

Network Spending Is Unusual Covering Nixon in Arab Lands

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By LES BROWN JUN 14 1974

Because television in the Arab countries is in the early stages of its development, the American networks have run up some unusual costs in covering the Middle East, most of them related to relaying the television picture.

News officials of ABC, CBS and NBC have estimated that the total cost for coverage may approach \$500,000 for each of them.

In order to send their reports by satellite, the networks have had to rent a portable ground station, needed for transmission. It was flown to Cairo and set up there at a reported cost of \$250,000. In addition, under a pool arrangement for facilities, they have had to ship to the transmission site two telecine cameras, film-processing equipment and technical personnel—in effect, setting up a temporary television station.

The expense for the facilities alone, shared by the networks equally, is expected to exceed \$400,000. Much of the other costs, which the networks would not have incurred in most other parts of the world, will come from shipping news material to the Cairo base from the other Arab countries on the President's itinerary.

Using Courier Planes

From each country, the networks will be sending their film by courier planes to Cairo for processing and subsequent transmission by satellite to their respective news operations in New York. Israel, which has advanced television facilities, is expected to present no such logistical problems to the networks when President Nixon arrives there on the final leg of his trip.

Since the networks did not ship live electronic cameras—"There is a limit to how much equipment we can send over," one executive said—they have been dependent on Egyptian television for all live coverage and otherwise have been reporting the story chiefly with film.

The poor quality of the live transmission, upon the President's arrival in Cairo on Wednesday was noted on the air by an NBC correspondent. But this may have been partly an effect of the need to convert the signal to the American technical standard, network executives have pointed out.

The transmission was in black and white, because Egyptian television does not yet have color equipment, and its tendency to dwell on long panoramic views rather than close-ups and varied shots was an indication of that country's inexperience with television remote broadcasts, network officials said.

The networks were unable to present the coverage of Mr. Nixon's visit to the palace of Egypt's President Anwar el-Sadat although the television cameras were present, because there was no microwave to relay the pictures to the ground station at Qubba Palace in Cairo.

Reporters Assigned

The networks have assigned seven of eight reporters and as many field producers, including some who are based in European and Asian capitals, to cover the President's travels. But, for all the expense, and although two networks have sent their principal news anchorman along—Walter Cronkite of CBS and John Chancellor of NBC—the networks do not expect to devote an extraordinary amount of air time to the Middle East trip.

ABC-TV has scheduled a half-hour news special on the Middle East visit for 8 P.M. Saturday, but otherwise most of the coverage on all the networks will be confined to the regular evening newscasts and morning news programs, barring unforeseen developments, the news officials said.

"The trip is colorful and important but not as substantive as the President's next trip, to the Soviet Union, promises to be," one of them remarked.