have to say those things do affect policy.9

But being used as a common carrier for messages of government puts an enormous responsibility on the media, including CNN. CNN Executive Vice President Bob Furnad has been responsible for the network's landmark coverage of many live events, which has helped build CNN's reputation for being first in breaking news. While helping define "live coverage" as part of CNN's niche in the news business, Furnad said he sees a downside to some of the new capabilities to go live:

I don't think that live availability always creates a positive situation. In years when there were no satellite transmissions, when there was a crisis and government leaders made statements, it could be days before an affected government would respond. They would take the time to review all their alternatives, to craft and give their response. They had the time to work with it, to examine it from all sides and make sure that what they were doing was what they wanted to do and that it was sending the right message. Today when the president of any country can go on national or international television and make a statement about another country, about another world leader, because of this live availability, because of what we and other news media do, there is an unspoken pressure on the person on the receiving end to respond quickly. So what have you lost? You have lost the time for measured thought. You have lost the time for a full debate within the inner circles. You have lost the time for a crafted response. So what happens is a self-imposed quick response that might not be the right response. The availability of this live international media is positive in terms of the citizens of the world knowing what is happening to them and to others, but it isn't necessarily a positive [development].10

Furnad acknowledged that world political leaders are fast learning how to use the live media to their own advantage. Politicians everywhere seem to have figured out how to get the exposure they want through live television news coverage almost whenever they want it, sometimes with a surreal effect. Jacobs remembered one such occurrence in April 1996:

One weekend . . . there was heavy fighting in Liberia between forces loyal to Charles Taylor and those of Roosevelt Johnson. Monrovia was being torn apart by the violence and the looting that followed. Taylor had accused Johnson of murder and, in attempting to arrest Johnson, the fighting had broken out.

At the height of the battles, Taylor called CNN and we put him on the air for an interview, and he described the situation from his point of view. He had talked to us before on the phone, so we had a beep graphic already prepared for him.

About an hour later, Roosevelt Johnson called. Apparently, he was watching Taylor [on CNN] and called to dispute his assertions and gave his point of view of the fighting and the murder charge against him. He said the charge was bogus and politically motivated.

Taylor called back later, and we put him on the air again. The assignment editor on the International Desk told me when he talked to Taylor and his people, he could hear CNN International was on in the background.

We told the desk to try to get them both on the phone at the same time, and, if possible, we could hold a debate/negotiating session on our air. However, we were not able to get both of them on the line together.11

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10 Bob Furnad (executive vice president, CNN), interview with Paolo Ghilardi (December 1996).

11 Jacobs, interview (January 1997).
Furnad related an instance in which the government of a country in the Middle East choreographed an event before CNN's television cameras so its pronouncements would reach the greater audience and have the maximum effect. During the Persian Gulf War, CNN had planned to carry live a 2:00 P.M. press conference by the country's secretary of state.

From the control room here at CNN Center I could see the live satellite picture of the camera outside the door of this individual's office. The door was open and I could hear what was going on. As it turned out, President Bush was live on CNN at the same time and his comments were going beyond two o'clock. I turned up the speaker on the Middle East remote so I could listen in to know when the [official] was coming out, so I could brief the anchors. When I turned up the monitor, what did I hear but a television set in the office. They were listening to President Bush, whose statement went on until about 20 minutes after two. This leader sat and waited in his office knowing that he wouldn't get on the air so long as President Bush was speaking. Thirty seconds after the President finished, he came out, made his statement and took questions.12

Governments—especially the United States government—no longer can count on international media organizations such as CNN to cooperate with the press arrangements they have been accustomed to make during previous conflicts, according to Arnett. This was evident in CNN's response when President Bush and the Pentagon ordered all civilians, including the international press, out of Iraq prior to the bombing of Baghdad;

The view of Ted Turner and CNN was, "Wait a minute. We are an international news organization. The world is interested in where those bombs are going to land and what is the effect." That's why we stayed in Baghdad.13

Although CNN President and CEO Tom Johnson has acknowledged that the network's coverage of abuses of power and the pictures it transmits around the world probably do shape government policy, he said CNN does not set out to affect any specific policy.

Images of the people dying in that Sarajevo marketplace when the mortar crashed in near the CNN cameras was a very important image which contributed to world attention. The images of the hundreds of thousands of dying refugees in Rwanda contributed, I think, to the U.S. attention and the United Nations attention. The images of the dying children in Somalia led to the humanitarian relief effort and unfortunate attacks on U.N. and U.S. forces. But again, our mission [at CNN] is not to influence world opinion. Our mission is to report and inform, not to be trying to influence public opinion. We do hope that as people are better informed through those images that they can make judgements about what should be done in the world arena.14

Yet, even for a news company that wants to operate in the "world arena," employing thousands of journalists and opening new bureaus as fast as the American broadcast networks are closing bureaus, being comprehensive in international news coverage is nearly impossible for practical as well as editorial reasons. News producers at CNN still tend to give "center-stage" coverage to certain world news events. While CNN is giving saturation coverage to one or two major international stories, many other events as a result are poorly covered or not covered at all. Rob Golden, who became an international assignment editor back in 1984 when there were only six staffers on the International Desk, described how this happens:

