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WEBINAR

ASSIGNMENT RUSSIA:
A CONVERSATION ON JOURNALISM AND THE COLD WAR

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. DIONNE: I want to welcome everybody here today for a great discussion of a great book, “Assignment Russia: Becoming a Foreign Correspondent in the Crucible of the Cold War.” It’s a real joy to be with Marvin Kalb. Someone I have admired all my life and I am so happy to be here with my questions, but also your questions.

The book is really interesting and for those of you who are old enough, you will enjoy the stories from the earliest days of going back to radio as well as television.

For those of you who on the younger side, it’s a really spectacular introduction to how the media grew and developed and particularly how one of the most important people in the history of both radio and television news, Edward R. Murrow helped build news in the media. That is to say on the broadcast media and how he was smart enough to hire a lot of smart people including Marvin Kalb.

There is a great picture of a young man on the cover of this book and, Marvin, I love that picture. And it looks like you're looking over your shoulder maybe at the KGB guy who’s following you around in Russia. I don't know if you remember that picture or when it was taken, but you can tell us about it.

But it’s a real joy to be with you. I don't think I have to introduce Marvin, but he’s had a very distinguished career at both NBC and CBS. Has been affiliated with Brookings has got to our great benefit for a long time. He is the founding director of the Shorenstein Center on present politics up at Harvard and it’s extraordinary he built that.

One of his gifts was to be able to relate simultaneously to academia and journalism. And I learned from this book. And so, I may fall into it myself as I told Marvin that Edward R. Murrow used to refer to him as Professor Kalb. And on that too he was prophetic because Marvin eventually became Professor Kalb and is still professor emeritus at Harvard.

So welcome, Marvin. It’s a real joy to be with you. And it was a good way to say, unmute yourself, Marvin. You’ve never been muted before.

MR. KALB: All right. Thank you, E.J. Thanks very much for the introduction. And I want to thank you and Brookings for being able to setup this book launch. I’m deeply grateful to both of you.

MR. DIONNE: Well, thank you. This is going to be fun. I want to say things at the

outset. One is a number of you sent in questions in advance that are really good questions including a former U.S. senator, the owner of an antique store and I have your questions here and we will get to them.

I also want to get to audience questions, and you can submit them in two ways. One is to an email which is events@brookings.edu or by a Twitter at #AssignmentRussia. And if you want to send out comments on this, it will help Marvin sell books so #AssignmentRussia. Anything you want to send out there would be good.

Marvin, I really loved the way you began this book. And the way you talked about your very first job in journalism for which you were entirely unprepared. And you tell this story in a very honest way that I think a lot of people at a certain key moment in their first job in a given profession will relate to. Why don't you tell us about your first day on the job?

MR. KALB: I'd be happy to do that, E.J., and thanks for raising it as one of my absolute favorite memories.

I was very happily on route to getting a Ph.D. in teaching Russian history possibly at Harvard, but certainly at another university when I got a call from Murrow to come down and talk to him in New York.

MR. DIONNE: Could I --

MR. KALB: Sorry?

MR. DIONNE: Let me just interrupt you to say, we are going to talk about Edward R. Murrow in a moment because he is such an extraordinary figure. And Marvin has --

MR. KALB: Right.

MR. DIONNE: -- has some insight on him. Go ahead, Marvin.

MR. KALB: No, no. I just want to mention that Murrow was the guy who called me and introduced me in effect, but we can talk about this more in a bit.

But Murrow got me in a sense into CBS. He's the one who invited me. And for my first job, it was to write radio scripts, radio news scripts, on the hour for local WCBS. Now, there's a difference between local and network. But I wrapped up as I was in Russian history knew very little about that. But I was put into this job.

I arrived at midnight, walked into a newsroom that was absolutely empty. And in my experience, there's nothing emptier in life than a newsroom at midnight with no one there. And I sat around wondering what is it they want me to do?

I didn't know how to write a radio script. Nobody taught me. They probably assumed that if I had a write a dissertation, I could write a radio script, but that didn't follow. One doesn't follow from the other and the hours passed and the silence deepened. There was no instruction. I was terrified.

And then at about three in the morning bells went off at the Reuters, the British news agency. And bells at that time meant bulletin. And I leaped up, ran over to Reuters, looked at it and it said, 29 people died today when their boat capsized in the Ganges in India.

And my first, embarrassing to this moment, response was, "Thank God. Twenty-nine people dead." I had my news story. And I ran back and started putting that into the lead, as they say, the number one story. I wrote it. I waited for the editor to arrive. He did at about 25 minutes to five, the first broadcast. He was a chubby guy named Hal Terkel.

He said, let me see your script. I gave it to him and I was trembling with anticipation. Is he going to use my script or will he throw it out? Will I be a failure on my first day on the job or will I succeed? Obviously, I was flop because he threw out the script, wrote another one.

