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Brookings/Harvard Forum on Press Coverage and the War on Terrorism

An Interview with Mike Wallace: A Look Back and at What's Ahead for Broadcast News

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TRANSCRIPT

MR. STEPHEN HESS: We wish you all a good morning and welcome to the 18th conversation of the Brookings/Harvard Forum. I'm Steve Hess of Brookings, the co-host with Marvin Kalb the Executive Director of the Washington Center of Harvard's Shorenstein Center.

Opening this program reminds me, Mike, of President Eisenhower's favorite cartoon from the old Saturday Evening Post. They had a man at the podium and he was saying, "Our next speaker needs all the introduction he can get." [Laughter] I may have done some introducing in my time, but I think truthfully this is the first time I can say our next speaker needs no introduction.

Mike Wallace is simply the backbone of the most successful program in the history of television — "60 Minutes".

MR. MIKE WALLACE: Not so. Don Hewitt is the backbone.

MR. HESS: It's funny, when I was thinking of that sentence I said the most successful "information" program and then I crossed it out — thinking of Dallas or Seinfeld or Mash?no program has had the 34 year run, at least 25 of them right up there at the top. It is, I think, the most successful program in the history of television.

And when he interviews you, you know you've been interviewed. [Laughter] William F. Buckley once said, "I am sure that Wallace using whatever magic it is he disposes of would have succeeded in getting Jack the Ripper to talk to him on the subject of how London streets were crowded with unnecessary young ladies." [Laughter]

And when he investigates you, you know you've been investigated. The Coors Beer Company once ran an ad that proclaimed, "The four most dreaded words in the English language are 'Mike Wallace is here'."

Here's Mike Wallace. Marvin, why don't you start our questions.

MR. MARVIN KALB: Mike, as you know, this series has been devoted to exploring the role of journalism, the flow of information in the coverage of the war against terrorism.

MR. WALLACE: I saw what you did to Ted Koppel. I've watched the broadcast.

MR. KALB: No, actually Koppel was not in the series.

MR. WALLACE: Oh.

MR. KALB: He was in the Kalb Report series.

MR. HESS: — another series as well.

MR. KALB: He was in a series over at the National Press Club. I'll let you get away with that one.

However, what we are trying to explore is in a sense how well has journalism done in this war against terrorism, so let me start with a nice brown couch loving question. Your judgment, sir, on how well has journalism done.

MR. WALLACE: In the war on terror? I think journalism, particularly at the beginning, was superb. And when you say — Look, print has done a fine, fine job. However, it's the old story about community. Jennings, Brokaw, Rather — they really helped establish a community to meet an incredibly horror story and to inform and not to necessarily frighten, if that's the word, America. From the beginning, I think, television did an absolutely first rate job. It's a difficult story to keep up, but — Let me talk about television because it seems to me that newspapers, most of them do a damn good job.

But if you want coverage of television, coverage of terror in television it's like going to the corner kiosk. You can have a magazine that's a serious magazine, you can have a sensational magazine, a tabloid magazine, and there is all of that for the American public to feast on. But if they are sufficiently eclectic I find that in television between the three networks, CNN, Fox to a certain degree, Jim Lehrer — They can't do it all by themselves, obviously, but they do a damn good job.

MR. KALB: Given the seriousness of what happened on 9-11 what are the negatives that you would ascribe to the coverage? If any.

MR. WALLACE: Are we talking about television coverage?

MR. KALB: Television coverage, yes. Your business.

MR. WALLACE: At the beginning, none. We were finding our way. We were really trying to find our way.

On 60 Minutes, it happened in the beginning of the week and we were trying to come to come together to find out what we could do the following [inaudible], and everybody, everybody was trying to find something to do. Naturally you wanted to know who's to blame for this damn thing. $30 billion going into the intelligence community and you mean to say that the CIA, the FBI, none of the intelligence community had any clue? But it was very difficult to get people to talk sensibly. People from the CIA, from the FBI and so forth.

But by and large, come on, we were all so shocked that it could possibly happen to us Americans. We were fat, happy and arrogant. And if I may, we were stunned this could happen to the United States of America.

MR. KALB: Mike, 60 Minutes is one of the best programs, and Steve has already given you the highest praise, the best in television history, the most successful. Why is it —

MR. WALLACE: Wait. Best *and* most successful.

MR. KALB: Best and most successful. Why is it, and let me deal with that in a broad framework.

You were talking about all of us being stunned by 9-11 and there's no question we were. Why is it that 60 Minutes with its reputation, with its first class journalists, with you, with Don Hewitt, why weren't you doing programs about the coming terrorist threat that was about to hit the U.S.?

MR. WALLACE: I'll say again, we, like the rest of America, were fat, happy and arrogant.

Let's face it —

MR. KALB: You're including 60 Minutes.

MR. WALLACE: I'm including all of journalism.

I don't have at my fingertips — I did a story, for instance, a couple of stories, on smallpox, on weapons of mass destruction, of the possibility of the, the impossibility of combating this kind of thing. We had trouble, believe it or not, getting some of this stuff on the air prior to 9-11.

MR. KALB: Why was that?

MR. WALLACE: I remember Barry Lando and I, Barry was a producer with whom I worked for many many years, he's no longer at 60 Minutes. We wanted to tell the story of how an anthrax attack could conceivably kill 100,000 people in New York City if it were put aboard a boat traveling on the East River, let's say, and it became this wonderful duck. You can't see it, you can't taste it, you can't smell it, and without knowing that it even happened, suddenly it could envelope the island of Manhattan and conceivably kill 100,000 people.

MR. KALB: So why couldn't you get that on?

MR. WALLACE: Because that's too scary to put on.

MR. KALB: But who tells you it's too scary? Is that Hewitt's decision? Is that Andrew Hayward's decision? Is that —

MR. WALLACE: This was before Hayward. It finally got on, but we had to fight like the dickens, Barry and I.

MR. KALB: But if it was before Hayward, it was quite a long time ago.

What I'm getting at is in the year before, two years before —

MR. WALLACE: I'm trying to point out that we were very foresighted, Marvin. We did this kind of thing.

MR. KALB: But within that first year or so before 9-11 you weren't that foresighted.

MR. WALLACE: Oh, no. You're quite right.