It's generally true that most days of the year there is at least one lead story which we put special emphasis on. It could be Bosnia one day, Iraq the next, Rwanda the day after. Whichever story produces the sharpest developments, surprises, and drama will typically be the story we emphasize with interviews, correspondent reports, and live shots. However, the decision to focus on such stories is often limited by our access, technical abilities, and cost of covering a story. Today, for example, there's a lot of bloodshed in Somalia. It's a story we'd certainly like to explore. But we have no one in Somalia. No other journalist is reachable there. A

12 Furnad, interview with Ghilardi (December 1996).
13 Arnett, lecture (26 April 1996).
14 Ibid.
dangerous place where only the bravest, or most stupid, journalists venture for any length of time. No working phones. No feed facilities. No working airport. In short, a nightmare to cover. So instead of Somalia, we are today placing greater emphasis on our Rwanda/Tanzania coverage.  

Stephen Cassidy, in meeting with a group of International Professional Program (IPP) trainees representing a dozen mostly developing countries, admitted being troubled by the fact that some stories get attention and others do not, that some places get noticed and others do not. He and his colleagues on the International Desk struggle with these issues every day, according to Cassidy.

Remember the Zapatistas down in Mexico? Explain this to me. I couldn’t understand this and had big fights with the people I work with on this. All the world is watching Bosnia, right, and there’s great conflict there and great civil war going on, and then the Mexican government sends its air force to bomb Chiapas, and the world didn’t even pay any attention. It was like, uh? But if the French government had sent their air force down in the Côte d’Azur, it would have been gigantic headlines. If the United States had sent its air force to bomb Las Vegas, it would have been a gigantic story. But there’s the Mexican government sending [its military] down to Chiaapas, hundreds, thousands died, and nobody paid any attention to it... We covered it, but it didn’t get the big headlines. We’d bring the stories in and they’d play in the newscast, but they weren’t like A-1 at five minutes. It was two minutes. And I wanted to send more reporters, I wanted to send a flyaway [satellite uplink], and people go, “Naw, it’s not that important.”

Christiane Amanpour, one of CNN’s best-known international correspondents and often among the first reporters at the scene to cover crises and wars for CNN, confirmed that that’s the way it is with international news.

CNN, like any other international news organization, tries not to play favorites. In truth there are countries to which CNN returns time and time again and some countries to which we never go. African countries are examples. The most significant illustration of this was the Rwanda genocide in 1994. Everybody was late getting in there. For CNN, it was the year of O.J. and the attention of the company was focused elsewhere. Africa is a big continent.

Amanpour said the reasons are mostly cultural. French reporters are in Africa more than CNN is, in part because it relates to their cultural history. But CNN has the same problems covering Arab/Islamic cultures. “It is the nature of news as we know it. The spotlight moves to some regions and not others; the spotlight stays longer in some places.”

When CNN focuses on a specific breaking story, it becomes the world’s issue of the moment. According to Amanpour, whether in Serbia, Indonesia, China, or Saudi Arabia, the state may control the local media, but they cannot keep the citizens from receiving news and information from outside. During the December 1996 demonstrations in the streets of Belgrade, she noted, Serbian authorities had shut down coverage of the event by local media. But opposition leaders erected, in the downtown square, a huge television screen that carried the CNN signal. CNN’s reporter coverage in the capital city and its satellite feeds to private dishes in the country were not blocked. Meanwhile, citizens protesting the voting irregularities of the Milosevic government were on the phone to Atlanta and firing off e-mail messages to CNN urging them to keep the spotlight on Yugoslavia.

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13 Rob Golden (assignment editor, CNN International Desk), interview (December 1996).

16 Stephen Cassidy (senior international assignment editor, CNN), from comments made to CNN’s International Professional Program participants (September 1996).

17 One newspaper reporter recently noted that “Amanpour is such a familiar presence in the world’s trouble-spots that fellow journalists launch into a ditty whenever she touches down: ‘Where there’s a war, there’s Amanpour,’” Lydia Slater, “The Ingenue Who Couldn’t Wait To Go to War; Christiane Amanpour Is the World’s Highest-paid Foreign Correspondent,” Daily Telegraph (27 June 1996): 13.

18 Christiane Amanpour, interview (November 1996).

19 Ibid.
CNN's approach to covering news events—whether they occur in the U.S. or Serbia—more or less follows the same centralized model. The International Desk coordinates all of CNN's field reporters and producers, bringing into the system as many reports as possible. Those reports are then listed in CNN's computer system for the use of producers who select what reports to include in the networks' various newscasts. Depending on the audience for a network or show, producers will select stories geared toward their audience, or will write a script or tailor a piece of video or graphic information in ways that may be different from another CNN show or network.

One of CNN's 600 affiliates around the world may have a special interest in a story CNN is covering. When the hostage crisis broke in Lima, Peru, for example, the hundreds of people held hostage included diplomats from several countries, many Peruvians, Japanese businessmen, and several U.S. citizens. CNN Domestic and Headline News, both seen in the United States, were particularly interested in the status of the U.S. citizens held within the compound and comments from the U.S. government on the situation. CNN Spanish focused on the Latin American angle; highlighting the Latin American players involved. And TV Asahi, a key CNN affiliate, counted on CNN for help in covering this as a "Japan" story.