After that he sat down with me and gave me my first lesson in the difference between local news and network news. How you write for radio as opposed to how you write a book or a magazine article. They were two different worlds. I knew none of this. And thank God for Hal Terkel. He was the first who taught me.

MR. DIONNE: I think everybody should read that section to know how to behave towards new people coming on the job. The description of Hal is this water pull loving --

MR. KALB: That is so true, so true.

MR. DIONNE: Let me just read a couple of sentences about that. "It took him less than five minutes to rewrite the script finishing at 4:56 a.m. That's four minutes before it was due. When a short man in a seersucker suit walked into the newsroom and gingerly made his way to Terkel's desk ignoring me on route." Marvin writes, "Hal handed him the script. He softly whispered, 'Good morning, Hal.' Made his way to Studio Nine where a few minutes later he delivered the 5 a.m. news with a smooth

professionalism that suggested CBS was as always an efficient, smooth running news organization."

I particularly like that because I think one of the things that all journalist get a kick out of is fooling people into thinking that something that can be utterly chaotic is actually a smooth running good organization.

Let's talk a little bit about Murrow. I was recently reading about Murrow actually in Lynne Olson's book, "Citizens of London," which --

MR. KALB: Yes.

MR. DIONNE: -- describes his extraordinary role during the Blitz and during World War II in London. It's a great description of him and, you know, I think he's still remembered but far less than he probably deserves to be as a towering figure in our public life as well as --

MR. KALB: Yes.

MR. DIONNE: -- journalism. Could you talk about Murrow? And really in a way, you are the last in a line of extraordinary people Murrow brought into broadcast news.

MR. KALB: Yeah. It just so -- that was a matter of timing that I happened to emerge on his screen because of this article that I did for the Times magazine on Soviet youth.

And Murrow wanted very much to learn more about Russia. And let's remember, E.J., that we were in 1957 right smack in the middle of the Cold War. That introduces an entirely new dimension into the analysis. At that time, both sides were set for a nuclear exchange. We came very close during the Cuban missile crisis.

Fortunately, through the wisdom of Nikita Khrushchev on the Soviet side and John Kennedy on the American side, we missed that opportunity to destroy ourselves. But Murrow understood the importance of Russia. He wanted very much to learn. When I went into see him that first time, the secretary said, he's a very busy man, Marvin. Thirty minutes tops. I said, fine. We spoke for three hours.

Murrow wanted to know everything about Soviet youths. What they thought about books? What they read? How they dated? What about their parent's relationship? How did they live at home? Everything I could possibly tell Murrow.

And he was always speaking to me as a young professor and I to him as sir because he was for me an idol. I listened to his 7:45 in the evening newscast every night that I possible could. And

then suddenly here was Murrow in my life offering me a job.

Murrow was the sort of man who inspired you to do better work. Not because he lectured to you, but because of what he himself did. He was the sort of man who when he walked into a room suddenly produced silence. People shut up. People stepped back and allowed him to walk in.

He was tall, dark, and incredibly good looking. Wonderful, wonderful voice. And he was an inspiration. And he started the industry of radio and television news when it was just getting off the ground in the coverage of World War II and then on the coverage of the Cold War.

Murrow today may not be remembered by a lot of young, but he ought to be remembered.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you. And I'll let people read the book because it's a really interesting look at how expertise actually translated into the job you eventually wanted in Green Deove. And you wrote a lot of stuff for other people before you actually got to say it yourself on the air which I think people will find interesting.

I'd like you talk about the Cold War and how it organized journalism. And I think to do that I'm just going to read a passage after the U-2 spy plane went down. You can sort of tell people about that story. And I'll just pick up. This is your first report from Moscow as a CBS correspondent if I have that right?

MR. KALB: Yes.

MR. DIONNE: "I dropped my camera case and tape recorder on the floor near a table and quickly wrote a short piece about my visit to the U-2 exhibition in Gorky Park and then a longer analysis that I hoped would be used on the World Tonight. I began my first report from Moscow as a CBS correspondent."

And this is Marvin's report. "It's all there if you needed the proof. The smashed-up plane, the pilot's helmet, his maps, even the poison pill he never took. All there in a large crowded exhibition in downtown Gorky Park. Soviet leader, Khrushchev, wants the world to see that it was an American spy plane. The U-2 shot down over Soviet territory that was the culprit. The real reason for the collapse of the Paris Summit."

You can explain that context. "But interesting Russians I talked to at the exhibition said

Khrushchev still wants peaceful relations with the United States." And then you have a quote and then you close, "Russians normally echo the party line when talking to foreigners and the party line here is that Khrushchev tried to save the summit but couldn't because so-called Western Imperialist and aggressors" do not want peace. Now, back to CBS news in America.

Talk about a couple of things. One, the Cold War. Two, were you trying to convey -- what were you trying to convey between the lines there? And what was it like to have the U-2 story as your first story out of Russia?

