Title: "David Gergen, Arthur Miller, and Martin F. Nolan discuss, The Rights and Responsibilities of a Free Press at the Ford Hall Forum"

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Recording Summary:

Transcription of a Ford Hall Forum that features Martin F. Nolan, David Gergen, and moderator Arthur Miller discussing, "The Rights and Responsibilities of a Free Press." The panelists examine the state of journalism in the face of challenges such as media conglomeration, the general public's declining interest, and tensions with the government. Using the recently uncovered Iran/Contra scandal as a backdrop, they discuss the importance of a free press as a check on US government policies and actions.

Transcript Begins

INTRODUCTION: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Ford Hall Forum. This is the last presentation of our fall series tonight, and we're glad to see you all here. This is part of our Constitutional Series and we're looking at one of the premier parts of the Constitution; that's the First Amendment and the rights and responsibilities of a free press.

Tonight's moderator is someone I think who is familiar to all of you – as a legal commentator on TV, both locally and nationally on Good Morning America, and as the host of the popular Miller's Court. Arthur Miller is not just a television commentator, however. He's been a professor at Harvard Law School since 1971, before which he practiced law in New York and taught at the University of Michigan. He's known professionally for this work on core procedure, where he's author or co-author of more than 25 books, and for this work in copyright law. He's also known for extensive work in the field of the right of privacy, where he has written, testified, debated and helped formulate legislation.

And now, without any further introductions, ladies and gentlemen, the Forum is pleased to present as our moderator this evening, Arthur Miller. [applause]

[00:01:21]
ARTHUR MILLER: Thank you, Donald. We are indeed a blessed people because we have more rights than any other nation on the face of the earth. We tend to forget that as we get wrapped up in the events of the day – the Middle East, South Africa, Iran, hostages, and things like that. But we should never forget that we Americans have more rights than the people of any nation that has ever inhabited this planet.

[00:01:55]
But of all those rights, if somebody woke you up in the middle of the night and shook you by your shoulders and said, "What is the most unique, distinctive American right," there can be only one answer – it's free speech, free press.

We practice free press in this country like no one else does. We inherited it from the British, but the British, unlike us, hem it in by official secrets laws, libel laws, contempt laws. We wrote it down; they didn't. We wrote it down in the First Amendment, as any good journalist will tell you. It's in the First Amendment. First. It's holy scripture.

[00:02:50]
And the truth of the matter is that not only is it the most distinctive American right, it has served us magnificently well for 200 years. In our lifetime, we've seen it operate twice at a very unique level. No matter what you may think about Watergate, no matter what you may think about Vietnam, the truth is that our First Amendment, our press, in both of those crises, enabled the American people, through the ventilation of those issues, to form their own judgments about a president and about Southeast Asia. It was a performance that could go on in no country other than ours. The press, the First Amendment.

[00:03:46]
But nothing in life is absolute, other, I suppose, than death. As holy scripture as the First Amendment may be, the press not only has rights, it has responsibilities. And that's our topic tonight – the press, its rights and its responsibilities. We have two people who know as much about this subject as any two people one could think of.

[00:04:16]
Our first speaker is Martin F. Nolan, a man with deep Boston roots; born in this city in 1940, educated here in the city again, at Boston College. He's been with the *Boston Globe* since '61. He's been the editor of the editorial page since 1981. He's a frequent participant in television, appearing most frequently on Face the Nation, Meet the Press, This Week with David Brinkley. He was a member of a team that won a Pulitzer Prize, journalism's highest award, for meritorious public service. But to me, Martin F. Nolan is most appreciated because he was a card-carrying member of President Nixon's Enemies List. Our first speaker, Martin F. Nolan. [applause]

MARTIN NOLAN: Thank you, Professor Miller. I didn't bring my card with me. Rights and responsibilities. Well, of course, we like one and we like it to be conferred, and the other one we have to work towards. That's what my business should be doing more of.

[00:05:53]
Rights, yes. I think the rights of the press are safe, for now; temporarily, at least. And our responsibilities, we try to meet them every day, but I think we fail to do so in some important areas. And we do so because we assume that our readers lack our own ability to concentrate and that our readers have a short attention span, and that our readers sometimes have that cynicism which is the occupational hazard of our trade, that cynicism born of a daily routine.

[00:06:31]
I wish our rights were portable or, indeed, potable, as some cherished things that once belonged to W.C. Fields. In the mid-1930s, Fields had done very well for himself and bought a new house in Bel Air. And he invited Groucho Marx over one day to show it to him. And he said, "It's a great house, great house, Groucho. You've got to see it, wait till you see the attic." "The attic? Why do you want me to see the attic?" He said, "Come on up, come on up."

So Groucho Marx goes up to the attic and Fields shows him, as far as the eye can see, cases and cases of whiskey, gin, vodka, other spirits. He says, "Isn't this great, Groucho?" And Marx says, "But Bill, why do you have all this here? Prohibition is dead. Why do you have all these things?" Fields says, "Yeah, Prohibition is dead, huh? Well, it might come back."

[00:07:32]
Well, I sometimes think that the attempted prohibition of First Amendment, the "beat the press" syndrome that we endured several decades ago, might come back. The tension between authority and the press is as old as this republic, certainly. My favorite writer on this subject was our third president, Thomas Jefferson. He's my favorite because he had a lot to complain about. Probably the most gossiped-about public figure in our history. If the current day politicians think they have a bad time of it in the press, they should sometimes examine how Jefferson was treated.

As he once said, "Every shaft of calumny which malice and falsehood could form has come from the press toward me." And yet, he just said a few years later, after concluding his term in office, he said of this tendency of the press to gossip and to trivialize, he said, "It is, however, an evil for which there is no remedy. Our liberty depends on the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost."

[00:08:50]
Every technological innovation has brought the press and its rights into conflict with authority. The biggest news story in the early days of the republic was the death of General Washington in 1799. The news took 11 days to get to Boston; 13 days to get to Concord, New Hampshire; 19 days to get to the Ohio Territory; 24 days to get to Kentucky. Every technological innovation is a boon for readers, viewers, but sometimes it threatens politicians and the ones who complain about it frequently are the weaker politicians.

Take James Buchanan, please. In the 1850s, he wrote to James Gordon Bennett, who was one of the entrepreneurs of the penny press, he said, "I do not know whether the great commercial and social advantages of the telegraph are not counterbalanced by its political evils. No one can judge of this as well as myself. The public mind throughout the interior is kept in a constant state of excitement by what are called telegrams. They are short and spicy and can easily be inserted in the country newspapers." I thought of that when I heard Spiro T. Agnew attack the press in 1969. It's nothing new.

[00:10:18]
Our current President [Ronald Reagan] is the most telegenic, most photogenic, most skilled communicator, ever, in the White House. And yet, I think now he is having his troubles, not just as a lame duck, but in wrestling with the truth itself. Let me just read you something he said recently. Out of old habit, I used to cover the White House when I lived in Washington, the weekly compilation of presidential documents, available from your Government Printing Office for a reasonable price. I get it every week and out of habit read it, just to see what the President said. You can check with it about a week later, two weeks later.

[00:11:03]
October 28, 1986, in Columbus, Georgia, at a rally for Senator Mack Mattingly, the President said, "You know, America used to wear a kick-me sign around its neck. We threw that sign away and now it reads 'don't tread on me.' Today, every nickel-and-dime dictator around the world knows that if he tangles with the United States of America, he will have to pay a price." Well, the President said that, and he said it in Columbus, Georgia, Birmingham, Alabama, Rapid City, North Dakota, Charlotte, North Carolina – almost word for word – Evansville, Indiana, Reno, Nevada, Seattle, Spokane, Los Angeles and Colorado Springs.

And in every one of those places he said, "Please vote Republican," and the voters declined to do so. Perhaps the voters knew something, that he didn't really believe everything he said. Or maybe he did believe it because when the President said that, he had already signed an executive order that was far from forcing any nickel-and-dime dictator to pay a price; the nickel-and-dime dictator was about to be rewarded with a cache of arms.