In such instances, a wide array of video and information elements are needed to satisfy all of the various "users" of the information, and the International Desk must coordinate the efforts of the crews on the ground to ensure the varying demands are satisfied. The CNN International Desk provides news material for the CNN networks in several forms:

- **video** (shot by CNN, its affiliates, or another source that supplies CNN with video, such as Video Reuters, WTN, APTV)
- **written information** (the International Desk calls sources worldwide and coordinates the efforts of CNN personnel overseas to gather facts on news stories worldwide and compiles them in an internal wire file for CNN writers and producers and affiliates to use when producing and writing news reports)
- **live or taped reports from correspondents and/or guests**
- **phone reports from correspondents and/or guests**
- **inhouse reports** (news reports written, voiced and edited in Atlanta or London for what CNN can't cover using a correspondent or stringer)

The International Desk must coordinate the activities of CNN's 20 non-U.S. bureaus, sending reporters and crews from one story to another and coordinating which stories they are going to cover and which live or phone (beeper) reports, if any, they are going to produce. When CNN reporters are unable, for whatever reason, to get to the scene of a news event, the International Desk attempts to contact government officials, non-government organizations, or even local businesses to get as much information as possible about the story, and if possible to arrange for them to appear on one of the CNN networks for a live phone interview.

### The Push to Internationalize

Golden recalled the period at CNN when the network finally was becoming profitable while still struggling to become a player in international news.

Beginning in 1985, when CNN made its first attempts at international distribution, it was clear that the focus of the news was very much on American stories, with an American point of view. With very few exceptions, the only international stories we covered were ones in which there were U.S. strategic interests or U.S. familiarity. Yes, we covered events in Beirut and elsewhere in the Middle East but hardly anything in the Indian subcontinent or Africa. We covered Nicaragua and the Falkland's war but hardly anything else in South America and very little in Asia. We did not come close to satisfying a truly global coverage of events and issues.\(^{21}\)

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\(^{20}\) At the request of the U.S. State Department, CNN agreed not to air the fact that there were Americans in the compound for fear they might be singled out.

\(^{21}\) Golden, interview (December 1996).
Within five years, CNN's international prospects had become far brighter. By the time Tom Johnson took over at CNN—just one day before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait—CNN was poised to become a global source for news about the war. Ted Turner had identified in Johnson a manager able to carry out the broadly stated directive to internationalize the company, a task that has become more like a mission:

I think when CNN is there, there is greater public knowledge and attention. Frankly, I worry more about when CNN is not there, to shine a bright light into the very dark corners of the world [and] to look at issues even in democratic societies such as the continued use of torture by the Israelis against those they interrogate, to disclose abuses of power in the United States in our own White House and among our leaders.22

In early 1996, Chris Cramer left the BBC as one of its top news executives to become a CNN International vice president, and a central figure in the company's conspicuous effort to internationalize. As a relative newcomer to CNN, Cramer still marvels at CNN managers' faith in television news as a potential force for good:

Being English, one is naturally skeptical about that kind of thinking, because it's very un-English. I actually believe that they are probably right. I think CNN has and can be a force for good, and I think that the type of television it produces has, over time, been exactly that.23

Those around Turner, and many who work for him, have a similar vision, Cramer said. "It's not bullshit. It really isn't. I mean you can be cynical about it, but if you scratch it, it's not bullshit. It exists."24 Still, according to Cramer, CNN's success owes more to its dogged pursuit of news in the western news tradition than to any "do-good" philosophy. Cramer described CNN as completely obsessive when it comes to being first. The word defeat does not exist in its vocabulary. I mean, failure doesn't exist in its vocabulary. There's a lot of Atlanta about that. There's a lot of boosterism about that, and the two are not unconnected.25

CNN appears to be equally determined to be ever more global in the coming years, perhaps an acknowledgment that the internationalization of the network is not yet complete. In the years since 1985, CNN has employed at least four distinct strategies to internationalize its newsgathering and news production operation:

- hiring a multi-national staff;
- building the company's international reputation for fairness, balance, accuracy, and sensitivity to local views;
- engaging in staff reorientation and training and developing a system of international protocol; and
- building linkages and cultivating international relationships, including taking full advantage of the resources and philosophy of World Report.

International Hiring

CNN has made a "concerted effort to hire the very best journalists we can find all over the world," according to Eason Jordan, head of CNN International and a CNN vice president. One of the characteristics that Jordan said makes CNN distinctive is the increasing diversity of its workforce:

You've got men and women, you've got black and white, you've got Arabs and Israelis, and you've got people from all over the world with Riz Khan being from Yemen and Sonia Ruseler being from Argentina and Ralitsa Vassileva being from Bulgaria, and Jonathan Mann being from Canada, literally from all over the planet making up our staff here in front of and behind the scenes.26

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22 Johnson, interview with Ghilardi (December 1996).

