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## CNN Basks in Reaction to Its Beijing Coverage

By ELEANOR BLAU MAY 25, 1989

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These have been glory days for the Cable News Network. Its coverage of the upheaval in Tiananmen Square in Beijing has won praise from press analysts and attracted thousands more viewers, especially in the six days last week that CNN was able to transmit from its own satellite facilities in Beijing.

The network, its admirers say, was simply doing what it does best: showing a historic event unfolding - live. And being a round-the-clock all-news operation, it devoted many more hours to the story - 30 of them live that week - than could any of the three major networks.

"I think the Cable News Network really came of age," said Fred Friendly, a professor emeritus at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism and a former CBS executive. "It performed a great national and even international service."

Kudos for CBS

CBS, the only one of the three major networks to send an anchor, Dan Rather, and to set up its own satellite facility in Beijing, also performed "an enormous service," he said. In an age when air time is enormously expensive and networks are cutting back, "CBS did more than anyone else among the commercial stations," he said. "But they didn't have what CNN has, which is unlimited air time."

CNN, a network of the Turner Broadcasting System, made its debut in June

1980, and has been turning a profit in recent years. It has grown rapidly, and now has 21 news bureaus, of which a dozen are outside the United States. It is seen in 83 countries besides the United States.

Its "Prime News" programs at 8 P.M. are normally watched by about 500,000 American households, roughly one-tenth the size of audiences for each of the three major networks' prime evening newscasts. An Order on a Legal Pad

But 860,000 American homes watched CNN live last Friday night between 8 and 10:15 P.M., when a tense and curious exchange took place. Chinese officials told CNN to stop transmitting and CNN staff members asked for that in writing. A Chinese official complied on camera, writing the order on a legal pad. CNN members conferred with their network's headquarters in Atlanta, and the transmission ended.

That same night, 12.2 million viewers were watching CBS (and some called in to complain) as the network broke into the season's final episode of "Dallas" with a 21-minute special report that showed Chinese officials telling CBS to end its operations in Beijing.

During the past week, 400,000 American households tuned in daily to CNN on average - an increase of some 150,000 from usual. 'Logistical Nightmare'

The broadcasts from China were "a logistical nightmare," said Eason Jordan, CNN's acting international editor, although events such as the 1988 Democratic National Convention required a larger staff.

CNN had 40 people in China last week, including the CNN anchor Bernard Shaw; Mike Chinoy, the Beijing bureau chief, and three other correspondents.

"They were working without sleep, as long as 20, 24 even 40 hours," Mr. Jordan said. "Even when they were told to get some sleep, they were too excited."

In the view of Ed Joyce, a former president of CBS News, "Bernard Shaw, and particularly Mike Chinoy, showed that nobody in commercial networks is doing anything better than they are doing. Chinoy, I thought, really seemed to have a grasp on the subtleties" of the situation. ABC and NBC 'Were Not Factors'

"What I found fascinating," Mr. Joyce said, "was that the competition was between CBS News and CNN. ABC and NBC were just not factors" - which he called a "watershed" development.

ABC and NBC were hardly in accord with this assessment.

"We're not at all ashamed - we covered it well," said Dick Wald, the senior vice president of ABC News. Noting that the original reason for the coverage was the

Chinese-Soviet summit meeting, he said, "The second story that captured the attention of the world wasn't part of anybody's planning."

Comparing CNN to a wire story and the networks to newspapers, Mr. Wald said, "The wire service is constant and constantly updating, but the newspaper creates a shape for things and a context."

Joseph Angotti, a senior vice president of NBC News, said, "I think its unfortunate that people have a perception that if your anchor is not there, you're not covering a story adequately." On the Camera's Presence

"The nature of CNN allows it to do things we simply can't do," Mr. Angotti added. Describing the coverage by CNN - and by all three networks - as "terrific," he added that "We think our pictures have been the best."

Not everyone agrees on the impact of CNN's presence. Reuven Frank, a former president of NBC News, said the main point was that these days, "the presence of the camera changes the nature of the event."

Students, he said, were very much aware of the coverage, and timed their protest to the summit talks, just as antiwar demonstrators chose the Democratic National Convention to capture the cameras' eyes in Chicago in 1968.

And will CNN's achievement affect the way the commercial networks cover news? "What I'm afraid of," said Mr. Frank, "is that it may allow the networks to cop out. They could say, 'well, if you want it, it's there on CNN.'"

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