MR. KALB: Your colleague, Dan Rather at CBS, did an interview for BBC a week or so ago and one of the things that he said, I want to read it to you because I think it's terrific and it has to do with the nature of patriotic reporting or the impact of patriotism on the reporting of the war against terrorism by American journalists.

Dan said, "The fear," Dan uses that word a lot, by the way, "The fear is that you will be neckless here. You will have a flaming tire of lack of patriotism put around your neck. Now it is that fear that keeps journalists from asking the toughest of tough questions."

Do you agree with that?

MR. WALLACE: No, I don't agree with that. I read that myself.

If you are going to be perceived as less than patriotic because you ask tough questions — Barry Zorthian who is sitting right down here in the front row used to handle us in Vietnam. He's the guy that we would ask the hard questions about body counts and things of that nature back in those days and he handled us with —

MR. KALB: With an iron fist. [Laughter]

MR. WALLACE: That's correct. Morley Safer, by the way, without reference to you [Zorthian], I didn't know that I was going to see you today, that he brought home a Rolls Royce from Vietnam or he brought home sufficient money to buy a Rolls Royce from Vietnam because of what happened at your poker table. [Laughter]

MR. KALB: Patriotic.

MR. WALLACE: Bernie Goldberg wrote a book about bias. The most patriotic group of individuals I have knowledge of are reporters. They'll put themselves in harm's way, they'll go out of their way to cover difficult stuff, and they will report it honestly and accurately, and they're editors — That's not to say it happens all the time. Of course there are fights between reporters and editors and the editors are under a different kind of pressure sometimes from the reporter. But if you start worrying about whether you're going to be called less than patriotic, you're not going to be a good reporter, and Dan is one of the best.

Now Dan has never shown me any fear of calling it as it is, and he follows the best of them all, Walter Cronkite. You were at CBS News. CBS News tradition has been to call it as it is through the years come what may. And I think the American people are sufficiently sophisticated to take any kind of reporting as long as it is honest.

MR. HESS: Mike, CBS tradition, you've given pretty high marks to network coverage. Thirty-four years ago when you started 60 Minutes, it wasn't a weekly show. It wasn't on Sunday nights. It was off and on in prime time. It had two correspondents rather than the present format.

MR. WALLACE: Harry Reasoner and I.

MR. HESS: Harry Reasoner and Mike Wallace. It took awhile, maybe even a half a dozen years to hit the pace and the format that has made it so successful.

Was that a fluke, or would CBS or any network give a news operation the opportunity today to create something like this?

MR. WALLACE: The circumstances when we began in 1968 were totally different economically. CBS was far and away the most profitable, far and away the most innovative, and it was run by Richard Salant, who is, as far as I'm concerned, the finest news president of a television operation that there has ever been. And we were told, in effect — Bill Leonard really did. Bill Leonard, who was second to Salant and our boss so far as 60 Minutes was concerned did say, all you guys have to do is make us proud. And we tried to find out what the character of the magazine that we were going to be doing, what the character of it was.

Harry Reasoner was the white hat. He was the heart of America. He came from the middle of America. He had a sense of humor and he was a wonderful writer. I was the contrast. I was the black hat and the fellow who was willing to ask nasty questions, etc., etc. And little by little that is the way the broadcast built. And because we were up against —

They set us on, to begin with, Tuesday night at 10:00 against the NBC Tuesday night movie, and ABC as I remember it, it was —

MR. HESS: Marcus Welby.

MR. WALLACE: Marcus Welby, exactly. Obviously they were throwing it away as far as audience was concerned, and we regularly finished 85th out of 100 or 90th out of 100. Nobody ever said a word to us. And they did move us around. We were on Thursday night, we were on Friday night, we were on Tuesday night, and finally a young man — not so young man — by the name of Arthur Katz who was in charge of audience research at CBS said look, if you were to put 60 Minutes on Sunday night at 6:00 you probably would be faring a lot better than you are now, and so they moved us to 6:00 o'clock. Sundays at 6:00 o'clock. But we were constantly up against football for the first three months of the season. So eventually they moved us to 7:00 o'clock. That was prime time Sunday night as far as the broadcasters were concerned. But we were fortunate in that there was an understanding among the networks that at 7:00 o'clock Sunday nights all you could do was either a news broadcast or a children's broadcast. ABC had Disney on Mickey Mouse. I forget what NBC did. And we began to find our audience. And we began to find our audience during the Yom Kippur War in 1973.

What happened was that suddenly there was a gasoline shortage in America and people no longer had the gas to drive to grandma's house on a Sunday afternoon. They had to stay home. And they began to fiddle around with the dials and see what was on. And by that time we had found out who we were and

you can really see that the ratings began to [inaudible], and within five years of that, five years of 1973, we were in the top ten, and suddenly we were number one of all broadcasts because we had had an opportunity to develop the investigative quality of some of the stuff that we wanted to do, some of the profiles, some of the back of the book stuff, and we also had going for us, of course, Vietnam, the civil rights revolution, understanding of, to a certain degree, of what goes on in Washington, and time to develop these stories. And unlike the hour-long things that people would get bored with from time to time, there were three pieces. The audience began to understand well, if you're not interested in this one you'll be interested in the next one that's coming around.

MR. HESS: Do you remember you went on the air September 24, 1968? I'm reading by the way from quite a remarkable book called "Close Encounters" by Mike Wallace and Gary Paul Gates, 25 years old. And let me just say something about this, Mike, if you'll allow me to say something nice about you. I read a lot of memoirs of correspondents in my business. I call these books "the presidents who have known me" books. And they have some very good stories and they're entertaining but they don't tell me very much about journalism.

Mike Wallace's book is quite remarkable in that way. You're going to have to get it out of the library. This one came from the Mary Washington College library, because he joins forces with another writer knowledgeable in journalism —

MR. WALLACE: A former CBS news writer.

MR. HESS: Right. And they alternate chapters. So Wallace tells you what it was like being there with Menachem Begin or the Shah of Iran and so forth; then you move back to the other writer who's telling you a lot of what was going on behind the scenes.

Okay, September 24, 1968, first program, your first interview with the Attorney General of the United States, Ramsey Clark. Do you remember the first question you asked him?

MR. WALLACE: I do remember that we talked a little bit before — I think, something to the effect that in this country, in the United States of America at this moment, cops are the current niggers.