23 Cramer (vice president, CNN International), interview (September 1996).

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Eason Jordan (senior vice president, CNN), interview (August 1996).
The same holds true for the behind-the-scenes staff. Jordan noted that Cramer, the second-in-command at CNNI and “the guy who is really running CNN-International,” is British. The 31 assignment editors who work on CNN’s International Desk represent at least a dozen nationalities and speak some 20 languages.

David Clinch, an Atlanta-based assignment editor from Ireland, said the network’s transformation into an international company necessitated an infusion of non-U.S. staffers.

What is an international service? Who do we have at CNN who is going to do this for us? We didn’t really have anybody. I wasn’t here. The people who were running the International Desk were generally Americans with domestic network experience. Most were young with a concept of globalization but not necessarily the experience. So what happened again, as a kind of coincidence of what was needed, was the hiring of foreign people. So what do you end up with? You end up with an American service with a non-American influence which, by default, is an international service. I had never worked for a global news service. Neither had anybody else. What have you created? You have created an American service which was and still is American, with non-American influence which is as close to an international service as you can get.

Clinch admitted to having many of the biases that come with being an Irish national. The key to being international was not to get rid of people with such biases, but to make sure that as many points of view are represented on the International Desk as possible.

[International Assignment Editors] Yan Mei is Chinese and Kim Norgaard is Danish. Where is international? Is it somewhere out in the Atlantic Ocean? I don’t know where it is. It is an extension of everybody in the world and you can never have everybody in the world working for CNN.

CNN news comes from a variety of sources—including local reporters from Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Paolo Ghilardi, an Italian graduate student completing an internship on the International Desk, remembered how CNN covered a breaking story in Italy by using local journalists:

During the first days of my internship here in Atlanta, there was a crash of a Russian cargo plane in Turin, my home town. The way the International Desk covered it was to quickly locate someone in Turin to do a beeper for us. I helped locate the local journalist who covered the story. An American reporter would not likely have been there to cover the story or have been as familiar with the local situation. So even though it was CNN’s story, it relied on local sources and had that flavor.

Training and Protocol

Lou Curles is director of protocol for TBS/CNN. Under that job description she is coordinator of major events, which includes World Report contributors conferences. Her job also entails coordinating visits of VIPs who come to CNN, setting up their meetings with various company executives, and arranging special tours of the newsroom.

What I do first of all is find out if Tom Johnson is available. If he is not available, I go down the line. Ted is doing some [of the greeting] these days, but very rarely. Last year Ted did a lot of these. During the weeks and months prior to the Olympics we had many “pre-visits” from heads of state. This includes ambassadors and people of that stature. During the week before and the two weeks of the Olympics we had 924 VIPs come through CNN, most of whom Tom Johnson spoke to. We find an appropriate room in which to meet them. If they have secret service or state department people with them, [we will meet them on the street level and bring them up. That is protocol. Tom will give an overview of CNN and many times call in the senior executives such as Eason Jordan and Bob Furgard. Then we take them on what

27 David Clinch (assignment editor, CNN International Desk), interview (December 1996).

28 Ibid.

29 Paolo Ghilardi (intern, CNN International Desk), interview (December 1996).
we call the “executive tour,” led by Tom Johnson and my staff. Each visit we try to design according to the interests they have, whether it’s a look at CNN Interactive, CNN Sports Illustrated, CNN International, or in many cases just an overview of CNN.30

On the day she was interviewed for this book Curles was responding to a request from the king of Sweden, scheduled to visit Atlanta in March 1997. During the 1996 Summer Olympic Games, Curles coordinated visits to CNN for royalty such as Queen Sophia of Spain and the crown prince of Nepal, as well as high-level government officials from around the world.

The goal of Curles’s work is relationship building. Her role is to help create new relationships for the company and to cement established relationships. In many cases, this requires sensitizing CNN’s own staff to international issues and giving them the social tools with which to carry on successful international relationships.

This past year my office put together a book to help with this. The CNN International Protocol manual has now been distributed to our executives and anyone else throughout the company who wants to use it. It has information on every country with which we have relationships. To use one example, the country of Greece, our affiliates and clients are listed in there, the geographic and cultural information, the “dos and don’ts” of that country, the things we want to talk about with them. This manual was done strictly for our needs in our company and is continually updated.31

According to Curles, the transformation of the network into an internationally-minded company—one capable of performing its international newsgathering responsibilities in an efficient and effective manner—required a more considered and professional approach to protocol.

It has been very hard. As you know, many of the staff were here when the company was thought of as the Chicken Noodle Network, a kind of mom and pop operation.

Ambassadors would come and just anybody would take them around, whoever knew them or was available. In 1994, Tom Johnson and Julia Sprunt looked into the need. I went on board in this capacity in 1995 and for the first months did try to sit down and see what we needed to do to educate our company, and of course with the merger we have had hopes of having many seminars and meetings to tell our executives what to do. Many of them of course know what to do; many do not.32

Relationship-Building

A key component of the network’s corporate and journalistic relationship-building strategy is CNN’s World Report. When it comes to using local reporters to help gather the news and tell it on CNN, World Report is in the forefront. This willingness to turn over CNN air to reporters from contributing stations on a regular basis represents a kind of handshake, an agreement to listen to one another and share information, video, and other resources, so that a much more global and diverse newscast is the result.