[00:12:23]
In trying to examine what is forcing the President into this attitude of uncharacteristically blaming the press – and I say that it's uncharacteristic, he doesn't usually – I really think now it's becoming clear that there's a military influence upon the President. Now, let's be clear. From my own limited and unheroic service as an enlisted man, I can assure you that the professional military are not the problem in this country. The professional military have been called upon from time to time to clean up the mess of civilians. The war in Vietnam had more to do with what went on at Harvard and MIT than what went on in the Pentagon.

[00:13:04]
But having said that, I do notice that despite President Reagan's genial attitude towards the press, I'm not so sure it's shared by Admiral Poindexter, Colonel McFarlane, and Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North. Because their mission is antithetical to a free society, for their mission depends on extra-legal, unconstitutional, secretive methods. Now, there's nothing wrong with secrecy and diplomacy; we don't want to see negotiations on television. But when you have something like an enormously illegal act being conducted, of course it needs to be secret. And secrecy– when

we're examining the drug epidemic in America, someone ought to take a look at secrecy as a drug. Because secrecy to cover illegal actions begins with, well, something that you can prescribe as necessary; then it leads to recreational use; and pretty soon the patient is hooked on it. And excessive secrecy, I think, is as harmful to the democratic politic as any crack, smack or heroin is.

[00:14:21]
Again, the sheer size of the military budget is a factor in President Reagan's credibility problems right now. He said it was *only* a planeload. Has anyone ever seen a C-5A? It's as long as a city block; it can hold 100 tons. Again, this is not all President Reagan's fault. The attitude towards the military budget that creates the capacity for mischief was started by presidents long ago. Jimmy Carter always shocked me when he promised the NATO partners to spend three percent more than whatever the budget was. We're coming to the point it's not how you spend it or what you spend it on, it's how much.

Again, this reminds me of W.C. Fields. Fields walked into the Black Pussycat Café in Lompoc, California, one morning, and says to the bartender, "Say, was I in here last night? Did I spend a $20 bill?" Bartender, "No." He says, "Boy, is that a load off my mind! I thought I'd lost it." Well, the Pentagon, like W.C. Fields, feels as long as you spent it, that's what counts. It doesn't matter what or how.

[00:15:47]
The rights of the press throughout history have been well taken care of. Let me illustrate it by telling you about somebody called Elijah Parish Lovejoy. He was a graduate of Colby College in Maine, Class of 1826. And he wanted to become a newspaperman and he moved to St. Louis and started a paper. And he was an abolitionist, and because of the hot and heavy activity involving the slave trade in the Border States, his views were unacceptable and his press was thrown into the Mississippi River, and so was he.

He moved across the river to the free state of Illinois, to Alton, where he thought he could write without fear, and he got his press in Alton. And again, his press was burnt and he was beaten up.

He tried one more time. But on the night of November 7, 1837, a mob attacked his newspaper office, and he and some friends tried to fight back. But the mob set fire to the building and killed Elijah Parish Lovejoy.

[00:16:58]
Now, because of this record, his alma mater, Colby College, every year gives an award named after Elijah Parish Lovejoy. And during the 1950s, when this award was begun, it was pretty easy; you could give this award for courage and dedication and craftsmanship to various Southern editors who have fought heroically against all odds. But throughout the '60s and '70s, and now into the '80s, it's not so easy to give an award for courage in journalism because it doesn't take much courage to practice journalism. Our job has gotten a lot easier. I know because I'm on the selection committee. And when we choose it, we always say the best we can do is somebody who goes against the grain.

[00:17:48]
I look at the Ford Hall Forum tonight and I am filled, of course, with fondness and nostalgia because about 25 years ago I used to come to cover Ford Hall Forum events. It was at Jordan Hall, down the street, then; Judge Reuben Lurie would introduce Averell Harriman or J.K. Galbraith or Ayn Rand. I was always interested in Ayn Rand, but I was more interested in the audience for Ayn Rand; I thought they were fascinating. Those people who worry about the self-centered yuppies today should have seen those folks. [laughter]

[00:18:25]
Not only was the Ford Hall Forum intellectually nourishing and stimulating, but it was also cozy and warm and safe from an outside assignment. Whoever got that magic white envelope that had the Ford Hall Forum assignment was less likely to be covering a three-alarm fire at a Chelsea warehouse, or being dispatched to a living room and trying to cajole some grieving parents to surrender the only photograph of their slain or mangled teenager. These sort of barbaric practices were what the American newspaper business was all about 25 years ago. It was much more competitive, and what it competed in was private grief, not public policy.

[00:19:13]
When I started angling for Ford Hall Forum assignments, there were seven newspapers in Boston. There were nine in New York City. And what has happened since then is that the American newspaper business has had its shakeout, as they say on Wall Street. In the process, of course, American newspapers missed one of the great stories, the greatest mass migration in human history, of Americans to the suburbs. Americans, and therefore readers, and therefore are not too many afternoon papers left.

[00:19:48]
But newspapers have survived now; I don't know whether information is powerful or not, but it sure is profitable. Newspapers are now more, better bottom-line-oriented than television networks. NBC's worried about moving to New Jersey. ABC's new owners have taken away their limousines. And CBS is a bit of a mess. When a paper comes to the position of being sort of the only game in town, which the other media, electronic media, depend on, we have certain obligations. And I'm not so sure we fulfill them.

[00:20:26]
My responsibility every day is the editorial page and the op-ed page of the *Boston Globe*. Since the news side has to worry more about accuracy and fairness, that doesn't mean that we don't worry about them, but I think that the problem with editorials sometimes is lack of clarity. I keep on drumming into the writers, I say, "Two rules. Ideology is negotiable, but these rules are not – one, be clear; two, make a point." Our motto is, better to offend a million readers than to confuse one. I don't want people scratching their heads saying, "What are you guys saying?"

[00:21:11]
I remember someone who was once interviewed for a job on the *New York Times*, and one of the top editors said, "Now, do you read the *New York Times?"* "Oh, yes." "What's your favorite section?" And she said, "Well, I like the corrections." [laughter] She didn't get the job. The corrections are part of our daily life and we're not proud of them, but we do print them as an obligation. I think if we extended that, we'd have probably fewer problems with litigation, although I am quite all too familiar with the use of the libel suit as a political platform. I wish our

judiciary were more aware of that and would throw some of those ridiculous libel suits out. But it's our responsibility to be fair and accurate.

[00:21:57]
One great defect and one place where I think my business is not keeping up its responsibilities is in the coverage of American politics. I like covering American politics. I find it fascinating. I think that newspapers, by and large, disserve the readers by assuming that the readers are as cynical as we are about the contest and are in a bloody hurry to get it over with. That is the addiction to polling which we have. Every year at the *Boston Globe* we take a survey: Should we poll again next year? And every year I vote against it, and every year I lose.

[00:22:38]
I've covered a lot of politicians. I know what kind of questions they love – How's your farm support. "No problem." What's your labor support in Contra Costa County? "Oh, I've got that." How's your fundraising? "Oh, they're ready for that." Politicians do not like the questions of, Why are you running? What difference does it make if you are elected? What would be the first thing you'd do if you were in office? What would be the first bill you'd veto?

[00:23:10]
Now, we have to be scrupulous in our business in giving all of these politicians their own due. They could filibuster those questions, but I think that would show the readers a lot, too. But we've become addicted to the horse race because the politicians are addicted to the horse race. And they are because of the polls. And therefore, to be fair to the poor guys lagging behind in the polls, we have to give them a slide rule measure of how much news, of political news. Well, I think we ought to take the slide rule out and use it differently next time. I think we ought to say, How many horse race inches have we given the poor readers? And how much substance? If we try it differently, we might do better.

[00:23:53]
Well, my business, in the hydraulics of human nature, it is seasonal. Politicians are up, the press is down. We're never going to be beloved figures. Many people are influenced to get into this

business by a great moment in the newspapers because it was, of course, a terrific movie, as was almost a documentary is. Two newspapermen go after a corrupt regime, bring down the government, and therefore this movie and two famous movie stars, influenced a lot of people. Of course, I'm referring to Pat O'Brien and Adolphe Menjo in *The Front Page* in 1931. [laughter] This is cyclical.