MR. KALB: It was a heck of a first story to have.

MR. DIONNE: Yeah, exactly.

MR. KALB: Let me just set the context very, very quickly. For many months in 1959, '60, a number of people in the United States government led by the American ambassador to the Soviet Union, two of them really, Llewellyn Thompson and Charles Bolen, they thought it would be very important that a president of United States to talk to the president of Soviet Union.

The two nations were poised to go after each other, each stocked with nuclear weapons. And they wanted very much to head off this kind of confrontation. And they thought that Khrushchev was the kind of leader, totally unlike Stalin, who wanted to deal with the West.

And so, they did work out a summit meeting in Paris in early May of 1960. And that would be an opportunity for Eisenhower and Khrushchev to meet and have a chat and try to settle Berlin with Khrushchev regarded as a bone in my throat. He had to get rid of that problem and he was doing it by way of Cuba. And John Kennedy wanted very much to have a disarmament agreement with the Russians if that was possible.

Suddenly as a high watermark, I think in Cold War machinations, we sent a spy plane over the Soviet Union in early May of 1960. This was not the first one --

MR. DIONNE: Well, Eike was still president just to set the context.

MR. KALB: Eike was president exactly. And this was not the first U-2 plane sent over Russia. There were many others that preceded it, but this was the one that was shot down directly over Sverdlovsk, a major city in the heart of the Soviet Union.

Now, when it was shot down amazingly the pilot, Gary Francis Powers, was able to

parachute to get out of the plane as it was going down. The Russians of course got him when he landed and got the plane. And Khrushchev was trying to tell the world, one, that the United States is very bad. Trying to upset the balance of power that existed, nuclear power, between the two sides.

That the United States had war mongers. That Eisenhower who came through to so many people as a wonderful guy, he was really a war monger. And he tried to drum up an enormous amount of populace support for that belief. At the same time, as he went to Paris in mid-May for a summit meeting involving the U.S., the USSR, Brittan and France.

I was arriving for my first summit meeting. My first big foreign assignment and I was terrified. This was a spooky thing to do. I was there with Dan Schorr, Richard C. Hottelet, Alexander Kendrick, David Shelburne, all of these icons of the CBS stable of foreign correspondents.

I was in the middle suddenly covering Khrushchev and I had this idea that every time Khrushchev was in a foreign capital, he would take a walk very early in the morning. So I asked my CBS editor, can you give me a crew? I'll go to the Soviet ambassy. I'll be there at six in the morning. If he comes out, I'll do an interview with him. CBS will have an exclusive.

At the beginning they said, no, but then they yielded and said, yes. I was there at six in the morning. Khrushchev didn't come out at 6:15, 6:30, 6:45. The camera man said, should we wrap up? I said, no, let's stay until seven.

At seven these big steel doors of the Soviet ambassy opened. He emerged with two bodyguards. I and my crew rushed towards them. The two bodyguards immediately reached in for their weapons. Khrushchev looked at me and he said to the guards, no, no, no. He's okay. That's Peter the Great.

And that is in itself a wonderful story because 1956, Khrushchev and I had a conversation at the American ambassy in which, believe it or not, was about basketball of all things. He looked up at me and said, how tall are you? I said, three centimeters shorter than Peter the Great.

To this day, E.J., I haven't a clue as to why I said that. It just came out of my mind. And Khrushchev loved it. And he burst into laughter. Everybody else did. And by the way, whenever a dictator laughs even on a lousy joke, everybody in the environment also laughs. And I have a feeling that Khrushchev when he saw me in Paris really kind of saw a friend, and we walked down the block. And a

block and a half away there is a French bakery producing that early morning, magnificent aroma of croissants.

And the aroma was breathtaking. Khrushchev stopped. Gave it a sniff and I said, Mr. Chairman, that is a French croissant. Would you like one? He said, yes, is it good? I said, it's delicious. And I ran in and I got a bunch of croissants. Gave them to Khrushchev and his bodyguards. I to my crew and then Khrushchev had this look of absolute joy, Slovak wonder on his face when he bit into the croissant.

And he said, (speaking Russian). "This is really delicious," he said. And I said, "Oh, yes, it is." And then suddenly in my mind, Marvin, get busy. And I leaped in and began to talk to him about Berlin. CBS had a fabulous interview and I had my first, quote, scoop.

And I can only tell you, E.J., because you've gone through it yourself. When you are first starting an assignment and you get a scoop of that dimension at a summit meeting, you are in seventh heaven, and I was at that time. It's a fabulous.

MR. DIONNE: I'm just trying to think of the Fox News version of this. Line media correspondent feeds communist leader. I love that story. That's fantastic.

I got a question that fits with that. And would you think of that -- so I'm going to combine two questions. One is, would you think of that as your first exclusive as a foreign correspondent or is there something else you talk about? And a writer who sent us your question early named Kathleen O'Halleran. Thank you for your question. Asks, what is your story with the greatest intrigue? So why don't you take hers and link it up with a scoop that maybe a story.

