



# WAR & THE OSCARs

Since 1846, the Associated Press has been a trusted source of news and information. As Director of **AP Global Media Services**, the AP's outside broadcast production and transmission arm, **Alla Salehian** is wired up to information all day, trying to anticipate which stories broadcasters will want to cover where

**A**s a news agency and in my own department we are always trying to keep ahead of world events and anticipate the focus of the next major news media interest. We are looking at an arc of the next frontier, if you like, on the war against terror – I don't like this phrase but it is out there in the public domain.

With our new media centre in Kabul, we are connecting Kabul with our Islamabad office, and India will be our next expansion into the region.

The focus in that part of the world is shifting from Iraq to Afghanistan and I think it is timely to open a state-of-the-art service centre in Kabul to cater for all the broadcasters who are going to turn up wanting to cover that story.

#### **Are you scaling down your activities in Iraq?**

At the moment we have no plans to

scale down. There is a lot of continuous interest in covering Iraq, primarily from Middle East broadcasters.

If you look at the Western broadcasters you get the odd report from Iraq, whereas for Middle East broadcasters Iraq is still an extremely important news story and they are covering it on a daily basis. The security situation in Iraq is by no means perfect but the fight against extremism or terrorism or whatever you want to label it is shifting back to Afghanistan.

#### **Where are the next flashpoints going to be?**

We still have a simmering problem in Gaza, and the recent election in Israel and the recent pronouncements by Obama mean that there is potential for that situation to flare up again.

It's an interesting time seeing exactly how this plays out – to move on to potential peace talks or it could just flare up. Gaza is something that we constantly keep our eye on.

#### **You operate in regions where big news stories break all the time – what are the challenges of that?**

Clearly the number one challenge is security, the safety of your staff and customers. In places like Iraq and Afghanistan there is an added risk because being part of the press is no safeguard, plus sectarian or tribal issues mean that the violence could be unrelated to your work, it could be just the situation in that country. There are a lot of different aspects that have an impact on security, and that's the difficult part.

Everything else is relatively easy to do – permissions, licences, the ability to operate freely those are the things that we deal with across the world, even in safe countries you get regulatory issues that may impact on your ability to operate.

#### **Editorially, what are your guidelines as to what stories you want to report?**

We tend to go for the most newsworthy and the events that we

think broadcasters want to report on. When you have in excess of 400 broadcasters that you are transmitting to on a daily basis, it's very difficult to cover every single story.

It's not really an editorial judgement, it's more how do you practically cover the world and give the broadcasters the important information when you have got a budget and limited time in which to transmit.

As an agency of course we don't make value judgements, we just report fact. We sit in the middle, we service everybody, we don't have an editorial guideline other than what we report needs to be factual, needs to be checked, accurate and impartial.

#### Accurate and impartial news – is that achievable?

I think you can do it. Again, it's difficult. If you go to the US and you watch Fox News as compared to any others, you know what they stand for from the start – I think there is room for all of that as long as the audience appreciates what they are getting.

The audience are very savvy, viewers know exactly what they are getting from these channels and they are going there for a certain bit of information.

And that's fine, that's healthy, it would be a bit boring let's face it if everybody just sat in the middle. As an agency, we provide pictures with natural sound and a shot list that goes with it, so actually the good news for us is we can let the pictures speak for themselves.

We don't voice our video material, so there is no opinion in there. We leave it up to the broadcasters how they wish to edit it and write their script to it.

#### Has the audience reached saturation point with yet another story about yet another bombing?

It's a difficult one – no broadcaster wants to be caught short of not covering an event. Audiences tend to be a bit fickle and as soon as you don't report the audience will turn round and say: 'There was a bomb

“ We're looking at an arc of the next frontier ”



in Iraq today and you guys didn't report it. Are you hiding something, is there an agenda?'

I think broadcasters are having to find innovative ways of covering the same story and bringing it down to a human level. At the end of the day you are reporting on people and you need to connect your audience with them. It's a difficult balancing act.

#### Looking ahead, what's in the pipeline?

We will be making a big splash, once we have finalised everything for our operation in India. Completely on the opposite side to this is, we are at the moment building a high-end media centre in Los Angeles.

We have increasing demand for entertainment news from some of our customers – we already cover the Oscars and Cannes etc – so we are setting up in LA in a big way

with proper studio facilities.

That's a little bit of light relief from all the war and mayhem that we cover.

Although it does not sound very sexy to talk about fibres, as part of my expansion plan, we are looking at connectivity and installing large bandwidth that will connect by fibre Los Angeles to New York to Washington to London to Brussels, Paris and Rome, and we'll connect up to our existing fibre from Beijing as well.

This is the first phase – when we talk of covering news you can't separate the coverage of news editorially from what you need technically in order to distribute and transmit that information, fast, efficiently and also increasingly a requirement for HD.

Alla Salehian, thank you. ■

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