

Toe to toe with Trump

CNN's White House reporter earns cheers, jeers for confrontational style

Paul FARHI *The Washington Post*

These are times that try a White House reporter's soul. Jim Acosta hasn't kept quiet about what's been troubling his.

CNN's senior White House reporter has been frustrated by many things: the curtailment of live broadcasts of the press secretary's daily briefings; the lack of substantive answers from the administration; the alleged "blackballing" of CNN (or maybe just of Acosta), by all of the president's spokespeople, among others.

Other reporters share some of Acosta's irritation. The difference is, Acosta has been outspoken about his. At a time when CNN is under attack by President Donald Trump and his supporters, Acosta has been fighting back. He has said on the air that White House press secretary Sean Spicer's unresponsive answers were rendering him "just kind of useless" as a credible source; that the ever-briefer briefings have become "basically pointless"; that covering this White House has at times been like "covering bad reality television."

The other day, after Trump once again denounced CNN as "fake news" during brief remarks to the press in Poland, Acosta tweeted that the event was "a fake news conference" because the president's response was prompted by a reporter who had interviewed for a White House job.

He has repeatedly needled Spicer on Twitter, too: "I can't show you a picture of Sean," he tweeted, over a photo of his ankles, during a blacked-out briefing on June 19. "So here is a look at some new socks I bought over the wknd."

Another, on June 12: "As he often does, (Spicer) avoided taking questions from CNN today." This included a sarcastic hashtag: #courage.

Acosta's remarks aren't just blunt; they're unusual. Reporters are supposed to report, not opine. Yet Acosta's disdain has flowed openly, raising a question about how far a reporter – supposedly a neutral arbiter of facts, not a commenter on them – can and should go.

"I think I'm just covering a story, honestly," Acosta says in a call from Germany, where he has been covering the president. "When the president of the United States calls the press 'fake news' and 'the enemy



Jim Acosta at the CNN Republican Debate at the University of Miami in 2016.

of the American people,' " he adds, "I think that's when you have to get tough and ask the hard questions."

Of course, Trump and Spicer haven't held back, either. In an interview, Spicer denounces Acosta in some of the harshest terms a press secretary has used – at least in public – to refer to a reporter. "If Jim Acosta reported on Jim Acosta the way he reports on us, he'd say he hasn't been very honest," Spicer says. "I think he's gone well beyond the role of reporter and steered into the role of advocate."

"He's the prime example of a (reporter in a) competitive, YouTube, click-driven industry," Spicer adds. "He's recognized that if you make a spectacle on the air then you'll get more airtime and more clicks ... If I were a mainstream, veteran reporter, I'd be advocating for him to knock it off. It's hurting the profession."

Acosta, 46, has been a prominent face at CNN for the past decade, covering the last three presidential campaigns, President Barack Obama's two terms and other major stories.

He was a reporter at CBS News before joining CNN, and worked for TV stations in Chicago, Dallas and Knoxville before that. He started his broadcasting career as a radio reporter for WMAL-AM in Washington.

Despite his run-ins with Spicer and constant jeering from Trump supporters, Acosta seems to be relishing the fight. "I'm having the time of my life right now," he says. "This is the biggest story of my life. I'm like a kid in a candy store."

Acosta's clashes with the administration have such a relatively long history that it's difficult to sort cause from effect these days. Spicer effectively blames Acosta, without mentioning him by name, when he suggests that live audio and video coverage of the briefings was curtailed because of "grandstanding" by some reporters. The restrictive policy, in turn, prompted Acosta to pepper Spicer with questions about it: "Why not turn the cameras on, Sean?" he asked repeatedly on June 27. This, in turn, led to more criticism of Acosta.

Trump first mixed it up with the CNN reporter during the presidential campaign last year. Pressed by Acosta to account for his unfulfilled promise to donate money to veterans organizations, the then-Republican candidate replied acidly, "I've seen you on TV. You're a real beauty."

President-elect Trump tangled with him again in a tense exchange in January that concluded with Trump branding Acosta as "rude" and CNN, once more, as "fake news."

A curious sidelight to all this has been the

relatively tepid support Acosta has received from his fellow White House journalists. Only a few have publicly spoken out in support of him. There have been no walkouts or calls for boycotting the briefings (although Acosta has suggested "collective action" to get the cameras back). The White House Correspondents' Association has confined its agitation to behind-the-scenes negotiations with Spicer and several short, general statements.