MR. HESS: You said that. "I think Dick Gregory has said that today's cop is yesterday's nigger." A pretty provocative way to start.

Now if you were interviewing Mike Wallace on May 22, 2002, what would be the provocative question that we —

MR. WALLACE: Let's put the business about Dick Gregory and niggers and so forth into — Look, the fact of the matter is that when you ask a question like that, Dick certainly did say that. And if you'll think back to 1968, a black person would say hey, those are the pigs. Those are the pigs. The cops are the pigs. A lot of black Americans felt that that, saying the cops were, I hate to use the word again.

MR. KALB: But that was your technique and it always has been.

MR. WALLACE: That's correct.

MR. KALB: Instead of you asking a tough question you put it in the mouth of somebody else. [Laughter]

MR. WALLACE: You learned that, did you?

MR. KALB: I did.

For example, when you were interviewing the Ayatollah Khomeini you sat there on a rug with him.

MR. WALLACE: Forgive me, Imam.

MR. KALB: Forgive me, Imam, this is not my idea but people around the Middle East say your policy will lead to a war —

MR. WALLACE: No, no, no. I said, I remember very well sitting, the hostages had just been taken, and we were sitting in a room not much bigger than this. It was not as long but it was about twice as wide. We were sitting on the carpet, and we had had to submit questions to the people around the Ayatollah Khomeini ahead of time and I said we don't do that. They said fine, no questions, no interview. We said okay, but we'll have to announce that we had been asked for these questions ahead of time.

So we sat there and negotiated the questions that we were going to ask the Ayatollah. Finally toward the end I said to myself, what are they going to do, make me another hostage? And I said forgive me, Imam, but Anwar Sadat says, his words not mine. [Laughter] Anwar Sadat said you were a lunatic. [Laughter] The translator looked at me as though I was a lunatic if I thought that he was going to translate that for Khomeini. That's the only time, really, that Khomeini looked at me. Up to now he had been just straight ahead and saying in effect give us back the Shah and then we'll talk about —

MR. HESS: Okay, I'm' playing the Mike Wallace game. Then, Mike Wallace, tell me that provocative question that Mike Wallace would ask Mike Wallace.

MR. WALLACE: Sure. You used to sell cigarettes on television. You used to do a game show. I mean you were in the entertainment business. You were an actor.

Back in those days, the answer to the question which you haven't asked for.

Back in those days, come on, I'm an old man. Back in those days in the '40s and the '50s and the '60s, you could do anything. You could sell Philip Morris cigarettes and you could do a panel show or a game show of sorts and you could anchor the news on Channel 5 at 7:00 or 11:00 at night and no one thought a great deal of it.

MR. KALB: But Mike, it's only because you're saying this. It's not my idea — [Laughter] I mean other people might say, but Murrow didn't do that and Collingwood didn't do that and Sevareid didn't do that and Cronkite didn't do that, so why did you do it?

MR. WALLACE: I did it to make a living. I did it to make a living, and you're quite right. It kept me for a long time from getting a job with one of the networks. I had to sanitize myself, as far as Dick Salant was concerned — Mind you, I had worked at CBS but not for CBS News. I worked at CBS and had interview broadcasts and things of that nature and filled in for Bob Trout on the local evening news and did network

stuff as well. But to get a correspondent job at the mother church, which is what I was after, I had to sanitize myself. So I quit absolutely everything and announced this to Dick Salant, and announced that particularly to the Philip Morris people who thought I was crazy. I had nothing lined up. But I wanted to go to work in something that was really satisfying and my wife and I said well, we've got enough money to not have any income for a year or so, so let's do it.

MR. HESS: Now it's 1980 and Ronald Reagan is running for President and you got him on 60 Minutes and you say, "Can you explain this, Governor? Why should a competent, decent, mainly successful two-term Governor of California, a man acknowledged by the reporters who have covered him through the years to be bright and serious and devoted and dead honest, why should that man who still has a reputation among millions of Americans as neanderthal or even dangerous, a hip-shooter, light-weight, actorish, in short, probably not up to the job of the President of the United States." What do you think about a question like that?

MR. KALB: It's a hell of a question.

MR. WALLACE: It was a hell of a question. Do I repeat his answer there?

MR. HESS: Let me just tell you, I was trying to trap you and you wouldn't let me, because later on you said "I had taken a cheap shot at Reagan." So I was wondering whether we give you this opportunity to sort of — Do you have any retrospective regrets?

MR. WALLACE: About asking that question?

MR. HESS: No, no. About 34 years and thousands of interviews and questions.

MR. WALLACE: You know something? There is no such thing as an indiscreet question. There are indiscreet answers. But you do what you can, to a certain degree reporters role play. I don't have the mien, if you will, to be an anchor man, and I certainly don't look like this rabbinical character over here to my left [Kalb]. He speaks to substance and seriousness and so forth.

So I was trying to find a niche for myself as a reporter. And therefore, find it the way that I could find that niche. It's been useful and successful down the years is to ask not unfair questions but direct questions, sometimes abrasive questions. And it's astonishing how many answers you get.

MR. HESS: Do you remember what you asked Menachem Begin?

MR. WALLACE: Yes. We had quite a to-do.

MR. HESS: You asked him whether he, 30 years ago, was not the Yasir Arafat of today.

MR. WALLACE: That's correct.

MR. HESS: And what did he say?

MR. WALLACE: A terrorist. "Who, me?" He said, "Who are you talking — " He was stunned and angry at me. But the fact of the matter is that Menachem Begin and the people of the stern gang were terrorists

back then in their efforts to find themselves a free Israel. It infuriated him to be compared with Yasir Arafat, but if you look into the history of what Menachem Begin did, it is not, to some degree, dissimilar.

MR. KALB: Let me pick that up. That's kind of interesting that you raise the point.

Begin took action, in the definition of terrorism and the way a journalist would look at it, Begin took action against the people who were governing the land he wanted. Arafat took action by hijacking airplanes that had absolutely, filled with people who had nothing to do with the land that he wanted for a Palestine. So it seems to me that one could argue — I wouldn't, but one could argue — that that question is totally unfair and ahistorical.

MR. WALLACE: He made his point and let's move ahead. [Laughter]

MR. HESS: Then he said to you after you were off the air, remember, Menachem says to Wallace, "Now I suppose you'll use your scissors, Mr. Wallace, and clip here and clip there and do what you want."