[00:24:40]
Like Hildy Johnson and Water Burns, whom they portrayed, another great newspaperman from Chicago was Finley Peter Dunne, who had a character named Mr. Dooley, who wrote in dialect because in the turn of the century, it was the only he could get away with saying outrageous things with a Roscommon brogue. So Mr. Dooley said [in Irish brogue:], "Ah, the newspaper does everything for us. It runs the police force and the banks. It commands the militia, controls the legislature; baptizes the young, marries the foolish; comforts the afflicted, afflicts the comfortable; buries the dead and roasts them afterwards."

[00:25:20]
Comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. Well, that's the phrase I like. If the American press would do more comforting of the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable, we'd meet our rights and earn our responsibilities.

Thank you. [applause]

ARTHUR MILLER: Thank you, Mr. Nolan. Our second speaker is David R. Gergen, who joined *US News and World Report* in January of '85 as a contributing columnist. In September of that year, he became managing editor with responsibility for directing coverage of domestic and foreign news. And in March of this year, he was named editor.

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Mr. Gergen is a veteran of three White Houses, serving most recently as communications director for President Reagan, from '81 through the end of '83. He left in January of '84 to become a fellow at the John F. Kennedy School at Harvard and at the American Enterprise

Institute in Washington, where he had been a resident fellow in the '70s. His breeding also includes a degree from Yale University, and believe it or not in 1967, a degree from the Harvard Law School, having wisely escaped that institution before I arrived.

David R. Gergen. [applause]

DAVID GERGEN: Thank you very much, Professor Miller. There are some who say that when I got into journalism I found honest work at last. Nonetheless, where I come from, back in North Carolina – the Harvard Law School, some may wonder why I wandered away from it – back home in North Carolina, they say it takes three years to go to the Harvard Law School and ten years to get over it.

[00:27:23]
Nonetheless, I am delighted to be here. This is a very distinguished forum. I'm delighted to join Marty Nolan on this forum. I've been reading his editorials in the *Boston Globe* for a long time. At least I know where one edge of the argument is, and it is often the cutting edge, I must say. But nonetheless it's good to see him again. Marty, as often his fashion, has, I think, presented a wonderfully panoramic view of issues that concern the press. And rather than cover some of that same ground – I certainly couldn't do it as well as he has already – I'd like to cut off a slice of that and look a little more closely at an issue or issues that are very much current this evening. And they concern United States foreign policy, with particular reference, I hope, to the press.

[00:28:15]
What's been interesting about foreign policy, particularly in the Reagan years, is the degree to which the focus has shifted away from NATO issues and frequently away from arms control issues to what's called low intensity conflict. That's the latest code phrase one hears in Washington; there are all sorts of conferences that are held on that issue. And time and time again one hears speakers from within the administration, and in fact elsewhere, who say that the most important series of issues that we as Americans are going to face in coming years are not keeping the peace with the Soviets in terms of a strategic peace, a nuclear peace. That we think we have made a lot of progress on; after all we've done that for 40 years. The most important

issues we face are other kinds of conflicts, what they call low intensity conflicts, which mainly are the struggle against terrorism and also the struggle in third world countries against adventurism, Marxist advances as the Reaganites like to call them. But in any event, where the US is so frequently challenged or its friends are challenged. And it's here that much of the energy, certainly a lot of the ideological passion in Washington, is now centered.

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Over the last six years, we have seen a concerted effort by the Reagan administration to counter—or perceived to have been made by the Soviets during the '60s and '70s, particularly during the '70s. There were some nine countries around the world where the Marxist governments took power in the 1970s. They're scattered around and they run from Nicaragua to Afghanistan and elsewhere. But in each of those countries, what's remarkable today is that under the, quote, Reagan Doctrine, we, the United States, are assertively challenging the power of the groups that came into those governments. And we're actively supporting, in one country after another, with arms or with money, often covertly, the authority of those countries. We're trying to prevent them from consolidating their power. And in many other countries, we, the United States, are actively trying to win over democratic forces.

[00:30:43]
I read in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* today, as a follow-up to Iran, that since 1981, President Reagan has approved some 50 covert actions in his administration. Activities that were undertaken the CIA or by others – in some cases by the National Security Council staff – to secretly influence the course of events in other countries. This is very much at the center of much of American foreign policy today. And it does often present, this kind of activity often presents acute difficulties for the executive branch. Not only within the executive branch, but also with our allies, with the Congress, with the press, and ultimately with the public. We've seen this just most recently in the Iranian question, what is rapidly becoming a fiasco over Iran. We certainly saw it in the disinformation issue that arose with regard to Libya. And we've also seen it certainly in the secret war in Nicaragua in support of the Contras.

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Now, I want to talk for a moment about the kind of problems and the challenges that are seen within the White House and by those within the executive branch as they look out and try to conduct these kind of policies. I think it's important to understand the mindset that's at work here to understand why we are seeing the events in Iran unravel as they are.

[00:32:10]
To most folks around the President, the world appears to be highly volatile. It is one in which the Soviets, despite their economic problems, are continuing their adventurism. There is a very widespread belief that Mr. Gorbachev is not significantly different from his predecessors, that he is in fact as adventuristic as they have been, and he is as interested in destabilizing regions of the world as they have been. The amount of shipments, for instance, going to Nicaragua are higher this year than they have ever been before. And the Soviets are lending a lot of support to that. And there are other places in the world, as you look around, and Afghanistan happens to be one of them in which the Soviets seem to be increasing their pressures and not decreasing them.

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There is a feeling also among those who surround the President that if the United States only has sufficient political will, it can at least hold this adventurism in check and perhaps even can roll it back – by the perspective and the perspective of those around the President.

In those nine nations that the Marxists took over in the 1970s, in every one of those countries the group that has come in to power has failed to consolidate its power because of the pressure that is coming from outside with a lot of US sponsorship. There's no better example of that than Nicaragua. The Sandinistas are having a difficult time governing. That does not mean the Contras are a popular force; they're not. But the Sandinistas are also having difficulty governing. And in the minds of the Reaganites, that's a positive step forward; at least the Sandinistas are not as effective as they were in the minds of the Reaganites at destabilizing places like El Salvador.

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More than that, there is a view that the use of force against terrorism has succeeded. No better example of that than Libya where Gaddafi was certainly thrown off stride, if he hasn't become totally quiescent, since we hit him.

[00:34:12]
No new nations have fallen under Marxist rule since the Reagan Doctrine went into effect; that's one of the proudest claims that the President has. Democratization has taken hold in some countries in South America; we have more democracies in South America than we've had in a long, long time. And there are even faint signs of progress in some parts of Africa outside southern Africa. Southern Africa is a different matter. So within the mindset of the Reaganites, if the United States simply has the political will and it is willing to persevere, we can, in fact, may have a new containment policy that has chances of success.

[00:34:52]
But to pursue these policies, it's the view of those who are in power today that the United States, the executive branch in Washington has almost acted in isolation, that it's forced by the world in which it finds itself to act in secrecy, to act almost alone. As the Reaganites look out around the world and beyond our shores, we find a NATO alliance that is predominantly focusing on NATO and European issues. There is no appetite within the alliance for dealing with some of these third world problems. And not one of the nine nations where the Marxists have gained these footholds are we finding support from the allies for the Reagan Doctrine. There is some quiet support in Afghanistan from, as I say, the West Germans who are sending money into Pakistan, which may be being used to support the resistance movement in Afghanistan, but, by and large, as the Reaganites see it, we're not getting a lot of support from NATO and we're also not getting a lot of support from NATO in our pre-Iran days when we went out and asked for their help against terrorism. The French, for instance, were clearly willing to be much more accommodating toward terrorist states than we were. And by French lights, they've made some progress with that.

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But the main point is, as the US looks around, it doesn't find a lot of help out there, and feels it, again, has to go toward unilateralism as opposed to what the Europeans call multilateralism.