The importance of the assignment editor for contributors cannot be underestimated, according to Stewart Krohn, general manager for TV Belize and a contributor to World Report. Krohn said it was because CNN “asked me nicely” that he decided to become a contributor. The person responsible for bringing Krohn into the CNN family was Debra Daugherty, an assignment editor since 1992:

Some projects take weeks, months, years to bear fruit. During a trip to South America, I met with the owners of Uruguay’s Saeta TV and Mexico’s Multivision News. On returning to Atlanta, I followed up with both stations making phone calls, writing letters and sending contributor kits. In each case, the ‘yes’ came nine months later.33

World Report assignment editors often are the first CNN personnel to make contact with emerging broadcast stations or organizations around the world, according to Andrew Henstock, an

30 Lou Curles (director of international protocol, TBS/CNN), interview (December 1996).
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Debra Daugherty (assignment editor, World Report), interview (February 1997).
assignment editor who first joined World Report as an intern after taking a journalism course in graduate school.\textsuperscript{34}

Within the past couple of years we have started working with newly formed private companies in both Africa and in the former Soviet Union. We used to work with TASS, so when the Soviet Union split up, we had to fill in all the blanks there. We had to go out and find [potential contributors] from Belarus, the Ukraine, and the Baltics, all the former republics. The trouble is finding English speakers in place. They are at a premium, especially in the former Soviet republics. When you make that first phone call, it is always fun cold calling.\textsuperscript{35}

One of the most effective approaches employed by World Report assignment editors when soliciting contributors for news reports is to emphasize that such reports can change viewers' perspectives on an entire region or people. Assignment Editor Octavia Nasr said she believes that her success is largely a measure of her ability to get contributors to see World Report as a valuable vehicle for communicating their views:

It took me a long time to get people [from the Middle East] to start contributing, because of the mistrust. There was ignorance of the culture. The Middle East seems to a lot of people such a far-away land. A lot of people think of it as nomadic or a desert, or people with camels, they ride camels to work and park their camels outside, something like this. And the Arabs feel that.

When I started [here] no one wanted stories from the Middle East because they were all, [by] some standards, "boring." But what these people did not think of them was that the Middle East was not taking them seriously. So they were sending their third-class reporting. They were sending it to World Report because they didn't pay much attention to

\textsuperscript{34} Andrew Henstock (assignment editor, World Report), interview (August 1996). Henstock, from Scotland, recalled that "one of my first exposures to World Report, the first time I had actually seen it, was in a graduate seminar. We were addressing the whole idea of news flow, NWIO, and all that. It caught my interest and I came here as an intern."

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.

World Report. They didn't think that World Report was such a great idea then.

But then they realized that if they send a good piece, this piece is going to take a good spot in the show, it's going to be introduced right, it's going to air so many times, the point of view is going to be there. If it's a bad piece, people are going to think, "Oh, Kuwait TV, they don't produce good pieces." If it's a strong piece, people are going to say, "Wow, look at what Kuwait TV can do." Then, instead of just waiting for them to do stories, you start calling them, saying, "I want you to do a story for me. I really want the Kuwaiti perspective in this."\textsuperscript{36}

CNN's World Report efforts in Africa—always an underrepresented, underreported region of the world—are likely to produce still more broadcasting partners for CNN. According to Henstock, this is primarily because of Africa's changing media environment.

In a lot of [African] countries, like Nigeria, their systems just got deregulated. We work with the mouthpiece of the state NTA but we've also got three more private Nigerian stations. They take a very different view of events than the state station. In fact, it spurs the state station to do a few more reports just because they've got those other [private contributors] there . . . that are less afraid of addressing issues than the state station.\textsuperscript{37}

In the early years of World Report, its founding editor, Stuart Loory, was chief ambassador for the program. More recently the assignment editors have assumed that role, to the benefit of the entire CNN network, according to Nasr:

It's very interesting and I am very happy to serve as CNN's representative. I am proud of that because CNN calls on me for lots of things, from attending conferences and signing contracts or renewing contracts. When we run into

\textsuperscript{36} Octavia Nasr (assignment editor, World Report), interview (September 1996). Nasr, a former contributor to World Report from Lebanon, also said that her experience as a contributor, "having been in their shoes, helps a lot. I don't ask them for things that are impossible." For Nasr, this means understanding what is "reasonable" to ask, "the thing that I would have done if I were in their shoes."