MR. WALLACE: And I said to Menachem Begin, "Prime Minister, are you accusing me of being dishonest?"

MR. HESS: Fair enough. I'm sure you didn't clip here and there, but you can clip here and there.

MR. WALLACE: Of course you can.

MR. HESS: Tell us the tricks of the trade. For example, I noticed, remember, with the Shah of Iran, you were so close that the top of his head was off the camera. You were so close to General Westmoreland you could see the sweat pouring down his face.

Explain that degree of what I call tricks of the trade, but the degree to which you make your case through tools that the interviewee can't have at his or her command.

MR. WALLACE: We discovered on Channel 5 on that Night Beat program that we did in the '50s, that if you were to do this kind of closeups, and I used to smoke and you'd see the smoke swirling up the closeup, and you'd ask the tough question, and you'd see the question hit. You'd see it in the eyes of the interviewee. And there was great drama in it. But the fact of the matter is that everybody wanted to come on and wrestle with Night Beat, they did. And I say everybody.

It was one of those strange things that happen in New York from time to time when suddenly something new is discovered. I'd been in New York since '51, this was '56, and nobody had a clue as to who I was. And Ted Yates, the late Ted Yates who was a reporter here, a wonderful reporter, started David Brinkley's Journal. But he and I were partners and he came up with the notion of, first of all, do a lot of research. In those days interview broadcasts were tabloids. You'd sit with the interviewee and there'd be a table with a bunch of flowers, and a microphone would be in the bunch of flowers and then you'd say, "And then you wrote," "and then you sang", and so forth. It was that kind of thing. And for the first time, truly, Night Beat said hmm, let's do some research. Let's find out what this guy or that person has said in the past or what has been said about him in the past.

There was a guy up in northern New York state who used to watch and he wrote us and he said you know, as my hobby I have been collecting clips about all kinds of people and I would like to help you. And sure enough, we would get — television stations didn't have a morgue back then — and we got all kinds of information from him, and out of that came some damn good interesting interviews on television, locally. And out of that, happily, I lost my anonymity.

MR. KALB: Mike, all of this history is fascinating but let's deal with some of the contemporary problems of journalism. How do you read and what is the story behind the Koppel/Letterman/ABC Disney eruption of a month or two ago?

MR. WALLACE: Money.

MR. KALB: How do you define that?

MR. WALLACE: All of us are facing it right now. NBC less, because NBC has CNBC and MSNBC and so they can continue to hire and continue to pay and continue to sell commercials. They have a very successful entertainment, various series going on. Ours are a lot better from that point of view than they used to be. And Disney is going through the dickens right now.

MR. KALB: You mean having a lot of trouble —

MR. WALLACE: Tremendous trouble because their ratings are way, way off.

So Michael Eisner worries about that for himself and for the fact of the obvious stockholders. So we hear that Peter Jennings, for instance, I don't know that it's going to happen, but the poor guy is going to have to go from $10 million to $7.5 million. They'll hold a tag day [inaudible]. And the same thing is true throughout network news.

Can you imagine in the days that you and I used to work at CBS News that you would have to justify ahead of time a budget to send a correspondent and a camera crew to some place where they were not safe? I mean it never occurred to anybody. It was a matter of pride, it was a matter of, we believed that we were the leading news network. Cronkite was the most trusted man in America and with good reason, and so that kind of thing never came up.

MR. KALB: But ABC was making money with Koppel and Nightline. Was it simply a matter of making more money?

MR. WALLACE: Much more money, they believed. Actually, Koppel was beating Letterman to some degree sometimes in the ratings. But the fact is that a commercial X played on Letterman would get, I don't know, two or three times as much money as that same commercial on Koppel. So it's not just a question of bodies, it's a question of the 25-54 audience and so forth.

MR. KALB: There was a very interesting quote that Jim Lehrer made at a commencement address a couple of days ago on this whole issue of Nightline and its relevance. One of the things that infuriated Koppel was a statement by an ABC executive unnamed that Nightline had become irrelevant. And here's Jim Lehrer saying "Maybe we are moving to a time when the major commercial broadcast networks,"

CBS which pays you, and NBC as well as ABC, "get out of the news business. They go about the business of entertaining and leave informing to others." Presumably meaning CNN.

MR. WALLACE: Well, it's not going to happen and you know that it's not going to happen.

MR. KALB: What is he saying? That you guys are just entertainers?

MR. WALLACE: Jim's not saying that at all and no one suggests it.

MR. HESS: "They go about the business of entertaining and leave informing to others," other than CBS, NBC, and ABC. What does that mean?

MR. WALLACE: Have you asked Jim about what he means?

MR. KALB: That's such a good answer, but I don't have Jim here, I have you here.

MR. WALLACE: I don't know what Jim means. Look, other people have suggested, as a matter of fact I among them, I really believed for awhile that NBC, but this was years ago, was going to get out of the news business. I think you probably wondered about that yourself. I wouldn't be surprised if you were to take a poll, a secret poll of the executives at ABC, I wouldn't be surprised if they would say look, let the other networks do the news. ABC News, which is a good outfit, and they're perfectly fine reporters, they're not making enough money and we have to make money. Our audiences for entertainment are way, way down and as a result of that if we could perhaps make some kind of arrangement with a local station they would be happy to have that time back, that half hour each night.

Look, I've not been in these meetings and I would like to say that I know what I'm talking about.

There's sufficient conversation of that nature that are going on currently to lead me to believe the shape of the news and the shape of coverage of news by television in the next ten years is going to be considerably different than what it is today.

MR. KALB: Does the age of the anchor —

MR. WALLACE: The age of the anchor? The clout of the anchor? You mean after Rather and Brokaw and Jennings? They're probably, each of them, they're adolescents as far as I'm concerned, but Tom is thinking about going. Rather at 70 is now leaving 48 Hours. Little by little. And then, with whom do you replace them? John Roberts of CBS, Brian Williams at NBC, Charlie Gibson is 59 at ABC. I don't know.

MR. KALB: What kind of person —

MR. HESS: Let me just follow up on this.

MR. KALB: Please.

MR. WALLACE: Yours are pleasanter than his.

MR. HESS: No, this is tough. [Laughter] I wasn't the moderator of Meet the Press.