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Domestically, as the Reagan administration looks out, it finds it has a series of additional problems. We have an ambivalent public. The consensus we had in this country on foreign policy was basically shattered by Vietnam. It has not come back again. And there is very little appetite in the American public for sustained covert, or even overt military actions by the United States. There is very little support in this country for the United States doing anything which may draw our forces into Nicaragua. Most people in the public just simply don't want to commit US military forces, and they'd rather not, in fact, hear a lot of about it, if truth be known. There's not a huge appetite out there to even know all the facts. There's almost a sense one gets around the country that if Reagan needs to do a few things quietly, let him go ahead with it, just don't tell me about it, and don't get our boys involved. I think that's an unfortunate feeling, but you find it.

[00:37:22]
But there is a widespread feeling in the country that if we're going to get into a military conflict, let's make it quick, let's make it decisive. Let's win and get out. But let's not have anything which requires a big, sustained effort; anything close to Vietnam. Granada was a wonderful success – a surgical war, nobody saw it on television, we didn't see any bloodshed; we just knew we got those kids home from that medical school. It looked like a pretty good victory and Reagan was very, very popular. That kind of victory you can get away with, but the long, sustained effort doesn't seem to wash with the public. And the Reagan administration knows that.

[00:37:53]
Beyond that, there's a question of Congress; there's a very divided Congress. It has been true for a number of years that no single President can count on support from Congress the way an Eisenhower could or the way even Kennedy could in some foreign policy situations, because the nature of Congress has changed. We no longer have the seniority system in Congress. We have 535 fiefdoms up there. As Ted Sorensen has written, when you look at the Congress, it's often as if there are 535 ants on a log in a swirling stream with each ant thinking he's in charge.

[00:38:31]

And beyond that, with this division, the Congress has also demanded much more micromanagement of foreign policy. They demand to be involved. They demand to be able to help make some of the decisions. And they're demanding oversight of covert activities. But with this demand for authority has gone – from the point of the Reaganites, and I must say I think there's a persuasive case to be made for this – with this demand for authority is an unwillingness to provide much responsibility. It is notoriously true that when the members of Congress are brought in to the picture on covert activities that they leak like a sieve; they leak much worse than the executive branch. It's very, very hard for any President – Reagan or anybody else – to go up to Capitol Hill and say, "I'd like to talk to you about something which is very important to our national security. Here's what we're planning to do. I'd like to have you as part of this, be on board with this." It's very hard to keep a secret in that group. And the Reagan people, as a result, have been driven back on themselves when they carry out covert activities.

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And finally, there is this concern – I think it's carried to excess – within the Reagan administration about the press. It is true that the American press is absolutely fascinated by clandestine activities, especially on the international front; those are juicy stories. Iran, from the point of view of anybody who's a journalist, is a wonderfully interesting story. It involves all sorts of interests – there are arms shifting back and forth, there are not only diplomats but there may be cakes and there may be keys and Bibles, and who knows what's going on. But if you're half a journalist, you're going to dive right in to that story because it offers so many interesting possibilities. And that's why it's going to be a rolling story for some time to come.

[00:40:21]

But in an age of hot journalistic competition – and it's extremely competitive, even though we have fewer newspapers, sadly, in cities like Boston – it is extremely competitive in the journalistic world today. It is almost a no-holds-barred effort to get at facts, as a result of which there's a great deal of speculation, there's a lot of jumping to conclusions. I think as well there's a glamorization of terrorism. We have gone way overboard sometimes in these terrorist cases,

particularly on the networks, and giving up, essentially, time and a lot of attention to the terrorists to present their demands. And they have won a lot of what they've sought simply for their cases by being able to command American television time.

[00:41:04]
The bottom line for the Reagan administration is, looking at all of that, there's a lot of paranoia about the press. There's a feeling that, particularly in the military, but it's also– and there are a lot of military people in the Reagan administration at the top, as Marty has pointed out. But there's a widespread feeling that you can't trust the press and that you'd better keep things away from them. All of this, all of these forces – lack of support with the allies, divided public, divided Congress, a press that is highly aggressive, in a world which is volatile, with an administration that wants to conduct essentially an assertive foreign policy and wants to do it in a way which really ties up the Soviets – has driven them more and more, I think, into a highly secretive mode and one in which covert activity has become a preferred way of doing business frequently.

[00:41:58]
And I think it has become increasingly dangerous, the conduct, the successful conduct of American foreign policy. We've seen this nowhere more so than what we've been learning over the last few weeks about Iran. Now, it does seem to me on Iran that the Reagan administration began essentially in 1981 or so believing that it would like to strengthen its contacts and its ties with the less radical elements – one can hardly call them moderate – in Iran in the belief that one day the Ayatollah would not be around, that we, the United States, like Israel and others, would like to stop the Soviets from coming into authority in Iran. And we had every reason to want to moderate their policies. That became even more so as they engaged in the war with Iraq because we have a very strong interest in not seeing that war spill over into the Persian Gulf.

I don't think they got very far in the early days, but in 1985, when the Israelis came and said, "You've got an opportunity, if you deal with Iran, to possibly get your hostages back," I think something snapped in the administration. And that's when they said, "Let's go after it." I think you have to understand it was Reagan. I think he has – I don't want to call it a hang-up, but I think that Reagan has an extreme personal interest in the hostages, individual hostages. I think

that it's not well understood. My sense of Reagan, in working around him, is, he is sometimes not as persuaded. If you come to him and make an argument about the fact that we've got an underclass in this country and there's a large group of people who have this problem or that problem, he tends to see the solutions to those problems in the context of a free market, a capitalistic society opening up opportunities, rather than a welfare system. That's his mindset, that's his response.

[00:43:56]
But if you come and talk to him about an individual who is suffering, whether it be someone in the underclass, someone in Harlem, or if you talk about an American like Nick Daniloff in Moscow and of prison, or if you talk about a hostage, he relates very strongly and on a very personal basis to that. And he feels very strongly about doing something about it and personally intervening. And I think that had an awful lot to do with our policies and what we've been in engaged in in Iran recently.

[00:44:28]
In the last few days, some of his advisors have talked to us in the press and said, "Look, over the last couple of years, 60% of the time, at least, when we go in to present a national security or foreign policy briefing to him in the morning, one of the first questions he's got is, 'Have you heard anything new about the hostages?'" It has been a preoccupation of his for some time. And I think that once they heard they could do something maybe about the hostages, and also possibly strengthen ties with Iran, they decided to go in with this policy.

But the problem they ran into was, that given all the other circumstances and all the other forces out there, they decided to do it within a very tight circle of people, and to do it in extreme secrecy. And that's where they got themselves into a lot of trouble. Because the tight circle was not only with regard to Congress, but even within the administration. They decided to withhold it from a tremendous number of people. There was a distrust of the State Department. That's where a lot of the experts are, on Iranian issues, and there was a distrust of those people because they might not be sympathetic. So they withheld the information, they held them outside the consultations, they didn't get a lot of advice from those people you would normally turn to.

[00:45:38]
As far as anyone can tell, there were only three or four people in the whole government who knew about and approved what the President was doing. Mainly the President himself, his National Security Advisor, Admiral Poindexter, Donald Regan, and perhaps Bill Casey, the director of the CIA. Clearly, the Secretary of State had a lot of reservations about; the Secretary of Defense had a lot of reservations about it, and it's my intuition, not yet supported by a lot of facts, that Bud McFarlane had carried out some of this diplomacy, had a lot of reservations about sending arms into Iran.

[00:46:12]
But the net result is that because they had such a tight circle of people inside, they clearly didn't have the benefits of a lot of wisdom and expertise that does exist within the government – not a lot, but there's a fair amount – that exists about Iran. After all, there are a lot of folks in this country who dealt with Iran very, very closely in the late Carter years, and have an awful lot of experience knowing and being able to identify and say, "Hey, you can get suckered by these people very easily." That's what the Carter people kept on looking for, the moderates, and kept on saying, "We think we've finally identified some moderates who can do some good for us." And they continually got double-crossed by them.

[00:46:50]
Now, that history is very, very applicable to this situation. And yet, there wasn't an effort to reach out because it was held so tightly. And they also did it, of course, and acted in violation of public US policy. We do have, after all, a policy about not dealing with terrorist nations and, just recently, not long ago, we called Iran a terrorist nation, put them on the terrorist list. The President has called the Iranians Murder Incorporated, and we had a policy about not dealing with them. But we also had a policy about not sending arms to Iran. And we have completely, I think, undercut the position we had with our allies as we went to them on terrorism. We had the moral high ground for a long time, about saying, "You ought to come help us and work with us on terrorism," and that high ground is no longer available to us. Whatever they say, it's much more difficult for us now to go out to the allies and say, "Hey, give us some help."