\textsuperscript{37} Henstock, interview (August 1996).
trouble with a certain contract in the Arab world, I go. There was one time where Eason didn’t even think that we were going to get anywhere but he said “Just go anyway and try.” Believe it or not, I pulled out my Arabic proverbs and ways, like, “If you do me this favor, we are going to save our relationships.” It worked. It was beautiful. . . . It makes you feel that next time I need these people, it’s going to be much easier to request things. It just builds great relationships, not only for World Report, but for CNN as well.38

Daugherty said that the assignment editors’ World Report contacts in particular regions of the world make them valuable to the network’s push to internationalize:

For several years, I have attended the General Assembly of the Caribbean Broadcasting Union. The two-day meeting allows me to recruit new stations and to spend time with Caribbean news managers reinforcing year-round contact by phone. The presence of CNN and CNN World Report is seen by the CBU board as a strong sign of support for their union. One-on-one contact with CNN World Report contributors has always netted year-round results with new contacts and contributors.39

World Report Newsgathering

Shortly after World Report’s launch in 1987, Scott Shuster noted in the Columbia Journalism Review the potential for contributors to the World Report program to displace conventional “foreign correspondents” who cover “foreign news” for the American news media.40 Now that an estimated 20,000 news reports have been added into CNN’s mix of news, it must be acknowledged that World Report does function as an important adjunct to international newsgathering, and the expectations of World Report news grows increasingly closer to expectations of CNN-reported news.

What makes World Report’s newsgathering apparatus interesting is the unique manner in which its assignment editors interact with potential reporters in the field. The producers who transform individually contributed reports into weekend and daily World Report shows rely on a staff of assignment editors to coax contributors into providing timely stories with good video, understandable narration, and most importantly, local perspectives on issues or events which will capture the interest and attention of CNN’s viewers worldwide. The World Report staff expanded from three to four assignment editors in early 1996, which has produced more diversity in the news programming because “we can take the time to recruit and solicit packages from places that have not been heard from,” according to Daugherty.41

Each of the four assignment editors communicates with contributing journalists in designated regions of the world. But unlike their counterparts on CNN’s international assignment desk, World Report assignment editors have no direct authority over a staff of reporters. Instead, they must rely on personal relationships and on understanding and commitment to the unique philosophy of the program in working with the journalists who contribute reports for the daily and weekend World Report shows. Given the constraints, assignment editors often resort to playing the role of cheerleader, sometimes with unexpected results, according to Claudia Chang, a recent addition to the assignment editing staff at World Report:

I was just talking to a new reporter from one of our [contributing stations] in Taiwan. He is interested in doing some stories about the growing social problems in Taiwan . . . . While he believes in Taiwan and he is proud of it, he does also want to point out that with all the growth of democracy, with all these flourishing economics, there are still some problems that they are experiencing—a larger underworld crime organization system, a lot more drug-trafficking is going on . . . . He would call them growing pains. He is very excited about doing that. If that’s the aspect he wants to look at, I support what he wants to do. I haven’t at all been concerned that contributors may not know what

38 Nasr, interview (September 1996).


41 Daugherty, interview (September 1996).
they are going to put themselves into. They definitely know.42

Each week, the four assignment editors phone journalists in their respective regions to determine whether reports will be filed, and more commonly in recent years, to offer story ideas and suggestions for coverage. Conversations between assignment editors and contributors are negotiations, rarely if ever turning into the type of confrontation that can occur between assignment editors and reporters. Nasr said the process is not unlike “selling old cars.”

The good ones are the ones that want to work with you and say, “What can I do to get the best spot on the show?” “What can I do to lead the show?” If I feel that a topic is going to be the lead story, I call up [the reporter] and I say, “This is a lead.” I guarantee that she will do it. When you tell her that it’s going to lead the show, she will put extra effort into it, a lot more effort into it. It’s funny the way it works. It’s like you are representing these people and you know exactly how they are thinking and you know exactly their limitations and you know that . . . if you tell them, “I really need this piece, I want this perspective on the show because I am getting the other two perspectives, you are the only one missing and this block is going to be the lead of the show,” you know she is going to do it.43

And when the process is complete, feedback from the World Report staff helps improve both the relationship with contributors and the quality of their work, according to Nasr.

You see good results from the feedback, from giving them ideas and telling them how things can be done. But not dictating, definitely not dictating. Or making them change their customs or their ways of doing things . . . . You’re not telling them what to do, but you’re telling them, “If you use a little less of all this, you know, graphic movement there, maybe the story is told in a better way. It’s being understood in a better way, because people need to focus.”44

Even as the number of World Report assignment editors grows and they become more aggressive as newsgatherers, there are constant reminders of where the lines are drawn, according to Henstock:

We get paid to do this. They don’t. We try not to lose sight of that when we are dealing with [contributors]. I try not to forget that I am asking someone to do something on a day off or during their spare time. I think that’s important. The minute I start demanding stuff, that is probably the minute they’ll decide it’s not a good idea to do it.45

Nasr added that working at World Report requires having a special understanding of what contributors have to offer, and how much trouble they go to to contribute:

Jordan TV doesn’t have a whole crew [devoted to World Report]. IBA doesn’t have a whole crew for me. No. These people, after they do their jobs, they are doing me favors. They are putting pieces together, giving us their beepers. You know, all these things. So, if you don’t understand this, you are in the wrong business.46

Nasr also said that, while the assignment editors and producers sometimes want contributors to send in a particular story, produced from a particular angle, or incorporating particular techniques, boundaries still exist and must be observed, even while helping contributors improve their work. Chang agreed.