MR. KALB: Well, I could tell you that the story with the greatest intrigue only tangentially involves the Soviet Union. It was the attempt to kill John Paul, II.

And I did a great deal of work on that. Went to Rome. Spent about six months there looking into the story and I left with the feeling that the killing of John Paul started in Turkey with a killer named Mehmet Ali Agca. And he was sent through a chain of secret commands through Berlin and down into Rome with instructions to kill the pope because the Russians wanted him out.

John Paul, II simply represented two major -- a counter force to communism in Poland where he was from and communism throughout Eastern Europe. And the shooting of the pope and then

our pursuit as journalists of Agca, the people who surrounded him, the intrigue behind the Russian secret operation to get rid of a pope was a huge intriguing, fascinating story which I still, by the way, think has not been fully explored.

MR. DIONNE: Yeah, you know, it's funny. Later in my career and we can talk about this all. I was Roman correspondent. And I was never persuaded that we had the goods on the Russians on that. I don't think it -- and as you know there's been an enormous debate about it.

MR. KALB: Oh, yes.

MR. DIONNE: And I ever since -- and it's obviously never been proven that they -- you could see why they wanted to get rid of him.

MR. KALB: Yes.

MR. DIONNE: But it's never been proven that they did. But anyway, that's for another day. Thank you. I never knew we were on that story together because I covered the Vatican in some of those years.

MR. KALB: Right.

MR. DIONNE: I want to go also to Gordon Humphrey. I guess one of the questions I was going to ask you anyway. I'll ask Gordon's question. I'll link it to my question.

Senator Humphrey's question is: given the growing reliance of disinformation by despots in Russia, China, Iran and elsewhere should U.S. create some form of the 21st century USIA or some new form to message citizens in those countries using the latest social media platforms?

Obviously, we do have a government operation of that sort. It's been reorganized over the years. I want to link that to the job offer you turned down for Edward R. Murrow because one of the -- it's poignant at the end of the book where Murrow left journalism to go work for President Kennedy to run the U.S. Information Agency.

And he wanted you to leave your green job to go work for him. And you talk about how you and your wife, Maddy, walked around Paris. It's a wonderful description of somebody who loves Paris. Thinking through a big problem with help from a beautiful city and a wonderful wife, if I may say?

And so, talk about the Murrow story and answer Senator Humphrey's question also. I think that would be great. And let me just tell people again. Questions to events@brookings.edu or by a

Twitter at #AssignmentRussia. Go ahead, Marvin.

MR. KALB: E.J., first of all I think you've already answered the first part of the Senator's question. We have in the U.S. government today many, many places where they are studying Soviet propaganda, Soviet disinformation, Russian efforts. Let's bear in mind that this is something the Russians have been doing for literally hundreds of years.

They have always been involved with what we currently call disinformation. It is one way in which you can maintain czarist power, which is what the czarist people did and what the Communists did when the czars were kicked out of power. So that is not new and we try our best to do it. The remarkable thing, E.J., is that the American people continue to get sucked into what the Russians put out as truths.

And they have an opportunity as a free people in a free society to get all kinds of information. To fight Russian disinformation and yet they don't do it. And I'm talking about tens of millions of Americans who will hook onto something patently untrue, false and believe it. That to me is the shocker.

Please help me out with the follow-up question that was asked.

MR. DIONNE: Just why you turned down the job from Murrow?

MR. KALB: Well, Murrow, as I said earlier, Murrow was for me an idol. The man who hired me. I regarded him with utmost respect and admiration, affection in fact.

And when Murrow left CBS and he joined the USIA. The Kennedy administration was then only two months old. I had been on Murrow's last program on CBS called the use of crisis in December of 1960.

We went back to Russia and in March, Ambassador Thompson showed me a letter that he had received from Murrow to me. And he handed it to me and I read it. And he said he had something that he wanted to discuss with me of a sensitive nature. And I would have to leave the Soviet Union to actually talk to Murrow.

So Maddy and I went to Paris for a weekend, picked up the phone, called Murrow and much to my astonishment Murrow was offering me a job as his expert on communist affairs to sit with him and to give him analysis with expertise I had to provide to him as the head of USIA.

That was a stunner for me, E.J., because I had spent so much of my life trying to get this job in Moscow. I finally got it. I was doing what I thought Murrow wanted me to do, which was to be fearless, direct, honest in reporting the reality of Soviet communism. He thought I was doing a very good job. I hoped that I was. And suddenly, he was asking me to leave it and come to Washington.

It was an agonizing 24 hours, but Maddy and I both decided to stay in Russia because deep down we had a feeling that that was what Murrow probably wanted us to do anyway. And I had a very hard time picking up the phone and saying, no to Murrow who had been a yes-man for me all of my career.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you. I can't resist just briefly this question. I can't resist Jesuit's Father James McCann who is the Catholic chaplain at Georgetown Law asked: did Mr. Kalb, we'll say Professor Kalb in deference to tomorrow. Did professor Kalb ever experience Soviet medicine?