[00:47:48]
I also think they have violated the spirit– I think the case is very arguable, and certainly we're going to hear from the Congress a lot more about this, that they may have violated the spirit, if not the letter, of the law with regard to covert activities. The law that Congress passed in the wake of Watergate, in the wake of a lot of other things that were going on in the '70s, in the latter part of the Carter administration, a law was passed that required the executive branch, whenever it carries out a covert activity, either to tell the Congress, a small number of people in the Congress, ahead of time that it was going to carry on that activity. Or if it couldn't call them up in the middle of the night because they had to do something quickly, then to tell them in a timely fashion that it had done these covert things.

The problem is, they didn't tell them about Iran ahead of time, and now they're arguing, in the Reagan administration, "Well, we told them in a timely fashion." The Congress said, "Timely fashion? You started doing this 11 months ago and you finally decided to tell us. And the only reason you told us was, it went public." So they've got a very serious problem on Capitol Hill.

[00:48:50]
The public explanations have been very cute. I think they've been technically accurate, but they have left– I'm going to move along here; I guess we're going to run out of time here soon. But the public explanations have left an awful lot to be desired because they've left so many questions unanswered. There's a huge question about what the Israelis have been up to, and we in the press can't get much information about that. And you can't complete this picture until you know what other arms sales or shipments that we, the United States, have condoned.

[00:49:21]
And finally, in Iran, and with this Iranian mission, they have greatly deepened their credibility gulf with the press. It wasn't the American press that leaked this story. It wasn't the American press that found this story. It was first leaked in Iran itself by the opposition to the moderates, the more radical factions, and then the story spilled over into Lebanon; a Syrian-backed magazine

put it out in Lebanon. And finally it broke in the United States press as it drifted over from Lebanon. It wasn't the American press that was responsible for this.

[00:49:56]
And yet, the administration came out swinging against the press for talking about it, for speculating about it. Even in the speech the President gave the other night, he attacked the press for what it had been saying about it. And yet, it was quite clear that the American press had damn little to do with it. It was simply trying to report on what was happening internationally in a story which a lot of people feel both the Congress and the public deserve to know more about.

[00:50:25]
But I think it's important to understand that the press has found this whole episode to be highly offensive. There has been this barrage against the press, and now you find a barrage of criticism of the administration by the press. The papers today are just full of criticism of the Reagan administration.

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Interestingly enough, I think one element that's driving some of these stories is that there is a personal distaste by some leading White House reporters for the National Security Advisor; they simply don't like the man, Admiral Poindexter, and they're going to go after him. And they're not going to let up very quickly.

[00:51:05]
And I think the question is, and I'll try to be brief on this, the question is now just how do we get out of Iran, how do we deal with Iran, but how do we, in fact, deal with this larger issue of covert action, of what I think is going to be a continuing pattern by the United States government after Reagan of trying to deal with terrorism overseas and trying to deal with a lot of these third world countries. We are, after all, going to have this situation where low intensity conflicts are with us for some years to come. And we now, I think, have to step back from Iran and say, How in fact can we conduct policy in a sensible way? Not only in the executive branch, but within the press?

I think it's, first of all, very, very important that this administration, and succeeding administrations, recognize the idea that you cannot successfully conduct foreign policy with this country in a closet. It cannot be done so covertly, so secretly that experts aren't brought in to the process of discussing it, and that Congress doesn't have some role in, in fact, blessing it.

[00:52:17]
I think there has to be a degree of accountability. And we have to accept the idea of accountability in a democratic society. If the accountability is not there, in fact, we have lost something that's very, I think, vital to what a democracy is all about. And it raises questions about whether the covert activity itself is worthwhile.

There has to be accountability within their own ranks, within the ranks of an administration. The National Security Council staff is not a proper arm for covert actions by the government. And there's going to be a lot of pressure in this coming year to cut the National Security Council staff out of this. That's not why the NSC was set up; it was set up to coordinate policy, not to carry out the kind of things that we've been seeing recently.

[00:53:04]
I think that we have to get away from the notion in the executive branch that if an issue is not terribly important, we have hundreds of people who submit memos on it, and a lot of people get involved in deciding the issue, but if it's really sensitive, we only have three or four people to decide it. That is an inverse way, it seems to me, to go about policymaking.

[00:53:27]
There has to be an accountability to Congress. I think we have to be willing to bring in a small number of members of Congress for consultation. Now, the administration is making the argument, "Well, we didn't bring in the Congress when Henry Kissinger went to China." That's true. And if McFarlane had gone to Iran on simply a diplomatic mission, there would have been no reason under the law or anywhere else where that had to be disclosed. There's a distinction between secret diplomacy and secret operations. Secret diplomacy, I think, is acceptable. But when you have secret operations which have a military aspect to them, then more is required.

There has to be an accountability to allies.

[00:54:10]
And finally, there has to be an accountability to the press. I think it's important that activities of the government be able to withstand scrutiny. And that's part of the responsibility of the press, to scrutinize issues as they come before us. In a parliamentary system, such as the British have, it's often the members of the parliament who subject a government to close questioning. We don't have that kind of system. And it's become a responsibility of the press to subject the government to close questioning. And I think it's the responsibility of government to be willing to take those close questions and those hard questions. And it forces the government, frankly, to think through what it's doing and ask itself, if this becomes public, can we live with it? And that's a question of whether they thought that through in Iran.

[00:55:03]
Now, one of the reasons – I must come back to this – one of the reasons that we want to have that kind of accountability is if the covert actions can in fact be undertaken without public scrutiny, without Congressional scrutiny, we are not going to be long before somebody decides to abuse that and start using international covert actions domestically. Because once you can start conducting, in effect, police activities overseas, it doesn't take very long before you say, Let's try a few at home. We've seen that before. And Marty Nolan perhaps can talk about that better than anyone else. But it is a constant danger. I don't think it's a danger with this administration, but I think it can be a danger with successors, unless we have an understanding about how we conduct covert activities in the world.

[00:55:51]
Secondly, I think – and this will take a lot longer to discuss – what worries me a great deal about our public life today is, there is not a lot of honesty in our public dialogue. And it's not simply a matter of what the executive branch is up to. We have become much more interested as a society in appearances than in substance. We're much more interested in how something looks than what it really means. And there's frequently an ethic that we find in business, in Congress, elsewhere

that what's right is what you can get away with. I think it's partly a result of the television age, but it's certainly true that we've seen it increasingly in our public life.

[00:56:42]
And as I say, it is not restricted to the executive branch. Just to look back upon what the Congress recently did on the budget, when it passed this new budget, saying it had gotten the deficit down to $155 billion. There is a lot of cheating that went on in that deficit. Just a brief example: The end of the fiscal year 1987, the government, it was a payday, a military payday. It cost $2 billion, military payday. That was what was scheduled for '87. So what did they do? They took the military payday and they moved it into 1988. And they saved $2 billion on the deficit. That was one of the big savings we got, by moving the military payday 24 hours. And that's when we say, "Wow, look at all the savings. Look at how courageous we are." There's an awful lot of that that goes on in our public life today. And there's too much sophistry.

[00:57:34]
I would think, too, that there is a responsibility on the Congress. If we're going to conduct covert activities as a nation, as we must, I think the Congress has to show much more self-discipline and be willing to discipline its members when they do leak. After all, the reason the administration is not bringing them in so frequently is because they can't keep a secret. Well, the Congress has got to have the guts to say to itself, "If we want to be part of the team, we've got to play like a team and not simply use it for partisan purposes."

[00:58:02]
Finally, I would like to mention the press again and conclude on this note. I think that it is a responsibility of the press to ask tough questions – to ask a lot of tough questions about Iran, about disinformation, about Nicaragua, and a lot of these other activities. But I think it's also our responsibility to curb some of the excesses that we so often see in the American press. I think we too much glamorize, as I mentioned before, terrorism. I think we trivialize too many issues. I think we're willing to accept appearances sometimes instead of reality. I think that's particularly true in the way we cover politics. I think Marty was making very good points on that. I think we

rush to judgment too often. We're not willing to let all the facts or get the facts; we simply like to jump to conclusions.