You really have to be very open in how you think about what should be coming. That word “should” is just the most difficult one because you think about what we like, what can happen, the time under which it can happen, the resources under which it can happen. That affects what you are going to be getting and that’s not specifically defined.47

It is this kind of sensitivity that differentiates the role of the World Report assignment editor from a conventional television news assignment editor, said Henstock, as well as the omnipresent fact that the lack of a financial relationship between

42 Claudia Chang (assignment editor, World Report), interview (September 1996).
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Henstock, interview (August 1996).
46 Nasr, interview (September 1996).
47 Chang, interview (September 1996).
CNN: MAKING NEWS IN THE GLOBAL MARKET

World Report and CNN Converge

World Report assignment editors are expected to keep a constant flow of reports coming in to Atlanta—an expectation that has changed little since the days when Loory was executive producer. Yet the way in which these newsgatherers function has changed dramatically. When Donna Mastrangelo became executive producer of the program in 1991, she reorganized the World Report staff, borrowing the “assignment editor” model from her local television news background. The World Report assignment editor assumed a more activist role in soliciting material. According to Nasr,

Before Donna, newsgathering was not newsgathering really. It was just calling contributors up and saying “What do you have for me this week?” [We’d receive] a mishmash of reports that we’d have to put together for the show. Because [Donna] worked on a newsgathering desk, she had a very good understanding of newsgathering. And, she turned it around [so] that we go after stories. “You read the paper. This is the big story. This is what you want on the show. Get the contributors on.”

The assignment editors’ activist role also had an impact on World Report’s production standards, creating an atmosphere in which World Report producers Scott Herron and Susan Winé could embrace the premise of the program applying conventional television production standards.

The role of the show producer in television news is not generally understood by viewers, who naturally focus on reporters and anchors. Yet show producers shape the content of news programs, acting as gatekeepers of the news, determining the order of the stories as they attempt to assemble a “watchable” newscast. News stories are clustered together into segments, along with “teases” and “bumps” intended to keep viewers tuned in despite the constant interruption of advertisement breaks.

Unlike traditional TV news producers, World Report producers theoretically have no control over contributors’ scripts, nor can they pick up a phone and threaten to have a contributor fired because of a poorly constructed package. But in the same way that World Report’s assignment editors use personal persuasion to get contributors to send in packages, the program’s two show producers—one for the two-hour Sunday program and another for the daily show—use their own influence to get reporters to conform to particular production guidelines and stylistic conventions of television news. Such conventions include using natural sound to complement video, reporter “stand-ups” (but no more than one per package), and scripts that make sense and are delivered in understandable English.

World Report’s current approach to news was plainly evident on Sunday, November 4, 1995—the first “live” weekend show ever—when the program led not with a contributor to World Report but with a story from Walter Rogers, CNN bureau chief in Jerusalem. The report concluded with a Q&A exchange between World Report Anchor/Executive Producer Ralph Weng and Rogers. What was remarkable about the report was how similar it was to conventional CNN fare. Viewers would notice little difference between that report and what they usually viewed on CNN, perhaps causing World Report’s contributing journalists to wonder why the program, which for most of its ten years televised

48 Henstock, interview (September 1996).
49 Nasr, interview (September 1996).
50 Sometimes called a “stand-upper,” this is the part of the videotaped report in which the reporter is seen speaking directly to the viewer.
“unedited, uncensored reports from the perspective of the world’s broadcasters,” had begun to look less and less like unconventional World Report and more CNN-like.51

In the early years of World Report, any attempt to exert pressure—subtle or not—on what a contributor submitted was seen as risky—and perhaps a violation of the original agreement CNN made to contributors, which precluded the network from dictating what could be sent. From time to time, when a particularly one-sided report was contributed, Loory and his staff would inform another contributor that such a report had been received. The World Report staff would express willingness to receive a report expressing contrary views. In the case of South Africa, Loory even made exceptions to his own rule about who could be a contributor, allowing a production company—New York-based South Africa Now—to contribute reports that balanced the views presented by the SABC, South Africa’s main broadcast company. Assuring that multiple perspectives were aired was an important consideration.

While certain rules are absolute—no packages will air if they are longer than two and a half minutes, and longer packages will be edited down—other efforts by the show producers to shape the program are more subtle. Susan Winé, the Sunday show producer, encourages contributors to submit scripts for advance review, while Herron, the daily show producer, evaluates packages from established broadcasters by a different standard than the one he applies to contributions from less-experienced and less-equipped stations, the latter getting the benefit of the doubt because of their circumstances. Technically speaking, all reports are to be aired, provided they meet the agreed-upon minimum standards. However, packages that appeal to the producers will get better—and more frequent—play, being featured in a segment near the beginning of the show, or being aired on both the Sunday and the daily show. And packages that are technically unusable sometimes can be salvaged by a CNN editor—always with the contributor’s permission.