I survived a rupture appendix in the Brezhnev era. My case history document ended with this. Data release from hospital or date of death, underlined one. Just real quick. I just thought it was an interesting question to ask.

MR. KALB: No. The quick answer is that I was lucky and never needed Soviet medical assistance so I slipped past them.

MR. DIONNE: Did you ever tangle with the intelligence services there? Did they harass you? I think there is a question here somewhere. In fact, Boyd Walker, owner of Orlov Antiques, you're nice enough to send a question so we'll plug your business here. Also, an interesting name in light of our topic.

How does press access during Kalb's time compare with press access today? And was it equally dangerous for journalist to work in Russia then? Why don't you talk a bit about dangers then and perhaps now from what you know?

MR. KALB: You know, my sense is that it's much more dangerous now to be a journalist in Russia than it was in my time and for an odd reason. There is less direct government control over the journalist today than there was then.

With direct Soviet KGB control over your life, there was very little that was going to happen to me in the 1950s or '60s that the Russian did not themselves organize. So if they wanted me

there at all, they didn't want to kill me. As a matter of fact, I often had the feeling that the KGB people who were following me around were my protection against Russians trying to get to me with their stories.

And so, today it is much more dangerous. There are so many different ways of communicating. The use of social media is very big time. It advances the careers of a politician like Navalny. It is a key element of Russian's communicating with themselves, reporters in Russia writing about the Russians or reporters writing about the Russians for consumption in the United States or Western Europe.

Russia is still a very dangerous place. The rules of the road that we assume would apply to all civilized people do not necessarily apply in Moscow. And I think the foreign correspondent who goes there now ought to be very careful about what it is that he or she does on a regular basis.

MR. DIONNE: Could I ask -- again, one of the great things about this book is it's a book about journalism. It's a book about the Cold War and it's just a book about a country called Russia. You have emersed yourself all your life since you were a student in Russia, Russian society.

On the one hand, you very critical, obviously, of the Communist dictatorship and continue to be critical of the Putin regime, but you clearly also have a deep affection for this people, their culture. I guess maybe I could bring these questions together with a specific story which is I happen to know the answer so I'll ask it.

What the story that touched you personally more than any that you've covered there. And sort of how do you distinguish between your attitudes towards these regimes versus your feelings about Russia, Russian culture and Russia people?

MR. KALB: E.J., thank you very much for that question. That's an important one. For me, I was always able -- and I'm grateful for this opportunity. I was always able to study the ideology of communism as if it was something coming in from Mars and infecting a certain part of the United States.

And I wanted very much to figure out what was going on there? And if knowledge is --

MR. DIONNE: Effecting a certain part of the United States or Russia? I'm sorry. I just want to --

MR. KALB: No, no. That this kind of infection of communism could come into this planet, be settle in Russia then in China and then in large parts of Eastern Europe.

I thought it was an obligation in my part then as a younger scholar. I was not a reporter in those days. Simply to learn as much as I could about this country. I wanted to know its history, its language, its culture, its literature. I wanted to know as much as possible.

Then it so happened that through Murrow, etc., as I explained in the book. To get to Russia and to be a correspondent there. That then gave me the opportunity literally of being able to talk to Russians one on one. It wasn't in a theoretical exercise. It wasn't an academic exercise. It was real.

I'd go to a market place and talk to Russians, what did you do today? And many of them wanted -- first of all, it was clear I was a foreigner. But I was a foreigner who spoke their language and so they liked that almost immediately.

And then I would ask them about their lives and they would tell me. Not all of them. And some of them would lie flat out and I would know it and they knew it too. But many of them at same time would level. And they would want the world to know what was going on. And I thought this was fabulous.

The Russian people are a talented people. And you only have to look back into the talent of the 18th century right through the 19th. The literature, the poetry, the music, the composures, all of them were fantastic. You can't go anywhere in a university today and not study Russian literature, Russian composures, music.

So I have enormous admiration for the people and their potential, but unfortunately they have lived too much of their lives under an oppressive political system.

MR. DIONNE: I wanted to sort of put two -- we got two kind of direct policy political questions and I'll put them both on the table for you.

One is from John Dobson, a journalist with the Indian Sunday Guardian. "From 1991 and '94, I was a British diplomat at our embassy in Moscow. I therefore witnessed the collapse of the Soviet Union during that time. I met with many diplomats, military personnel, government officials. I was convinced at the time they all wanted to have genuinely good relations with the West. Relations that were destroyed," as Mr. Dobson goes on. "By a NATO encroachment on their western borders, which we promised not to do."

Was that an error on our part? Briefly, I think it's something we're going to debate for a long time.

