

Did CBS bow to Israeli pressure?

by Mark A. Bruzonsky

WASHINGTON

LAST week the President of CBS News accused the Israeli Army of deliberately killing two CBS newsmen and the Israeli government of making excuses for covering up. Then he demanded both an explanation and an impartial investigation. In addition, CBS promptly cancelled plans for a special series of telecasts. This week it was back to business as usual.

Asked to Israel to investigate, the vice-president of CBS News now says the killings were not deliberate and it was all, probably, an unfortunate accident. He will be surprised if CBS backs away from the programme cancellation as well.

And yet nagging questions remain. How is it possible that eye-witnesses saw the tanks just a few hundred metres away, but the Israeli army says, no, they were maybe two kms. What indeed has happened to the eyewitness bystanders and journalists, especially the young French woman who was just a metre from where it happened? Why has not CBS gone back to these for additional information and clarifications? And finally, what pressures were brought to bear on CBS by Jewish organisations, advertisers, and the Israeli government?

Having raised the matter so boldly, CBS News now has a journalistic responsibility to clear up these questions, not just walk away from the matter.

In addition, the fuller context in which this incident took place has never really been adequately explained. Whether the killing of two CBS newsmen was deliberate or not — and the first-hand, eyewitness reports still suggest it was — when the larger context is revealed it becomes far easier to reach the conclusion that Israel should be held accountable, at least by the court of public opinion.

It is remarkably sad that instead of doing just that President Reagan acted as an Israeli apologist at his press conference a short time after the incident saying "These things can happen." And now it appears uncertain whether CBS News will persist in its effort to really find out what happened and why.

The shameful truth is that Israel's iron fist policies in Southern Lebanon have been accompanied by escalating intimidation of the foreign Press. The goal is clearly to frighten journalists, especially TV newsmen, from covering Israel's brutal policies in Southern Lebanon and thus to prevent news and pictures of what the Israelis are doing from reaching Western audiences.

Earlier this month it was an NBC News crew that

TWO journalists of CBS attempting to show the world the truth of Israeli actions in Southern Lebanon have been killed. If the Americans continue to look the other way as they did in earlier atrocities by the Israelis, then they should not be surprised when more and more tragedies in the future continue to unfold.

was fired upon and Israel warned journalists in Beirut against attempting to cover events in the south. Just a few weeks ago, on the front page of the *The Washington Post*, there was a startling eyewitness account by Nora Boustany who violated Israeli restrictions, crossed into Southern Lebanon, and witnessed Israeli attacks on civilians, including the killing of a young girl.

First Israel targetted the Palestinians in Lebanon. The Israeli Chief of Staff termed them "cockroaches" and his soldiers proceeded to kill thousands, fighters and civilians alike, under the guise of "Peace for Galilee." Israeli military oversight of the massacres at Sabra and Shatilla eventually resulted, and nearly half a million Israelis took to the streets in protest.

Then it became the turn of the Lebanese. Embittered by Israel's support for the Phalange as well as by Israel's brutal occupation, the national resistance militias began to fight back. Israel then turned on their villages resulting in massive destruction and considerable death that still continues.

The result has been growing Lebanese hostility towards both Israel and the U.S., the evacuation of most American from Lebanon, and the possibility that the secular Lebanon of old might be all finished.

Now the press itself has been targetted. Aware that the world is largely oblivious these days, unless the blood and misery appears on TV screens at dinner time, Israel has been clearly stepping up its policies of repressing press coverage. Even the deaths of the CBS newsmen have been twisted to further this end.

"The Israeli defence force does not shoot at civilians, including journalists who are clearly identified as such," an Israeli army spokesman calmly stated last week. But he couldn't resist adding, "If journalists enter territory in which armed terrorists are located, they take upon themselves the risk of getting hurt." What the spokesman neglected to

admit is that the so-called "armed terrorists" include most of the population of Southern Lebanon defending itself against an enemy far superior in the tools of both war and terror.

Israel's attempt to withdraw from the violence of its own creation in Southern Lebanon will not end this cycle of escalating death and destruction.

Israel's border is far less secure now than at the time of the invasion nearly three years ago. Lebanon itself is far more radicalised and dangerous, now than ever before. If while withdrawing her own army Israel attempts to use local militias as an Israeli surrogate or to maintain any type of de facto control over the South, the Lebanese have made it very clear they will resist far beyond what the PLO ever did. And yet if battered Israel withdraws completely, then there still will be the cancerous Palestinian issue with the potential to spark new hostilities, or even a major war, at any time.

Furthermore, the need for evacuating most Americans from the country can be directly traced to what Israel has done, usually with American support or acquiescence, since 1982. One of the major prices of Israel's invasion and subsequent debacle is the serious erosion of American credibility and power in this particular corner of the Mid-east.

American officials, members of the Congress, and public opinion have made excuses for Israel and looked the other way many times before; and the result has been things get even worse.

When the U.S.S. *Liberty* was attacked and many Americans killed in 1967, the American's looked the other way even though the evidence mounted that Israel's attack was deliberate.

When Israel deported mayors, blew up homes, closed universities and moved in Jewish settlers to the West Bank various rationalisations for looking the other way were concocted.

When Israel went back on its promise in the Camp David agreement to turn the West Bank over to the Palestinian inhabitants, at least for autonomous self-government, somehow one excuse after another was accepted.

When Israel bombed Baghdad, invaded Lebanon, and lied about its intentions of marching on Beirut, too many found justifications for Israel's behaviour and again looked the other way.

When the Israeli army nearly a year ago beat to death two teenage Palestinians taken into custody after a hijacking, this was front-page news around the world and yet the promised investigation and trials have yet to be held.