Over the years, it should be noted, the relationship between the Atlanta-based World Report staff and the contributors around the world has become more cooperative. The program has become as much an Atlanta-based production as it once was a contributor-based production. As assignment editors become more aggressive in seeking out reports, and as show producers become more active in shaping reports to fit the program goals, World Report must be seen as more of a partnership. This has meant that the program’s weekend and daily show producers work hard at improving each show’s pacing and variety, specifically to avoid the “intro-package-intro-package-intro-package” pattern that is thought to make World Report less appealing to viewers accustomed to American TV news.

One way Winé and Herron attempt to avoid such a predictable pattern is to intersperse brief voice-over (VO) reports, in which the anchor reads the script while the viewer sees video, between the two-minute-thirty-second packages. VO reports are generated by editing down packages that exceed the time limit and by pulling text and video from international news feeds and wire services (e.g., AP, UPI, and Reuters) to strengthen the stories and enhance viewer interest. This practice has become common. Current show producers operate more like their counterparts on the CNN domestic and CNN International news programs than like their predecessors at World Report, who mainly “stacked” the program with whatever packages were available.

Herron, a former CNNI writer and self-described internationalist, argued that his task as the daily show producer is to create a half-hour program that “makes sense” sandwiched as it is between two other CNN news programs. To Herron, this means creating a program that adds the contributors’ perspectives to breaking stories from their country or region. In the past, a supervising producer at CNNI likely would have preempted the daily World Report show to cover the breaking story using CNN’s own staff of reporters and analysts. To avoid being “blown out of the water,” according to Herron and executive producer Ralph

51 Wenge explained that, when it was determined that World Report’s contributors in Israel were unavailable, busy working on the breaking story for their own news organizations, CNN President Tom Johnson suggested that Rogers be used—an exception to the program’s policy of not using CNN reporters in such instances. Ralph Wenge (executive producer, World Report), interview (December 1996).
Wenge, the daily—and even the weekend World Report program—has adopted what might be referred to as a “beeper” mode, whereby contributors are interviewed by telephone much in the same way that CNN reporters often give their eyewitness account of an event by phone.

Herron and Wenge acknowledged that their attempts to be as current as possible can sometimes backfire, given that their programs are re-aired from tape several hours after the initial live telecast. When the United States naval forces fired cruise missiles at radar stations in southern Iraq, Herron’s show for the day included six live interviews (by phone) with contributors in the Middle East. He opened the show with a set-up piece that incorporated a script he had written, covered by video of cruise missiles being launched from the U.S. ships. The combination of script and video looked entirely conventional, as did the replaying of the video during the beepers from the six contributors. In effect, there was nothing about the set-up piece remotely intrinsic to World Report, and it was clear that Herron’s traditional news instincts honed during years at CNNI had overtaken him. Herron and Wenge saw this strategy as a way to keep the program from being preempted by a CNNI supervising producer. They were thus able to accomplish their goal of getting the perspective of World Report contributors from the Middle East onto CNN air.52

CNNI’s Chris Cramer has noted the changes in World Report, and generally likes what he sees.

I am actually very impressed with how it’s developed over the years. Because it has developed over the years, World Report is not a passive product. It doesn’t simply pick up reports and write leads and put them on the air. We weave them into a particular vehicle, which has the potential to remain always up to date.53

That doesn’t stop him from worrying that World Report occasionally is becoming too CNN-like. And CNN’s president and CEO, Tom Johnson, remains cautious about the use of World Report contributors for conventional newsgathering for the network, in part because of the appearance that CNN unfairly benefits from the work of its broadcasting partners;

I often repeat that we do not intend to use the World Report conference or the IPP program as a recruitment system, and I really mean that. These efforts should be done to help the local broadcasters to build their own stations and improve their own services to the nations they serve.54

But clearly, World Report does enhance CNN’s reputation as an internationally-minded newsgathering operation, even if only by giving the traditionalists at the network a better argument to use when defending the network against charges of being too American. At the conference on media coverage of war, Arnett used World Report to illustrate how the network offered broadcasters from Arab countries an equal opportunity to present their side of the Arab-Israeli conflict.55 Cassidy, of CNN’s International Desk, went even further in underscoring World Report’s potential newsgathering value in that it would allow CNN to cover the world more completely, more comprehensively;

We are limited. We have limited resources just like anybody else. Limited number of people, limited amount of money. That’s why a greater number of news organizations help you get a better picture of what’s going on in the world. I spend CNN money over here, [contributors] spend money over there. Maybe by working together everybody sort of gets it covered.56

Managers like Cassidy said they acknowledge the obvious benefits to the news company of having a network of contributors around the world, ready and willing to help CNN cover world events in their respective backyards. But these same managers also worry that World Report’s uniqueness will be jeopardized by

52 Herron and Wenge said assignment editors, when arranging the live telephone interviews, urge the contributors to focus on analysis and background issues, and not on the breaking event itself. Interviews (August, September 1996).

53 Cramer, interview (September 1996).

54 Johnson, interview (December 1996).

55 Arnett, lecture (26 April 1996).

56 Cassidy, from comments made to CNN’s International Professional Program participants (September 1996).
being associated too closely with the International Desk. On the other hand, such closeness arguably will make CNN’s on-air product all the more compelling as it prepares for the first real competition in the international arena.