[00:58:48]
I think the American press has to recognize there are legitimate national security needs. The press is going to soon have a satellite internationally that we can look on troop movements and ship movements and everything like that. That's going to raise a lot of security questions that I think we ought to be willing to face up to as members of the press and talk seriously about. The United States not only has serious national security needs, it has serious national security interests. I've been curious; since this Iran thing has broken, there have been very few newspapers in this country which have really done, I think, an appropriate job talking about why Iran is important to us as a national security matter. Yes, the shipment of arms had a lot of problems with it, but the basic motivation of trying to strengthen our ties with Iran made a lot of sense. But there are very, very few news organizations which have talked about that. They've simply jumped on all the problems.

[00:59:47]
And finally, I think that there is a tendency in the press, still, to recognize the failures of government and the failings of a lot of the individuals we have in positions of authority, not only in government, but in a lot of other institutions and, too frequently, to give them short shrift on their successes. What I think is needed, as we approach what is a highly volatile world, is more balance, more understanding, and a willingness, whether the next administration be Democratic or Republican, a willingness to understand that ultimately we're all in this together.

Thank you very much. [applause]

ARTHUR MILLER: Thank you, David. It's now time for questions from the audience. I will be repeating the questions, to make sure that people in the hall can hear, and for the radio audience. Please keep the questions brief. And questions, not statements. Sir?

QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE: [off mic]

ARTHUR MILLER: The question is whether the press has a responsibility to maintain the English language at a reasonably high level. Mr. Nolan?

[01:01:42]

MARTIN NOLAN: Well, let me tell you an incident that took place during a local news story of some major importance after the seventh game of the World Series. The *Globe* had in the headline, on page one, the word Mudville. And we received about 40, 45 telephone calls; people outraged – "What is this Mudville stuff?" Well, the reporter did not say, "As in the famous poem 'Casey at the Bat,'" and so forth. And mind you, the poem was originally about Boston. Mr. Thayer, who wrote it, wrote it about the Boston Nine that day, and then it became sort of conglomerated into Mudville. And we were talking about this and I said, "What is the cure for this?" I mean, we can't educate people. I mean, suppose you put Adam and Eve in the paper; they say "who are they?" "Who's this Eisenhower guy you're always talking about?" [laughter]

[01:02:41]

Lester Maddox used to say about the Georgia prisons, "What we need is a better class of prisoners." I guess we need a better class of readers. But I think what we should never do though is talk down and presume that, "We want to make sure this news story isn't any longer than an MTV commercial," or something. So I'm sure the magazines do a much better job at doing things at length.

[01:03:06]

DAVID GERGEN: One of my favorite items in the American press is the last item on the editorial page of the *Boston Globe*, when you all do talk about language in a very interesting way. I think a major feeling in the press is not simply talking down, which I think we do too often, but in fact not providing context. And I think that's particularly true in television, that everything is just sort of the quick headline, "here's what happened today," but there's no background to it, there's no real sense. And any serious publication, I think, has to give a lot more attention to sort of putting things in context and letting people catch up with the world. I mean, after all, if war breaks out in a place like Pakistan, there are not many people who know

much about that. And I think you have to give a lot of stories early on to let people sort of catch up with what Pakistan is all about. And I think we have to give more space to that than we do.

ARTHUR MILLER: Yes, sir?

[01:04:05]

QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE: My question is for Mr. Nolan, and it has to do with the coverage which the *Globe* gave to the last two sessions of the Ford Hall Forum. I'm sure you have heard the suggestion that it's difficult– that the liberal bias of the *Globe* makes it difficult to tell the difference between news columns and the editorial page. And the report of last Sunday's session where Senator Kerry was criticizing the Contras and Bernard Aronson was defending the Contras. Now, this story had 98 lines and it starts out with a three-line headline, "Kerry Says Contras are the Creation of the US Government." Then it proceeds to give 37 lines concerning what Senator Kerry had to say. Then 30 lines of what Mr. Aronson had to say. Then it goes with eight lines giving a rebuttal to Kerry of Mr. Aronson's comments. But then it gives no rebuttal to Mr. Aronson. The net result is, there are 47 lines for Mr. Kerry's comments, 30 lines for his opponent. And then it ends with two lines quoting Senator Kerry. Now, if you go further–

ARTHUR MILLER: How about a question?

[01:05:29]

QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE: The question is, how do you defend this type of coverage? And this quick point has to do with the coverage of Reverend Robertson on Thursday evening at Faneuil Hall. I carefully scanned the *Globe*. I could not find a single word concerning that particular session. I did find about an eight-inch column in your competitor.

[01:05:56]

ARTHUR MILLER: The question is twofold, as I understand it. First, there seems to be a question as to the adequacy of covering the Ford Hall Forum. And second, there seems to be a question as to the liberal bias of the *Boston Globe*.

MARTIN NOLAN: Well, okay, let's see. The Senator Kerry/Aronson one, it sounded like an interesting game you were describing, it sounded like a close contest as to who got more lines. I don't really care, generally. I think that we don't really do every story with a slide rule and say, Well, all right, he's getting so many and he's getting so many. If somebody's got something more interesting or compelling to say, then that person will get more quotes in the paper.

[01:06:37]
On your second point, it was in my edition, a picture of the Reverend Robertson, the story. I forget who wrote it, but I remember it was on the back page of the first section of my *Globe*.

QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE: [off mic]

[01:06:54]
MARTIN NOLAN: Well, it was in there. I don't know what the liberal bias was about the Reverend Robertson. Just to make clear what I think: there's no liberal bias in the news coverage of the *Boston Globe*. There's a liberal bias on the editorial page, I've heard that rumor; that's true. But there is not in the news column.

ARTHUR MILLER: Mr. Gergen?

DAVID GERGEN: I think I'll stay out of that. [laughter]

ARTHUR MILLER: You're taking the safe ground, eh? Yes, sir?

QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE: [off mic]

ARTHUR MILLER: A question about the obligation of at least the print media in terms of the illiteracy rate in the United States. Mr. Nolan?

[01:08:16]

MARTIN NOLAN: Well, I know it's of deep concern. The *Globe* tries to help and sponsor libraries and newspaper-in-the-classroom type of things. We can't go much beyond the educational system. I know the *Globe* works carefully. We have a learning page every Sunday and there's frequently stories about literacy. I don't know what newspapers themselves can do. I know it's a problem. I think it's one reason we probably bore people and editorialize about the Boston school system a lot, because that's the future. If the kids can't read, they'll never get ahead.

[01:08:57]

DAVID GERGEN: Illiteracy is a serious social ill in this country, and I think it's important that the press do what it can, as it does on some other social ills, as Marty said, about afflicting the comfortable. But nonetheless, I don't think it's something we ought to change our writing for in order to appeal to people who can't read very well. If anything, I think we ought to lift the level of writing sophistication in a lot of our publications because I think we have several different kinds of problems in this country, but one of them is that people who are opinion makers and shapers in this country simply do not understand enough about the world around them. We are not as well educated about the Japanese as they are about us. And that is also a problem. And I think that's something that we in the press can do something more about, by lifting the level of sophistication.

ARTHUR MILLER: As you were talking, the perverse thought crossed my mind that the only people with a vested interest in the growth in illiteracy in this country would be television. [laughter] Yes, ma'am?

QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE: [off mic]

ARTHUR MILLER: The question is, how does President Reagan get his information? Mr. Gergen?

[01:10:23]

DAVID GERGEN: I must confess, he is not an avid reader of the *Boston Globe*, except perhaps during the World Series. I think all of us know that he is not a great reader. [laughter] He does read the *Post* and the *Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. He keeps up with the magazines. He also keeps up with television; he does see the evening news. It's interesting, since the Congressional sessions have been carried on television, I think he probably knows more about what's going on in the Congressional debates than any of our recent Presidents, simply because he likes to tune in and even call some of them up in the cloakrooms.