In fact, the pushback against Acosta from some quarters of the press has been more striking. On a recent Fox News segment, for example, former Fox News White House reporter Ed Henry agreed that Acosta's on-air commentary had "crossed the line" into opinion.

"He's overdoing this," Henry said. "... If you're going to be a reporter and going to be a correspondent, his opinions are now no longer coming from pundits. It's coming from White House correspondents."

CNN, understandably, sees things a bit differently. "Jim Acosta is a fantastic reporter, a great White House reporter," says Acosta's boss, CNN Washington bureau chief Sam Feist.

Feist compares Acosta to Sam Donaldson, the feisty former ABC newsmen, and makes no excuses for Acosta's pointed comments. "Jim is as tenacious now with Donald Trump as president as he was when Barack Obama was president," he says. "If you look at the reporting he did in the Obama White House, you'll find he's the same Jim Acosta."

In fact, Acosta didn't go easy on Trump and Spicer's predecessors; his questioning of Obama press secretary Josh Earnest and Obama himself was often highlighted in conservative media accounts and in Republican National Committee emails. During the IRS scandal, for instance, he asked Earnest whether the White House's claim that it had lost important emails was like saying "the dog ate my homework." He also pressed Obama on his characterization of ISIS as "the J.V. team" and the president's contention that he hadn't underestimated the terror organization. "Why can't we take out these bastards?" Acosta asked.

Acosta says today the president and the issues have changed. But he hasn't. "This is not a crusade," he says. "This is not partisan. This is journalism. We're trying to hold them to account."

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GOREN BRIDGE

WITH BOB JONES

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WEEKLY BRIDGE QUIZ ANSWERS

Q 1 - Neither vulnerable, as South, you hold:

♠ 7 6 3 ♥ K 8 2 ♦ J 8 6 ♣ K Q J 2

WEST	3♦	NORTH	DBI*	EAST	?	SOUTH	1♠
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*Negative, values with no clear bid
What call would you make?

A - Will you defend four of a major if the opponents want to play there? If yes, then pass or bid four diamonds. If no, bid five diamonds right away. We think it's very close.

Q 2 - North-South vulnerable, as South, you hold:

♠ A K Q 10 ♥ J 7 6 4 ♦ K 10 9 3 ♣ 8

SOUTH	1♦	WEST	Pass	NORTH	1♥	EAST	2♣
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?
What call would you make?

A - Four clubs would be a splinter bid, promising four-card heart support and short clubs, but it would also promise a better hand. This hand isn't good enough. Bid three hearts.

Q 3 - East-West vulnerable, as South, you hold:

♠ J 8 6 3 ♥ Q J ♦ A 5 4 2 ♣ A 6 2

Partner opens one club and right-hand opponent passes. What call would you make?

A - People bid "up the line" for many decades, and they would bid one diamond. Many modern players would bid one spade. Neither is wrong, just be "as one" with partner.

Q 4 - Both vulnerable, as South, you hold:

♠ Q 9 8 ♥ K 10 7 6 4 ♦ A 10 4 ♣ Q 9

NORTH	1♣	EAST	Pass	SOUTH	1♥	WEST	Pass
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?
What call would you make?

A - This hand is worth an invitation. Should partner have raised you with only three-card support, he'll have a problem knowing what to do. Bid three hearts, promising a fifth heart.

Q 5 - East-West vulnerable, as South, you hold:

♠ A 2 ♥ Void ♦ A K Q 9 7 5 2 ♣ Q 10 7 5

SOUTH	1♦	WEST	1♣	NORTH	2♥	EAST	Pass
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?
What call would you make?

A - Partner's bid in your void suit is a warning sign that shouldn't be ignored. Don't do anything aggressive. Bid three diamonds. Second choice — three clubs.

Q 6 - Both vulnerable, as South, you hold:

♠ 10 5 4 2 ♥ K 9 ♦ J 4 2 ♣ K Q 7 3

WEST	1♦	NORTH	DBI	EAST	Pass	SOUTH	?
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?
What call would you make?

A - A jump in response to a takeout double shows 9-11 points. It does not promise a five-card suit, or a good suit. Bid two spades.