MR. KALB: Journalists are the most thin-skinned people — [Laughter] — anywhere in the world.

MR. HESS: We know from this journalist or both journalists that there's something going on. There's not enough money to keep them all happy and there are going to be changes.

Here's a proposal, this is March 15, 2001, Santa Barbara, California, "Veteran TV newsman Don Hewitt surprised the assembled moguls and stars by calling on CBS, NBC, and ABC to end their rivalry on the evening news and combine forces into one giant news pool to be broadcast on all three networks simultaneously. It's time, he says, for the networks to pool their broadcasts into one blockbuster. He says, do we need to have correspondents from every network up and down the coast waiting for a hurricane? One person could do the job for all three. Instead of an AP, Associated Press, there could be an AT, Associated Television."

He goes on to say —

MR. WALLACE: That's what he said. He said they should alternate stints as anchors from week to week, each have one week on, two weeks off. That doesn't sound bad. Where they would do reporting otherwise.

What's wrong with that?

MR. WALLACE: That speaks to Hewitt, the kind of mind that he has. I'm quite serious. He is constantly looking for something new, interesting, revolutionary, whatever. I mean when you take a look at what Don has suggested down the years, and has accomplished down the years, he really is a pioneer. I don't think it's going to happen. I just don't believe that that kind of thing is going to happen.

First of all, understand this. The most popular broadcast in America today is the evening news. You add up ABC, NBC and CBS and you will have something like a 19 rating and a 42 to 45 share. It used to be doubled, but with all of what has gone on over the past 10, 15 years with cable and pay per view and the internet and all of that, they by and large do the same thing with different people doing it. But you put together cumulatively the evening news and the evening news is, that's pretty good.

MR. HESS: What you lose in this proposal, of course, is the competition between the three. But Hewitt says that competition isn't worth much. He says, in fact it was the pressure to be first that caused all the major networks to botch their election night coverage.

MR. WALLACE: That's true. And that's a staged business anyway, election night and convention coverage, which used to determine which one of the networks is going to be number one in the news rate for the next four years, was how we did during the convention.

Remember when Chet Huntley and David Brinkley all of a sudden overtook Walter Cronkite and Cronkite was taken out of the anchor chair for the convention —

MR. KALB: '64.

MR. WALLACE: Yeah. And who was it, Bob Trout and Roger Mudd replaced him and Cronkite, like the good veteran he was, he was down on the convention floor the next day, with the rest of us peasants, trolling for, covering the news down there.

I don't know, and anybody who says that he does know what is going to happen to network news over the period of the next decade is guessing.

MR. HESS: Go back to what's going to happen with 60 Minutes. One of the most notable things that I read in your book was —

MR. WALLACE: That book is 20 years old.

MR. HESS: Well your colleague, Mr. Gates, didn't present it quite as one big happy family the way I always thought of it.

For example, let me see. "One of the fundamental truths of TV journalism", he writes, "is immutable in its way as the first principle of physics, is that once a correspondent becomes a major star his ego inflates to a size surpassed only by his extravagant salary."

What's going on behind the scenes with all of you extravagant stars?

MR. WALLACE: The same thing that goes on behind the scenes of every newspaper in America and every — Sure, there are turf wars. I may want a story that Bradley wants, or Safer's a much better writer than I am — Come on. And you know perfectly well that Leslie Stahl and her legs are one of the most attractive features of 60 Minutes.

Look, we're all good reporters and sure, we compete for stories. That's good competition. And from time to time we shout at each other.

MR. HESS: In the case of the Watergate era with Gordon Liddy and Bob Haldeman, you also gave an awful lot of money to those guys to —

MR. WALLACE: I gave none.

MR. HESS: No, CBS. Do we still have checkbook journalism going around?

MR. WALLACE: No.

MR. KALB: Have you ever paid for an interview?

MR. WALLACE: Have I ever paid for an interview? No.

MR. KALB: Has 60 Minutes paid for an interview?

MR. WALLACE: 60 Minutes of all things paid G. Gordon Liddy $15,000, under Dick Salant, believe it or not.

MR. KALB: Did Salant approve of an unauthorized action?

MR. WALLACE: Sure.

MR. KALB: Why? Why was it so important?

MR. WALLACE: At the time I guess it was regarded as important. No one had talked really to Gordon Liddy. They paid, CBS News paid Bob Haldeman —

Look, when the *New York Times* paid people for their memoirs, correct? Correct? Svetlana Alliluyeva as I remember. Life Magazine paid the astronauts. This has been hallowed in practice down the years, that you will find if you really want something and want to publish something you'll find some way, if it's on the market, you'll find some way to pay. As I say, the astronauts had a deal with Time Life. Svetlana Alliluyeva —

Just because you sit down and you write your memoirs, that's your version of history. It would be wonderful to get Stalin's daughter to sit down and do it with you for nothing, but apparently the *Times*, in its — It found nothing wrong with paying for that.

MR. KALB: CBS had a rule, you were not to pay for interviews. So you end up paying for interviews.

MR. WALLACE: No, we were paying for memoirs. [Laughter] Right?

MR. KALB: No. Do you say that's right?

MR. WALLACE: In the best of all — No, I don't think it's right. I don't think it's right.

MR. KALB: But on occasion you end up doing this because you're in a competitive business —

MR. WALLACE: When you say you, are you pointing your finger at me or —

MR. KALB: You generically.

MR. WALLACE: Me generically? From time to time, yeah.

What happens is, candidly, there's a great deal of talk about "gets", in quotes. People that, people of the networks would like, they would like to put on the air for someone specific. They will pick up the tab for, in one way or another, by any other name, they will spend money to do it. It's well known in the business.

We I really am quite serious about this. I don't know, Marvin, and I have nothing to do with that, but I don't know that we have, I don't think we do it.

MR. KALB: But you have done it.

MR. WALLACE: We have done it, yes, for Gordon Liddy. We paid Bob Haldeman $100,000 for his memoirs, and believe me, I did that interview and we didn't get our money's worth.

MR. HESS: You're an enthusiast for one proposal to clean up the sins of broadcasting called the News Council. You did a story out in Minneapolis about charges that were brought against a local station by —

MR. WALLACE: A Minnesota News Council.