And he gets a lot of briefing material; every day he has a stack of material that comes in from the CIA and from others about the nature of things that are going on in the world. But he is also a very highly verbal man. He's like some of the other Presidents we've had; a lot of information comes verbally.

[01:11:31]
In terms of the kind of complicated issues on Iran, I think there are dangers if in fact you don't expand that level of information base because, like most Americans, he doesn't read a lot about– you don't see a lot in our daily press about Iran. That's when you need the experts to come in.

ARTHUR MILLER: David, you said he reads the *Post*. Is that the *Washington Post* or the *New York Post*?

DAVID GERGEN: Sorry, the *Washington Post*. And also the *Washington Times*, I must say, because that is– I think many of you are familiar with that; that has become a newspaper that has a wide conservative circulation in Washington.

[01:12:10]
MARTIN NOLAN: I know he reads fiction, too. He read *The Hunt for Red October*. And I was wondering last week whether he read too much Robert Ludlum. [laughter]

QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE: [off mic]

ARTHUR MILLER: The question is, why wasn't there much follow-up on the resignation of Bernard Kalb?

[01:12:45]

DAVID GERGEN: Just briefly, I think the story, because he didn't resign immediately after– he resigned over the disinformation memorandum and the stories about that. He didn't resign quickly. But more importantly, he resigned just on the eve of the Iceland summit, and the focus shifted. It was one of those kind of stories that the press moves on to the next event, and that's why it didn't get a lot of attention.

QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE: [off mic]

[01:13:17]

DAVID GERGEN: I think there is a real problem in the press about the roving spotlight, that we're one-issue-oriented, we tend to follow the latest fire. There's a lot of parachute journalism, that we simply follow whatever's out there, it's breaking fast. I don't think there's much continuity in the way we cover a lot of particularly international events. And I think it's one of the reasons a lot of Americans have trouble making sense of the world.

ARTHUR MILLER: Mr. Nolan, observations about disinformation, the roving spotlight or Bernard Kalb?

[01:13:45]

MARTIN NOLAN: Well, I think there'll be one of those where-are-they-now items about Bernie Kalb. And again, it's the nature of the job, too. It's an assistant secretary; those guys sort of come and go. Not to denigrate his office, but he's a spokesman and they do– Gerry Ford's press secretary resigned, but not much is made of it. If the Secretary of State resigns, which may happen, I think you'll see a lot of follow-up on that.

QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE: [off mic]

ARTHUR MILLER: The question is, Mr. Reagan's judicial appointments and what impact they may have on freedom of the press. Mr. Gergen?

[01:14:57]

DAVID GERGEN: It's a good question. I'm not sure anybody really knows the answer to that. I would not automatically assume that because it's a Reagan conservative or a Reagan-chosen conservative who gets on the court that that means we're going to see restrictions on the free press. For instance, Robert Bork, who was on the court of appeals in Washington, and was often mentioned, and may still be the next appointee, has written some notably favorable opinions, at least in the minds of some people in the press.

And I also think that with the control shifting to the Democrats in the Senate that the kinds of people who are going to be nominated now for the judiciary will be different. I don't think we're going to have any more [Daniel] Manions with the Democrats running the Judiciary Committee.

ARTHUR MILLER: Mr. Nolan?

[01:15:50]

MARTIN NOLAN: Well, I'm willing to take my chances with an intelligent judge, as Judge Scalia certainly is, and Rehnquist, than with people who may be well meaning, according to their previous decisions, but are not too bright. I'll take my chances if we have to– I've read some of Judge Scalia's opinions and I disagree with them, but I think he's the type of person who will grow in the office. Perhaps that's another way of saying what Mr. Dooley said, that whether the Constitution follows the flag or not, the Supreme Court follows the election returns. With a Democratic Senate, I think there is a greater spotlight. And with further judicial appointments, they will get more scrutiny.

ARTHUR MILLER: Just to follow up on this line, do either one of you see anything threatening happening in the courts at the present time in terms of freedom of the press?

[01:16:47]

MARTIN NOLAN: Oh, any judge, anywhere can come up with some wowser. But I think once it gets to a certain level, once it gets beyond the appeals court and it gets into– I've seen the Supreme Court argue and I'm impressed, even if I disagree with– the biggest one of my lifetime is the Pentagon papers. No idea how many Nixon appointees said, "Hey, we've got this, no problem; we're going to beat this rap." And when it came to the critical case of prior restraint, and whether in fact the government could have put a padlock on our presses and tell us not to publish something, the score was eight-zip. I was in San Clemente at the time and there were a lot of shocked people in the Nixon administration.

[01:17:37]
I have confidence in the judiciary. I think they have as great, or just as great a sense of what the right thing for the country is as anyone.

ARTHUR MILLER: Mr. Gergen?

[01:17:48]
DAVID GERGEN: I'm sometimes more scared by the lawyers than I am by the courts. I don't think there's a clear and present danger.

QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE: [off mic] [applause]

ARTHUR MILLER: Although I didn't hear a question mark, I'll turn it around. Why is the current President considered to be a great communicator?

[01:19:00]
DAVID GERGEN: I don't think there is any question in her mind. [laughter] Whether "great communicator" is appropriate or not, I do think that the man has demonstrated a fairly large capacity to persuade the American people that he is– well, what is persuasion? You can call it manipulation if you will. You can call it almost anything. But you can use a positive or a negative approach to that.

[01:19:33]

But the fact is that he is able to persuade a large number of Americans that he is acting in their best interests and he's an extraordinarily popular man. We haven't had a man this popular, even though people don't like a lot of his policies, since Dwight Eisenhower. And he's doing better than Ike in a lot of ways now, until the Iranian speech. In almost every instance one could see, when he gave a speech on television, opinion move in his direction. People came around to believe that what he was saying made sense. And that has not been true of our recent Presidents. It's been one of the great difficulties our recent Presidents have had, galvanizing opinion behind them.

[01:20:11]

I happen to think, whether you agree or disagree with the policies, that it's very important that our chief executives be able to persuade people of what they're about in order to govern. I think a real problem we've had in the Oval Office is a crippled presidency until recently. I think there's a danger we're going to get back into that. And I think communication skills happen to be one of the strengths that Reagan has. You may disagree with his policies, but the fact is, he's able to get on with a lot of them, and in a number of things he's made some progress.

[01:20:42]

MARTIN NOLAN: I'm happy to defend President Reagan. I do think he is really a great communicator in the sense of Theodore Roosevelt's description of the presidency as a bully pulpit, as a place to carry forth your ideas with strength, with conviction. He believes in lower taxes. He believes in a bigger defense budget. He believes these things sincerely. He's able to communicate them. I think, more importantly, his great skills at communication have strengthened the office. Not so long ago, liberal political scientists were saying the deadlock of democracy and we can never get anything done in Washington, and it's terrible, and nobody believes the presidency. And he has overcome this enormous credibility gap which began 21 years ago. And only, alas, very recently did he fail in his communication because he failed to trust people. He failed to trust all of us. He failed to trust George Shultz, Caspar Weinberger and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE: [off mic]

ARTHUR MILLER: The question is about journalistic decision-making. When the facts are sparse, what effect does competition have? Mr. Gergen?

[01:22:14]
DAVID GERGEN: It's a good question. It's one of the questions you face regularly because if you're on to something, you don't want to lose it. On the other hand, you sure as hell don't want to wind up with egg on your face because you do have a contract, you feel, with your readers and you want to maintain your credibility with them. Typically in that situation, you don't print until you know more about it, particularly if it's a highly sensitive story, if somebody's reputation is at stake, if maybe national security may be involved. Then typically you send the reporter back, or send other reporters into the field, try to see if you can verify. If you can't, you don't print it.

ARTHUR MILLER: Mr. Nolan?

[01:22:56]
MARTIN NOLAN: If it was sparse on the facts, we'd need to get some more facts before we're going to print it.

ARTHUR MILLER: Restraint.

[01:23:05]
MARTIN NOLAN: I hope so. I think so. But I think generally, you look at the paper every day, or any paper, and I don't think you'll see a lot of fanciful speculation very much.