MR. KALB: Yes. Well, my opinion is the answer is yes. I believe that it was an error to have moved as quickly as we did in order to bring NATO forces closer to the Russian border.

However, it has to be understood what the context was at that time and I'm sure that our British friend understands that is why. At that time, most of the West led by people like Bill Clinton and led into the Soviet Union then Russia, Yeltsin. They wanted very much to come together. They wanted very much for Russia to become part of the West.

Russia was also offered at that time membership in NATO. They were the ones -- the Russians were the ones who pulled back. They didn't want to go that far. They were afraid. And suddenly, the forces of the old-time repression came roaring back in and sat on all these opportunities for the growth of democracy in Russia.

So there was an opportunity if we had not moved our forces closer to the Russian border possibly the Russians might have reached a different conclusion, but I don't know that. It's a roll of the dice and an awful lot of smart people felt it was the right way to do things.

And a very good friend of mine once said, an American columnist, "When you've got your foot on the neck of a bad guy, don't let go. Push harder." In other words, there was a feeling on the part of many anti-communists in Washington that Russia was in trouble and this was a time to hurt them. Not bring them in, not soften the blow of the loss of communism, but crush them. And that is what the Russians had a feeling we were doing in early 1990 and I think what Putin believes the West is trying to do today.

MR. DIONNE: Yeah. I just had to ask this question because someone named Setick Covigian. I hope I have your name right. Forgive me if I don't. Has been hanging onto a question for 30 years, which she said you didn't answer when she asked it at the World Affairs Councill in Boston when you were with HCS Greenway, a very distinguished foreign correspondent.

Do you think the press was bias in favor of the breakup of Yugoslavia? You don't have to go on too long, but I just admire her persistence so I want to put the question to you.

MR. KALB: Well, now I've got 30 years --

MR. DIONNE: I hope I got the first name right. Forgive me if I didn't. Go ahead.

MR. KALB: No, no. I've got 30 years or perspective now, which I didn't have back then.

But I don't believe that the press was doing anything other than reporting it as clearly as they could possible could.

That was a huge story at the time. A complicated country like Yugoslavia was breaking up before our eyes. If the press appeared to be in favor of breakup perhaps it was just appearance. But perhaps also it was an inner desire to see an oppressive system that existed in Yugoslavia actually being broken up.

So it might have been a bit of both. And I'm sorry I didn't answer it back then, but I think probably Greenway probably answered a lot better than I.

MR. DIONNE: You told me that the story that touched you more. I mentioned this earlier and we never got back to it. The story that touched you the most was at Pasternak's funeral.

MR. KALB: Yes.

MR. DIONNE: Could you tell that story to folks?

MR. KALB: I'd like very much to tell it briefly. Pasternak died, I believe it was May 30th, or 31st in 1960. He was a great poet but he was known throughout the world as the author of the one book that he wrote. It's amazing to understand that, but he did one book and it was called "Doctor Zhivago," which became a huge success and it won Pasternak a Nobel prize for literature. He was never able to receive it because the bad guys in Russia held him back and Khrushchev held him back as well.

When I went out to his -- I get choked up even now. When I went out to his dacha where he had died. A small community. There were hundreds and hundreds of people. They looked to me like ordinary Russians that showed up for this man's funeral.

Also, great people showed up for that funeral. Sviatoslav Richter who was probably the most famous, the best pianist in Russian and perhaps in the world was there playing at his funeral service. Poets showed up to read their poetry. To speak warmly about Pasternak.

I had gone out three days before Pasternak died to the dacha hoping that I could get an interview with him. I couldn't because he was already very, very sick but I didn't know that. Two days later, of course, there was the bulletin of his death.

And when I went out there and saw the number of people in tears, broken down because they were paying their respects to a poet. And I was thinking to myself, which poet in the United States

would draw this kind of popular respect, affection, admiration? I didn't think any.

But Russia has a special place in its heart for great poets and Pasternak was certainly one of those.

MR. DIONNE: You have, by the way, and again this is why readers should take a look at this book. You never got the film that you had?

MR. KALB: No, I didn't. That was one of the stories of course --

MR. DIONNE: That's like it reads like the pages of a thriller trying to get your film out of Russia.

MR. KALB: That's absolutely right. I ran out to the airport. You couldn't, in those days, simply send your film out. The Russians wouldn't allow that.

So I had to find what we called the pigeon. And I ran out to the airport and it was the last flight to the Western world. I was looking around for a pigeon, and I saw a woman there. She was there with her daughter as it turned out. Also, as it turned out she was from New York. She recognized me because of CBS and I sort of recognized her because of the way she spoke.

And I was thinking to myself, New York, CBS. I've got a pigeon. So I warmed up to her. I talked to her. Her daughter said, "Is Eric Sevareid really as handsome a man in person as he is on television? Oh, I said more so. More so. And if you take my film, he'll be in London and he'll take the film from you and you can take picture with Eric.