MR. HESS: And you became something of an enthusiast after that. The rules of the News Council were — it was a body of citizens — You could bring your case as long as you were the subject of the story, and

if you agreed to waive the right to sue, and if you came by yourself without your lawyers and that sort of thing.

MR. WALLACE: To complain about how you had been treated by a newspaper or a television news operation or whatever.

MR. HESS: Yeah. Don Hewitt doesn't like this at all, but you do. And in fact there was a case when there was a national council where you had a story about the treatment of Syrian Jews, the American Jewish Congress complained about it, they took it to the national council and you say in this remarkable memoir how much work you did in preparation to make your case and you actually won your case.

Now what's wrong with that simple sort of solution? Why is *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* particularly against this and therefore?

MR. WALLACE: I don't know about *The Washington Post*. The *New York Times* has said we don't need anybody looking over our shoulder. And when *The New York Times*, and Cronkite didn't like it either. We don't need somebody looking over our shoulder telling us what we did right or wrong. We regulate ourselves. We are very careful and very thorough. If you want to write about us not doing it, — But we don't need some quasi — Not that there was any punishment that was going to be meted out. All the punishment was going to be that it would be made the news of something of a news story that had been badly handled, would be made available to people in the public.

MR. KALB: Give us an example of one.

MR. WALLACE: *New York Times*. I will happily give you an example which is the lynching of Win Ho Lee. Win Ho Lee, you all know the story, Win Ho Lee was in effect tabbed as a spy for the People's Republic of China or whatever, and the New York Times went off and biased the nation. Good reporters. They got a leak, obviously, from Secretary Richardson that in effect Win Ho Lee was passing nuclear secrets to the Chinese. It was wrong. They never sufficiently apologized. They acknowledged in effect, in effect, not straight out, that they had been wrong. The news council, actually the public and the news business generally speaking, understood that *The New York Times* had made a big mistake in the way that it handled the Win Ho Lee story.

What's wrong with that? There are some local places, there's one in Florida, there's one in Minnesota that has been very successful. What happens is as you say, the news council is composed of various people in the community, responsible people in the community where people who want to complain have the opportunity to complain. The station or the paper has the opportunity to answer. And they've done very well out there over a period of some years.

MR. KALB: Mike, as you look back over your own long and very distinguished career, are there moments when you think a national news council would have done well by examining stories that you did that on reflection you think were unfair or flat out wrong?

MR. WALLACE: Who said that?

MR. KALB: Some people say this. [Laughter]

MR. WALLACE: Some people say what?

MR. KALB: Some people say that you might have done this in the past.

MR. WALLACE: Really? Well maybe we might have. Do you have any one in mind?

MR. KALB: No, I'm asking you.

MR. WALLACE: But do you have a story in mind on that yellow pad? I can imagine that having done a certain amount of research about all of this, Marvin, you will — As a matter of fact, yeah. As a matter of fact up at Harvard every year for about three years you took me, George Crile, CBS News and so forth apart on our coverage of the Westmoreland business. CBS Reports did an hour and a half on General William Westmoreland called "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception" and the charge, in effect, in the piece was that Westmoreland had put an artificial ceiling on the number of enemy out there in the field fighting us. An artificial ceiling of 300,000. This was in 1967. And he had instructed his people to say hey, in effect, I don't care how you do you it but there are no more than 300,000 —

Why would a general say that? He would want to say there were more enemy out there and we need more resources and we need more troops. The reason was that by 1967 the United States of America, we Americans were bloody well tired of the Vietnam War. Angry about it, about the lives lost, about the money spent, and about the lack of progress. There were little talks from Westmoreland about the light at the end of the tunnel.

All of a sudden in 1967 when he came up with that 300,000 figure, a fellow by the name of Sam Adams who worked at the CIA, an old Indo-Chinese hand, went out there and found captured documents and went through them and it made it quite apparent that there were 500,000 or 600,000 enemy out there. And we had on the air all manner of people who would understand and who were savvy about what had taken place out there.

Well, that's that Buckley quote, by the way, Bill Buckley, he was astonished that Westy had sat down with me and Westy was not a friend of mine but I had spent time in Vietnam with him and he had flown me here and there over the years, over the months that I had been there. He sued us for $120 million.

Have you ever been sued for libel?

MR. KALB: No.

MR. WALLACE: Anybody here in the audience, journalists, ever been sued? You have been. Did you lose? You didn't.

We have been sued at 60 Minutes on, or threatened with suit maybe 100 times. We have never lost one.

We sat in a cold and drafty federal courtroom for five months and we were called every name imaginable. When you begin to talk about reporters, what have you got? You've got your credibility. We were called cheat, liar, fraud, etc., etc., etc. The prosecution put their case on first, the Plaintiff's case first, and we pick up the paper the next day and — It was, it succeeded in putting me into a severe clinical depression. And it put Westy in the hospital as well.

The fact of the matter is that after five months and two days before I was scheduled to go on the stand, all of a sudden our lawyer was David Boies, and I was rehearsing my answers for Boies and his young partner for the examination, and he came in and said it's conceivable, it is conceivable — What are you willing to say to Westy if he withdraws the suit? I said I'm not willing to say anything, nothing. This was, as I say, just before I was about to go on the stand.

He came in a couple of hours later and said I think we're making progress. He said, finally, and it came down to this, are you willing to say that he's a patriot? Do we have to withdraw a word of the piece? No. Do we have to pick up a dime of Westmoreland's tab which was by that time I think it had run to $3 million? No. Sure. He's a patriot. He withdrew the suit.

Despite that, my friend, Mr. Kalb over here, went after us for two or three years at the Joan Shorenstein Center at Harvard —

MR. KALB: What's interesting to me, Mike, is that the issue is still capable of arousing emotion in you. My question was not specifically about the Westmoreland broadcast. I was giving you a 60 year plateau on which to operate. I was simply asking is there a case that could have been brought before a national news council of a broadcast or an interview that you have done over that vast period of time that you now on reflection, looking back, say it was wrong.

MR. WALLACE: I wanted to bring that before the national news council, but Westy would have none of it.

MR. KALB: Put Westmoreland aside. But it doesn't matter — But we do have to get to questions —

MR. HESS: We're having such a good time. Shall we share him with the audience?

MR. WALLACE: I think that's a good idea.

MR. HESS: Okay, let's share him with the audience.