(E-mail: tcaeditors@tribpub.com)

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GOREN BRIDGE

WITH BOB JONES

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JUDGMENT

Neither vulnerable, South deals

NORTH
♠ Q 10 9 7 5 2
♥ A 5 2
♦ J 10
♣ K 4

WEST
♥ J
♠ K 8 4
♦ A Q 9 7 5
♣ Q 9 7 5

EAST
♣ 6 4 3
♥ Q 10 9 3
♦ 8 6 2
♠ 10 6 3

SOUTH
♠ A K 8
♥ J 7 6
♦ K 4 3
♣ A J 8 2

The bidding:

SOUTH	Pass	WEST	2♥*	NORTH	4♣	EAST	Pass	WEST	♠ Void	NORTH	♥ K	EAST	♠ Void
1NT	Pass	2♣	Pass	4♣	Pass	All pass		♥ K	♥ 9		♥ 9		♥ 8
								♦ A	♦ 8		♦ 8		♦ 10 6
								♣ Q 9	♣ Q 9				

*Transfer to spades

Opening lead: Jack of ♠

An expert bridge player learns to trust his judgment, even when that judgment calls for unconventional play. South in today's deal was Norwegian expert Espen Erichsen. Erichsen drew the inference from the lead that West had no attractive alternate lead, meaning that West had an honor in each of the side suits. Declarer won the opening spade lead with dummy's queen and ran the jack of diamonds. West won with the queen and shifted to a low heart.

South discarded the king of diamonds on the last spade, and West was in the hot seat. A red-suit discard would be instantly fatal so he shed the nine of clubs. Reading the position as though he had x-ray vision, Erichsen led a club to his ace, dropping the queen, and had his well-earned contract.

UNIVERSAL Sudoku Puzzle

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

6			2	7		3		
2	1	3		8		4		
7			3	1	4		2	
				6		1	3	7
1			4	3	8			6
9	3	6		5				
	6		7	9	5			2
		8		2		9	1	5
		2		4	1			3

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

Sudoku Puzzle Solution in Today's Prince George Citizen Classified Pages

UNIVERSAL Sudoku Puzzle

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

				6	4	9		
8	9			1		3		
6		7		5	3		8	
	6			7		8		1
3				9				4
1	9			8			6	
	1		7	2		6		9
		3		4			1	8
		6	1	3				

478276

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Sudoku Puzzle Solution in Today's Prince George Citizen Classified Pages

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Spider-Man webs up box office

Bloomberg

Spider-Man: Homecoming, Sony Corp.'s second reboot of the Marvel superhero series, led the North American box office as expected in its weekend debut, marking the first No. 1 opening for the studio this year.

The film, part of a production deal with Walt Disney Co.'s Marvel unit, garnered an estimated \$117 million in sales in U.S. and Canadian theatres, researcher ComScore Inc. said. The picture scored the second-biggest debut in the Spider-Man series and was Sony's second-largest opening ever, according to researcher Box Office Mojo.

Homecoming, co-produced by Marvel Entertainment President Kevin Feige, gives Sony Pictures a much-needed hit after a string of disappointments. The Culver City, California-based studio has languished in seventh place this year in domestic box-office receipts, in part because it lacks big titles to compete with Disney and Warner Bros. Kazuo Hirai, chief executive officer of the Tokyo-based parent company, has shaken up management, appointing new executives to lead Sony Entertainment and the film division. The studio has several more movies related to Spider-Man in the works.

Homecoming marks Sony's third series with the Marvel character. Tobey Maguire starred as the webslinger in three films starting in 2002. Andrew Garfield took over the role in 2012 with limited success. His last movie, The Amazing Spider-Man 2, didn't rate well with critics and generated the lowest sales of all the films. It also cost \$265 million to make.

In Homecoming, 21-year-old Tom Holland takes on the role of the mutant high-schooler. His first appearance in last year's Disney Marvel movie Captain America: Civil War sparked excitement for the full-length feature from Sony.

Robert Downey Jr. reprises his popular take on Tony Stark/Iron Man, who has recruited Peter Parker/Spider-Man as a supposed intern. Instead of focusing on his school projects and friends, Parker tracks down a group of thieves led by the villain Vulture, played by Michael Keaton, and gets in over his head.

