

## Bush Presses Editors on Security

Bush summoning editors to prevent publication of stories he considers damaging

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President Bush has been summoning newspaper editors lately in an effort to prevent publication of stories he considers damaging to national security.

The efforts have failed, but the rare White House sessions with the executive editors of The Washington Post and New York Times are an indication of how seriously the president takes the recent reporting that has raised questions about the administration's anti-terror tactics.

Leonard Downie Jr., The Post's executive editor, would not confirm the meeting with Bush before publishing reporter Dana Priest's Nov. 2 article disclosing the existence of secret CIA prisons in Eastern Europe used to interrogate terror suspects. Bill Keller, executive editor of the Times, would not confirm that he, publisher Arthur Sulzberger Jr. and Washington bureau chief Philip Taubman had an Oval Office sit-down with the president on Dec. 5, 11 days before reporters James Risen and Eric Lichtblau revealed that Bush had authorized eavesdropping on Americans and others within the United States without court orders.

But the meetings were confirmed by sources who have been briefed on them but are not authorized to comment because both sides had agreed to keep the sessions off the record. The White House had no comment.

"When senior administration officials raised national security questions about details in Dana's story during her reporting, at their request we met with them on more than one occasion," Downie says. "The meetings were off the record for the purpose of discussing national security issues in her story." At least one of the meetings involved John Negroponte, the director of national intelligence, and CIA Director Porter Goss, the sources said.

"This was a matter of concern for intelligence officials, and they sought to address their concerns," an intelligence official said. Some liberals criticized The Post for withholding the location of the prisons at the administration's request.

After Bush's meeting with the Times executives, first reported by Newsweek's Jonathan Alter, the president assailed the paper's piece on domestic spying, calling the leak of classified information "shameful." Some liberals, meanwhile, attacked the paper for holding the story for more than a year after earlier meetings with administration officials.

“The decision to hold the story last year was mine,” Keller says. “The decision to run the story last week was mine. I’m comfortable with both decisions. Beyond that, there’s just no way to have a full discussion of the internal procedural twists that media writers find so fascinating without talking about what we knew, when, and how — and that I can’t do.”

Some Times staffers say the story was revived in part because of concerns that Risen is publishing a book on the CIA next month that will include the disclosures. But Keller told the Los Angeles Times: “The publication was not timed to the Iraqi election, the Patriot Act debate, Jim’s forthcoming book or any other event.”

## **Bought Off?**

The admission by two columnists that they accepted payments from indicted Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff may be the tip of a large and rather dirty iceberg.

Copley News Service last week dropped Doug Bandow — who also resigned as a Cato Institute scholar — after he acknowledged taking as much as \$2,000 a pop from Abramoff for up to two dozen columns favorable to the lobbyist’s clients. “I am fully responsible and I won’t play victim,” Bandow said in a statement after Business Week broke the story. “Obviously, I regret stupidly calling to question my record of activism and writing that extends over 20 years. . . . For that I deeply apologize.”

Peter Ferrara of the Institute for Policy Innovation has acknowledged taking payments years ago from a half-dozen lobbyists, including Abramoff. Two of his papers, the Washington Times and Manchester (N.H.) Union Leader, have now dropped him. But Ferrara is unapologetic, saying: “There is nothing unethical about taking money from someone and writing an article.”

Readers might disagree on grounds that they have no way of knowing about such undisclosed payments, which seem to be an increasingly common tactic for companies trying to influence public debate through ostensibly neutral third parties. When he was a Washington lawyer several years ago, says law professor Glenn Reynolds, a telecommunications carrier offered him a fat paycheck — up to \$20,000, he believes — to write an opinion piece favorable to its position. He declined.

In the case of Bandow’s columns, says Reynolds, who now writes the InstaPundit blog, “one argument is, it’s probably something he thought anyway, but it doesn’t pass the smell test to me. I wouldn’t necessarily call it criminal, but it seems wrong. People want to craft a rule, but what you really need is a sense of shame.”

Jonathan Adler, an associate law professor and National Review contributor, wrote that when he worked at a think tank, “I was offered cash payments to write op-eds on particular topics by PR firms, lobbyists or corporations several times. They offered \$1,000 or more for an op-ed,” offers that Adler rejected. Blogger Rand Simberg writes that “I’ve also declined offers of money to write specific pieces, even though I agreed with the sentiment.”

Two years ago, former Michigan senator Don Riegle wrote an op-ed attacking Visa and MasterCard without disclosing that his PR firm was representing Wal-Mart — which was suing the two credit card companies.

## **Porn, Privacy and Participation**

Kurt Eichenwald says he knew he would take heat for his decision to urge a teenager involved in child pornography to give up the business and cooperate with federal investigators.

“We are sitting there facing a horrible reality,” the New York Times reporter says. “Every day I’m sitting there working on the story, there are children being molested and exploited, and we have a source who knows who and where they are.”

The lengthy Times report last week on Justin Berry, now 19, whose cooperation with the Justice Department has led to several arrests, was remarkable, not least because it was Eichenwald who persuaded the young man to give up drugs and stop performing sexual acts for paying customers in front of a webcam — and even referred him to a lawyer. The reporter clearly crossed the line from observer to participant.

“I knew our profession would look at this and say this was a troubling result,” Eichenwald says. “But every result was troubling. I’m interviewing a kid and he suddenly starts naming children and telling me where they are and what’s happening to them. He knew which kid was under the control of which pedophile.”

Slate media critic Jack Shafer is among those who have raised questions, writing: “Would a Times reporter extend similar assistance to an 18-year-old female prostitute? An 18-year-old fence? A seller of illegal guns? No way. . . . Will online pornographers and other allied criminals now regard reporters as agents of the state?”

At a July meeting with top editors and company lawyers, Eichenwald says, Executive Editor Bill Keller said that “ ‘we’ve got to do the right thing.’ . . . It would have been easier to come up with all sorts of explanations of why we should walk away.”

Eichenwald says he had to persuade Berry, an abused child who was lured into performing for the webcam when he was 13, to get out of the porn business and give up drugs for him to be useful as a source for the paper. The reporter says he personally provided information to the FBI about a 15-year-old boy being lured to a Las Vegas hotel by Berry’s 38-year-old business partner, who was arrested before the planned rendezvous.

“I knew we’d be criticized for getting a source to become a federal witness,” Eichenwald says. But he says he’s had nightmares and, as a father, feels “an enormous amount of guilt” about other children in the porn ring that he did not try to help.

If all this sounds like a movie, Eichenwald got calls from Hollywood within hours.

### **Plunging Reputations**

“The image consultant said, ‘You’ve got to stop wearing those turtlenecks. I think you’ve got to start showing some cleavage.’ I told her I didn’t think America was ready for that.” — ABC’s Judy Muller, quoted by Amy Tenowich

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