QUESTION: My name is Sam MacDonald, Inside Magazine at *The Washington Times*.

Mr. Wallace, you created something of a flap in the late 1980s when during a — at the Crown Table you had said that you perhaps, if you were covering a foreign army and you had direct knowledge that U.S. forces were going to be under attack, that you would not perhaps warn them that it was coming.

I wonder, first, do you still hold that view? Second, how does that logic apply today when the targets of foreign militaries or terrorists are civilians? Should a CBS news correspondent covering Hamas who knows about a coming suicide bombing, direct knowledge of time and place, inject himself into the situation and let people know that it's coming?

MR. WALLACE: The scenario for the one that he's talking about was one of the friendly programs. Westy was there, Westy was on the program, and Peter Jennings and I, a lot of people, but you are a reporter who has been granted entry to North Vietnam, and you go out on patrol with a North Vietnamese patrol, and suddenly you and the North Vietnamese realize that, particularly you, right about oh, not more than 50 or 100 yards away, there are some American and South Vietnamese soldiers waiting, and this is an

ambush that you're walking into. Do you say "Hey, hey, Americans, look out, we're over here"? Or do you go along and cover the story as a reporter?

Jennings answered and said oh, no, no, you let them know. And turned to me, what would you do? I said I disagree for the following reasons. I'm a reporter. I am covering a story. It's apparent that I'm not going to survive if I shout, they'll kill me. And I don't know that I'm necessarily going to save any lives. When you're sitting there at that moment with Westmoreland sitting to your right, Johnny Apple was there, there were a variety of reporters who had covered Vietnam and you don't' know whether to punt or go blind. It's a tough one.

I think, in retrospect, and particularly with a suicide. If I knew a suicide bomb was about to go off, would I just stand there as a reporter? Not in a million years.

MR. KALB: You would try to stop it.

MR. WALLACE: I would try to stop it.

MR. KALB: So there are times when being a journalist doesn't mean abstention from any kind of action.

MR. WALLACE: That is correct.

MR. HESS: We're learning that being a journalist also means you don't have to say you're sorry. Next question.

QUESTION: My name is Ghota Maticari. I'm a consultant here. I was with the Times of India for many years.

I want to go back to Marvin's question on patriotism and [inaudible] a quote from Dan Rather which was on BBC. This is a problem as a person who often has to deal with public opinion of other countries. I'm often asked this question, that especially after 9-11 that the Americans had this knee-jerk, patriotic, not asking the right questions. To which my answer often is that look, it was an America that was hit, not Britain. And what happened for instance during the Falklands War and how did the British press cover it?

But putting that aside, do you think there has been a change in the situation from the days of Vietnam and Watergate to now when this burden of not being against the grain is a little stronger these days, especially after 9-11 and with much stronger, much more frequent public opinion polling going on and much more frequent worry expressed in the news management [inaudible], do you think there's an enormous pressure, I think that's what Dan Rather was really referring to in a sense, it's not that Dan Rather or Mike Wallace would flinch from asking the right questions, it's just that there's a gentle pressure on to be patriotic. This is reflected in the political scene as well.

MR. WALLACE: Well it certainly is a totally different situation, one that we've never come up against before.

I still say, for instance, would it be unpatriotic if I were to do a story about the Palestinians, let's say, and say about the Palestinians, hey, you know something? These people who are blowing themselves up — I guess this is implicit in a lot of the coverage, but these people who are blowing themselves up have spent

the last 30 years or the last 20 years for some of the young people who do it, living in refugee camps, living in abominable conditions. Even some of the, and there's fear of this in Israel now, some of the Palestinians who live inside Israel itself are treated as second or third class citizens. Whether it's schools, tours, roads, etc. This is well known.

If you were sitting there and you saw a settlement going up and up and up, start with 20,000 and now up to 300,000 and being expanded. When you go to, I was in Ramallah to talk to Arafat two months ago. When you realize that they cannot go from one Arab place to another in the West Bank, —

MR. KALB: They can go.

MR. WALLACE: They can go? They can go, Marvin, but they cannot go the way that even you and I might be able to go. They are stopped, they are searched, they are regarded as guilty until proved innocent. It is impossible, it is impossible — I know that this is absolutely true. The Israelis have seen to it that there is no real body of Palestine, so to speak, there is not sufficient ability to go from one, from Jenin to Bethlehem to Ramallah to whatever.

All I'm suggesting is that a suicide bomber is giving up his or her life to a certain degree because of brain wash, to a certain degree because — And if you — We tried to tell those stories, we tried to tell that story. I went to Kuwait to try to tell the story of the Kuwaitis. You're walking a line in which you and your editors have to decide what you're going to put on the air or put in print and that's what Rather was talking to.

I do not believe, I don't think that we fully understand here in America, and particularly in the Palestinian/Israeli business, we don't understand the situation over there sufficiently.

Is it because — Do the British and the French and Europe generally, Italy and so forth, are they anti-American?

QUESTION: If I can follow the question and your answer.

MR. KALB: First your name and —

QUESTION: My name is [Nitri Anoyev].

MR. WALLACE: He wants to know your ethnicity and —

MR. KALB: No, I do not, Mike.

QUESTION: Okay, I can tell everything.

So my question is by your logic, you explain suicide bomber in Palestine by their life, desperate life and so on. But suicide crime done September 11th is not from Palestine.

MR. WALLACE: I agree with you.

QUESTION: So the reason must be different. It seems to me as though your answer on this question is very important question right now. We need to find the rule.

MR. KALB: Sir, just ask the question.

QUESTION: My question is, to you, do you think that it is really very important rule, not clear what is happened with this wave of suicide human beings? Because it was not ever before.

MR. WALLACE: And it was suggested just yesterday, I guess it was, was it by Rumsfeld or Mueller, the possibility of suicide bombing, we may have to face it here in the United States. It's something that was never thought about, never had to deal with before. This is not to suggest, I'm not trying to suggest that, and you're quite right, when I talk Palestinian and Israeli it had really nothing whatsoever to do with what happened on September 11th. Osama bin Laden found it useful to invoke, prior to that he was not invoking the Palestinian/Israeli business. Since that time —

MR. HESS: You're surely not saying that if a suicide bomber came into this room and blew up the back half of the room, that somehow we could justify the fact that they lived someplace in a refugee camp.