Well, that was horrible on my part because Sevareid would never have gone out to the airport to pick up footage, but I wanted so much to get this great footage out of this get story. And I lied in order to get them persuaded to take my film. They took it. I thought it was on its way, but it never got to London and it never got to New York.

And this great television version of the Pasternak funeral is now in my memory and those of the memories of the hundreds of people who were there, but I don't know if any footage about it. It was this speculator sad, truly authentically Russian thing.

It was buried in the shadow of an old church. And you looked at the bulbish domes and everything around it screamed Russia. And I wanted to so much to get that footage to New York, but it never got there. My big disappointment.

MR. DIONNE: No. It's a really powerful moment in the book. Garret Mitchell whom you acknowledge in the book, emailed me a question. There were several questions here and I know we've got to end in about 10 minutes.

Garret said I was intending to ask how whether Maddy Kalb or Maddy, your wife, her counsel on Russian culture and historical perspective. Why don't you talk a bit about Maddy? Then there are two questions here I'm going to put to you from our audience and then I'm going to ask you to close with a couple of thoughts. Go ahead.

MR. KALB: Well, let me quickly just say that Maddy and I were married in June of 1958. Lived together now for 62 years. That's not a bad record.

And Maddy has been part of my life in every way so when we went on a round-the-world trip visiting 13 different countries trying to find out information about the Sino-Soviet Alliance and a possible breakup of that alliance, she was of course with me.

And when I would sit down to try to figure out what was going on in Soviet politics, she was the first person I talked to. So everything about this book is also an adventure for (inaudible). And thank you for asking the question. It gives me an opportunity to say those good and wonderful things about this good and wonderful wife.

What were the other questions that you had?

MR. DIONNE: Oh, yeah. There were two that are on here and thank you to our audience for sending us a lot of great questions. We could do another hour here.

But I'm going to do two at a time and you can briefly answer both of them. One is from a gentleman called James Lowenstein. Any particular comments on how various American ambassadors have interacted with the Soviet leadership? And one from Cassio DaCunha, I hope I have your name right again.

In light of the anniversary of Gagarin's historic space flight, how would you report soft power events like this rather than political hard power events?

So ambassadors and, if you will, soft power events?

MR. KALB: Okay. Well, the two ambassadors I knew best were Bohlen in 1956 and Llewellyn Thompson in the early 1960s. They were both superb ambassadors, great representatives of

the United States.

Bohlen was unbelievably helpful to the press. He gave us no big secrets, but he would steer us towards a more sensible analysis of Soviet reality.

And Thompson in his way, he was much more quiet, but in his way also was extremely helpful. But more helpful than to journalists was the help that they provided to the U.S. government and to the American president. They were two terrific ambassadors.

MR. DIONNE: And then soft power that person citing Gagarin's space flight?

MR. KALB: Right. Well, Yuri Gagarin went into space in April of 1961, I believe. And when he went up into space there was -- you see it was a great story to cover, but bear in mind the only thing that the Russians told us was that a man had gone into space and successfully returned.

They made it into a huge story. It was a huge story, but there was an extra dimension to that story which also got a great deal of play at that time.

Was Gagarin really the first Russian into space or was he the second? And an earlier astronaut went up and never got back and his name as I remember it now might have been Titov, but that was an extra dimension to that story.

MR. DIONNE: When you look back just again on that soft power question. Is your greatest pride in political diplomatic stories or do you feel like you had an opportunity, given all the restrictions on you to give Americans a sense of what life was like inside Russia and the Soviet Union?

MR. KALB: Well, it's hard really to make that kind of distinction. Everything was being rationed in those days. What we might have regarded as an extremely interesting story, we had very little access too.

Please remember that in the late 1950s, early '60s, if you were a foreign diplomat or a foreign correspondent living in Moscow, the restrictions were intense and you did not have an opportunity simply to float around and pick up wonderful soft news stories.

They might become available but only if the Russians wanted you to know that. And because the Russian lied so much, the foreign correspondent was extremely suspicious of anything that was provided free of charge so to speak. In answer unsatisfactorily I think but at the same time try to explain that that kind of story was not that easily available at that time.

MR. DIONNE: Yep. Let's imagine a graduate student at Harvard now as you were in Harvard. It could be anywhere. We can say, Chicago or Berkley or any -- University of Michigan any of those places. People feel strongly about their universities out there.

Should they go into journalism? And what should we be doing in terms of our knowledge of China? When you think about on the one hand, we're all hoping we don't have -- that you can't completely analogize the Cold War to the situation with China for a whole lot of reasons, but we are entering into what is clearly a difficult period with China.

Could you talk a bit about China in light of your own experience?

MR. KALB: Well, thank you, E.J. When I was preparing for a Ph.D. one of the subject areas that I specialized in was Chinese history. And I developed a fondness, a deep interest in Chinese history. Wanted to know more and more about it.