ARTHUR MILER: I'm tempted to ask. In an age of Woodward and Bernstein, in an age in which every newspaper and television station has investigative reporting, and in an age in which every major event of our time is provisioned by the press, how come the press didn't have the Iran story for 11 months?

MARTIN NOLAN: Not too many bureaus in Tehran, as you may have noticed. Again, you're dealing with an absolute dictatorship.

ARTHUR MILLER: You mean Washington or Tehran? [laughter]

[01:23:50]

MARTIN NOLAN: Tehran, the story was in Tehran. Without Tehran, there's no story. The arms were going to Tehran. Colonel McFarlane and his Irish passport were going to Iran. And it's the same reason we don't have much coverage of the Iran/Iraq war; they don't have press secretaries and directors of communication. They don't have a free press. So that's, I think, the principal reason. Foreign operation. And that's the danger of them, is that they're easy to get away with. I think that's exactly what David was saying.

ARTHUR MILLER: You don't think the story could have been gotten in Washington?

[01:24:29]

DAVID GERGEN: The whole point of the way they carried it out was that only half a dozen people knew in the White House. Probably not more than two or three in State and apparently even less than that in Defense. And a very, very small handful of people at the CIA. When you have that small a number of people who know, it's relatively easy to protect the secret. That was the very game they were playing. But they didn't tell a lot of people at the State Department, they didn't tell a lot of the White House staff, they didn't tell the Congress. Those are the places where you often get these stories; that's why they didn't leak out. But the price you pay for that is one we're now seeing in the kind of policy decisions that were made.

QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE: [off mic]

ARTHUR MILLER: Is the press conference, as it now is run, helpful to the press or the country. Mr. Nolan?

[01:25:37]

MARTIN NOLAN: No and no. Its current format is sort of a tactical maneuver of the spin patrol. What Poindexter can't get done on the Today Show and what McFarlane can't make happen on Good Morning America, we have to drag out the President, hoping that these loutish reporters in the White House press room, of whom I am a former inmate, will be so aggressive as to make the American people sympathetic with this amiable, good person who's trying to do the best thing with the hostages. And they're nitpicking him, and they're asking him all these silly, boring, detailed questions. I think that's why he's having the press conference. He doesn't want to have the press conference to give out more information; he's given out as much information as he wanted to. That's what I think. And of course, David really knows the motivations better than I.

[01:26:33]

DAVID GERGEN: I was an inmate on the other side for a while. And I can tell you, I think the televised big press conference in the East Room of the White House has become a media theatre event, and it's obsolete, and we ought to go to other kinds of forums. I was responsible for trying to work with the President frequently preparing for press conferences, President Reagan, and also worked with some other Presidents on it. And you can anticipate before you get out the door about 80% of the questions – not the exact wording, but sometimes even almost the exact wording – that the reporters are going to ask. And they can also anticipate 80% of the answers.

[01:27:15]

So it's an exercise. It's like a Kabuki play. It doesn't lend itself to what we really need, and that is an exploration of policy and the President's thinking about policy, why he does things. I feel very strongly we ought to find different kinds of formats in which one or two or three reporters come in to the President's office and really have a discussion, a conversation, and get at these things. And let them pursue issues more thoroughly.

[01:27:43]

Beyond that, I think it's even more important that we preserve though some institution because I think that's part of the accountability. Absent the parliamentary system, it does seem that the press conference is the best substitute we have for asking questions of the chief executive. And think it's terribly, terribly critical that it occur.

ARTHUR MILLER: At this point, we only have time for one or two final questions. Yes, ma'am?

QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE: [off mic]

ARTHUR MILLER: The question is, what is the responsibility of the press in terms of projecting the image of the Soviet Union that is currently advanced by our government. Mr. Gergen?

[01:29:17]

DAVID GERGEN: Well, I must confess that I happen to believe that there is something inherently evil in a totalitarian system, whether it's the Soviets or anybody else. I think that kind of suppression of individuals is something which is, I think– I think it is evil. I don't think we ought to be willing to face up to that reality. That's does not mean we can't find a way to live with the Soviets; we have to do that, too. I think the responsibility of the press in that situation is to report as accurately as we can the nature of Soviet society. It is true, I think, that the Russian people by and large are not interested in having conflict with us. There are many of them who would like greater freedom. I think we ought to report on the dissidents who want greater freedom. I think we ought to report on the cultural liberalization that's going on there.

[01:30:11]

I think it's important, just as it's important we not be taken in by the Reagan administration on any particular world viewpoint it might have. I think it's equally important we not be taken in by the Gorbachev regime, that we look very carefully at its actions as well as its words. It's trying to project a PR image now. And we have to look behind that.

[01:30:32]

But I think the main thing is, we ought to be just as objective as we can and let the American people be ready to decide, or the government decide how to conduct policy. But I don't think it's our role to be the helpmate for either side.

ARTHUR MILLER: Mr. Nolan?

[01:30:46]

MARTIN NOLAN: I agree. The most important thing about the Soviet system, about the bureaucrats and everyone, the thousands of people who run it, they're not like us. They don't share our values. The Russian people have never known democracy. They had it for about six months in 1917. And there is no democratic tradition there. There is no feeling of openness and open dialogue like we have here tonight.

And part of their cultural and ideological heritage is an imperative towards aggressive, expansionist behavior. Now, that's a fact. That doesn't mean we have to throw nuclear bombs at each other. But I think that is the dominant fact of foreign policy today.

ARTHUR MILLER: Our last question?

QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE: [off mic]

ARTHUR MILLER: The question is, and I think I'm interpreting this right, with the growth in mergers, particularly in the media industry, is that going to affect reporting? Mr. Nolan?

[01:32:13]

MARTIN NOLAN: Well, I'm afraid so. I think it's more of a danger now in the electronic media. The conglomerate mergers that have dominated the print industry, the daily newspapers, in many cases have actually improved local papers. I've seen independent, small papers in small cities that weren't too good. And if they're bought by a chain, they actually improve; and they improve by firing people. And there are only a few large, independent newspapers left. Knock on wood. And the way they have to survive is by trying to acquire some smaller ones because it's only a game for empires now.

[01:33:02]

But I don't think it really will affect the coverage of corporate America. I think it will in television, I really do. I think when you get General Electric buying RCA, which already owned NBC, I don't think if I were an NBC consumer reporter I'd like to be checking how the light bulbs are working. I don't think I'd try to get on the air with that story; it's just a natural prudence. And if I were working for CBS, I wouldn't think this is a hot time for an expose of the Loews Theatre chain.

[01:33:33]
So I do think that the conglomeratization is going to affect electronic, but because even chain-owned newspapers still have a local root and depend every day on the affirmation of people putting out their 25 cents. That is an enormous check and a balance on any sort of getting into bed with some corporate giant. I'm lucky; I've worked for 25 years for a paper that's survived by rectitude and doing the right thing, and that made money besides. That's pretty good. And I wish every newspaper could do the same. But I don't worry about them as much as I worry about television.

ARTHUR MILLER: Mr. Gergen?

[01:34:13]
DAVID GERGEN: Yeah, I think he's captured it exactly right. And what you now find in a lot of smaller papers around the country is that they're picking up the services that go along. If you're part of the Gannett chain, there is a Gannett Washington bureau, for instance, that sends out stories. I think that a lot of local newspapers that have been bought by Gannett have been enriched by that. Similarly, I think a lot of newspapers around the country are being enriched by the New York Times service. You can go somewhere out in Denver now and read a story by Bill Beecher from the *Globe*. And the *Philadelphia Inquirer* today has a story from the *Globe*. I think that's wonderful because I think it really does enrich the coverage that goes on.

[01:34:47]
The danger is, you start pulling your punches, particularly on the editorial page, and some of the kind of investigative work that you want to do. And I think that danger is out there. It's really a

question of case-by-case with local editors fighting for their independence and be willing to go after the tough stories. Because otherwise, the press has little relevance.

ARTHUR MILLER: At this point, let me thank our two speakers – Martin Nolan, editorial page editor of the *Boston Globe;* and David Gergen, editor of *US News and World Report*. And our thanks to the audience for being here tonight. [applause]

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