MR. WALLACE: No, no, no.

QUESTION: Frank Sievert now with the International Committee of the Red Cross.

I just wanted to ask how you felt about reporters being called to testify before the international criminal tribunals such as the question that's been raised for Jonathan Randal of *The Washington Post*? And it relates also to I think the traditional practice of television and 60 Minutes not to provide out-takes for any judicial proceedings. But specifically, now these international criminal tribunals, this was even before the so-called international criminal court, are in practice asking journalists to come and provide testimony. Testimony which would both incriminate and work for the defense. In Randal's case I think it's done both sides as a matter of fact to some extent.

MR. WALLACE: I'm insufficiently familiar with the Jonathan Randal case to answer that question intelligently. I'm sorry.

QUESTION: My name is Clint Fetting.

I just have a quick question in whether or not you regard Walter Cronkite as the lead bar of journalism standards? And if you do or not, how do you feel about his latest comments about the war on terrorism and the war at home, its civil liberties and what not.

MR. KALB: What are you saying?

MR. WALLACE: What are his latest comments?

QUESTION: Just the effectiveness of journalism, mainstream journalism covering the issue to inform the American public —

MR. KALB: The capacity of mainstream journalism to cover a story as complicated as the terrorist story? Is that what you're getting at?

QUESTION: Yes.

MR. WALLACE: Yes, I regard Walter Cronkite as in the tradition of Ed Murrow and Fred Friendly and CBS News generally down the years. He achieved, he was regarded throughout our journalism — to people who knew him and knew his work in journalism in America as a man who could be thoroughly instructive, accurate, fair, tough, but accurate and fair.

I'm not sure what Walter has said about the coverage of terrorism. Have you?

MR. KALB: I've seen a lot of different quotes ascribed to him but I think the question relates to the, and it's a good question. What is your judgment on the capacity of the press as presently constituted to cover the war against terrorism, the possibility of suicide bombers in the United States. How do you think they are doing and might do?

MR. WALLACE: I think we are doing better. It's very difficult, and this is brand new for all of us. It's brand new for editors, it's brand new for reporters, and to a certain degree we make mistakes. By and large the energy is there, the desire to do it is there, and money is not getting in the way of covering that part of the story.

MR. HESS: The quotes that I've seen most recently from Walter Cronkite — perhaps you'd want to comment, I don't know if that was part of the question — was a criticism of the evening news as it's now constituted as opposed to when he was in the anchor chair, almost exclusively hard news emphasized, and what he sees now are a lot of programs which he says are "your kitchen counter and you", "your garbage disposal and you". The softening of the evening news. In a sense, in some ways trying to replicate part of the news magazines at which you're one of the thousands on a daily basis. And that's the way they use the 20 minutes that they're given every night.

Do you see a change?

MR. WALLACE: Oh, there has been a change. There's no doubt about the change, because of the competition, because of the business of ratings, circulation, call it what you will. Rather is devoted, I know him to be absolutely devoted to making his coverage as hard as he can. But he's also dealing with reality, and under those circumstances —

If you look at the ratings each week and it's quite close between NBC and ABC at the top, and CBS News lags behind the evening news, lags behind generally speaking by one rating point. Partially that has to do with what the lead-in to the news is.

Basically it is something — They're very forthcoming about it themselves. Frank Rich's piece in *The New York Times*, they handle it themselves. They have to deal with reality and the reality is circulation.

MR. HESS: But CBS in the Gary Condit case was one that said we weren't going to engage in this. NBC went through the roof on it. So it still does come down to someone who makes these decisions.

MR. WALLACE: The Gary Condit case wasn't just television. It was all over the newspapers as well. It got such foolishly overblown coverage. The same thing was true with OJ Simpson. Who knows what the next one is going to be? And this is also, hey, you want to hear some gossip? Watch us or read us.

QUESTION: Mike, how do you answer the persistent charge by conservatives primarily that there is a liberal bias in the three networks, and particularly CBS.

MR. WALLACE: I think it's an asinine charge. I know the people involved.

When you make a speech — Bernie Goldberg's book. The premise of his book, Bias, is that people are flocking to cable and deserting the evening news because of the liberal bias. That's garbage. That simply is not so. There is no liberal bias.

I have no idea of his politics, I have no idea about your politics. I don't know — If I were asked the politics of the top ten reporters, let's say, at CBS News, I wouldn't know. I'd have no idea. They're professionals. And even if I am a Republican or a Democrat or whatever, am I not sufficiently professional to handle that kind of thing? And if I'm not my editors are going to let that get through? It's baloney.

There is the desire on the part of a large part of the American public, and Bernie knew it when he wrote that Wall Street Journal article and then capitalized on it by writing his book, that it was going to strike a nerve with people who are predisposed not to like us very much.

The fact that they don't like us very much doesn't worry me at all. We are not or should not be in a popularity contest.

I asked Walter about this because I'm speaking about this next week, and I asked Cronkite a couple of nights ago, why is it that we are perceived by so many Americans as having a bias? He said you know something, he's thought about that a lot, but we, and by that I mean the media in general, are perceived as being for the underdog. We are not for the establishment. We are in effect for the underdog. And it goes back I think to that business about comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable? He said yeah, that's probably it?

Steve, do you believe? Marvin, do you believe that there's a liberal bias at the networks?

MR. HESS: No, I think there's another sort of bias, if you want to get into bias, because it's a little too simple to talk about Republican or Democrat. I do think you have folks that pretty much look alike in terms of where you come from, where you live, your social attitude and so forth. So there are some things that you think are newsworthy and other things that you think are less newsworthy.

For example the whole question of abortion is an area which you would find very few people on network news who don't take an abortion position, and I think probably subliminally at least, is reflected in it. So I don't think it's a bias in terms of the politics, but to me there is a sense of where you're coming from which now tends to include some things and not include others. Bias, if you want to call it that.

MR. KALB: Steve I think we're about out of time.

MR. HESS: We have had the privilege, the pleasure of sharing an hour and a half with Mike Wallace. It's been a wonderful experience for all of us in the room. We're glad that C-Span is going to allow an awful lot of other people to share this with us. We're grateful to you, Mike, in your busy life, your wonderful life, to come here to Brookings and share this with the Brookings/Harvard Forum. Thanks so much.