And what I realized back then and realize today much more acutely is that this nation right now is not -- in my judgment. I could be dead wrong and I hope I'm wrong. This nation right now does not know enough about what is happening inside China.

We have an image of China that is old fashioned. We have an image as a very backward country struggling very hard to catch up with the West, but never really able to do it. That isn't true any longer.

In my judgment, China has made it. Made it in a big way and the United States and the American people have to recognize that China is a country right up there with us competing for global superiority and I don't know that we quite grasp it.

And therefore, I'm frightened that there may be serious miscalculation in our relationship with China that conceivably could lead to a conflict. God, know I hope not, but we have to learn much, much more about what's going on in that country just as we had to learn a great deal about what was going in the Soviet Union at that time.

MR. DIONNE: Okay. I could be here for a long time. I really urge everybody to read this book because I think you will truly enjoy it.

I want to ask one question about journalism and one question that goes to really your overall philosophy of life. I just want to go back to Murrow. He had a very interesting critique towards the

end of his career. He gave a speech in Chicago where he really criticized the media.

He said, “This instrument can strategic and illuminate. Yes, it can even inspire, but it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends.” Otherwise, in a very famous quote, he’s talking of television. “It is merely wires and lights in a box.”

That was Murrow way back in 1958. You have been critical of the media your whole life even as you served in it. I’m curious. How do you think link his critique to the way you have looked at these issues all those years since?

And I think that can lead into something that I know you very much wanted to talk about which is the expression payback that means something very special to you. And somehow, I think you can payback Murrow with your answer to the first, but I’d like you to talk about the second as well.

MR. KALB: Well, let us remember that when Murrow made those comments in 1958, television news was at a takeoff point. Millions and millions of Americans were becoming acquainted with television news for the very first time.

It was small boxes with flickering images. And we know about the tall antenna sticking out of these boxes. We were only as a nation getting into it and here was Murrow, the great man himself, appearing and saying things.

And what Murrow said was devastating for two reasons. One, he said it. Murrow was saying this. And two, that the American people had a different image. They were excited by what it is that they were seeing. There was a lot of entertainment. People were dancing. People were singing. There were charming kind of folk operas taking place on American television.

And the American loved it and here was Murrow introducing a very sour element and you read a part of that. He was really saying in that Chicago speech that if you examine seriously what was going on in American television, you would find it’s not dealing with serious issues. It’s dealing only with entertainment.

And that was devastating to Murrow because he felt that this industry that he was building was not achieving what he had in mind. And so, he had to speak up against it.

For me, E.J., the thing that I want to talk about and link it to Murrow is something that I do call payback. And such as me, who uses that expression.

Merrick Garland, for example, in his testimony before becoming the attorney general of the United States was asked, I believe by Senator Booker, why is it that you would take this job? And he said, I want to payback because I have an obligation thinking about what it is that my grandparents went through.

And what Merrick Garland was saying and what I have felt for a long, long time is that this country with all of its problems, this country in 1913 and again 1914 welcomed two immigrants from Eastern Europe. My mother from Kiev and my father from a small town in Poland to the United States.

Both of them had been subjected to different forms of religious persecution. Both of them had lived in an environment of the tightest, if it existed at all, economic opportunity. They wanted to come to the United States and for them the language in Eastern Europe for the United States was in Yiddish, golden (speaking Yiddish), which translates roughly as a golden paradise.

They made up these stories about jobs being given to you. Money being given to you. Everything being given to you. And my father learned when he got here, it wasn't given to you. You had the opportunity. That is what was given to you. The opportunity to make things better for yourself and for other people.

And nobody bothered you, a (inaudible) stated for my father and for me, except in one or two ways. They didn't bother you because of your religion. And I felt with this book and everything that I kind of represented in the craft of journalism, this is my payback. This is my way of saying, thank you to America for what it is that they did for my parents and for millions of other people. And my belief that even with the problems we have today, we still have a glorious opportunity to live the American dream. I certainly feel that I have. And the book is simply my way of saying thanks.

MR. DIONNE: Well, not only have you told a great story, but you've inspired us, Marvin. That was wonderful. Thank you so much. I just want to read something to those of you watching here. And by the way, there's another volume coming, correct? So we don't want to plug that in advance, but I think you mentioned it here so it's not a KGB secret.

Marvin writes in the beginning, "please consider assignment Russia as a long letter home after an unforgettable personal adventure. It's the story of a few very important years of my life as a young reporter trained in the crucible of a Cold War.

It's one heck of a letter home. I feel very privileged to know Marvin and privileged also to have had a chance to talk to you about this book. And thank you all for joining us. Thank you for all of the great questions and all of your thoughts.

MR. KALB: Okay. Thank you. Thank you very much. And thank Brookings very much for doing this. I'm very grateful.

MR. DIONNE: And thanks to Suzanne Schaefer for helping put this together. Bless you, Suzanne. Take care everyone.

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