

## **Ethical Dilemma: To hyperlink or not to hyperlink, that is the question**

**When:** April 2014

**Who you are:** Either the AJC (& Web site), WSB TV (& Web site) or CNN (& Web site). The professor will designate you as part of the editorial team for one of these media.

**Your audience:** AJC - the Southeast; WSB TV - Georgia; CNN - the nation

ajc.com



CNN.com

**What:** A new president of Egypt has just been named, Suleyman bin Daoud, a Shiite who had been an outspoken critic of ousted President Hosni Mubarak and had lived in exile before the revolution of 2011.

Shortly after taking office in April 2014, bin Daoud is kidnapped, along with five American journalists, by a rival Sunni faction. Several hours later, the kidnappers say they have hanged the new president to protest the deposing of Mubarak. The kidnappers don't bother with cell phone video; they provide professional-looking video that shows the prime minister dropping through the platform. The video shows his head snapping off and his body, and head, falling to the floor.

The kidnappers have posted the video on their website, and American officials have independently confirmed that it shows what it says it does: the decapitation of the newly elected Egyptian leader. But American officials are asking American news organizations not to link to the video because, they claim, doing so will help the kidnappers achieve their ends.

No American news site has linked to the site yet, but we, the editors at the AJC (or CNN or WSB), are eager to do so. We in the newsroom meet to discuss our coverage. Our key questions:

Will we include a link to the hanging video and, therefore, the kidnappers' website, or not? Controversy is sure to follow whatever decision we make, so the second question: How will we explain our decision?

Whether we include the link or not, what else will we be sure to include and exclude from our coverage, including the requests from American officials? Inform your discussion with the ASNE/Poynter Ethics Tool --

Decisions on Deadline linked off the class page, and the “Principles & Values of Linking” reading, also linked off our page.

**Today:** Discuss what your news organization should do. We will divide the class into editorial teams. Use the tools to guide your discussion.

**Assignment for next class:**

A 350-word rationale explaining your decision (your own, not necessarily the group’s decision formulated in class), a rationale that should read much like the one from NBC News president Steve Capus explaining his network’s decision to air the Virginia Tech gunman’s video (available: <http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=101&aid=121760>).

For a different model, see the explanation from WSLS TV’s Jessica A. Ross, executive producer, on why her Roanoke, Va., station decided NOT to air the video or portions of it, documented in the same link above.

And for a more recent example of these kinds of ethical decisions and their rationales, see the New York Times article on Al Jazeera’s decision NOT to show video made by Toulouse, France gunman shot dead by French police: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/28/world/europe/al-jazeera-wont-show-toulouse-gunmans-video.html>.

Another resource that might help, on how to think through how to link: [http://www.poynter.org/content/content\\_view.asp?id=117350#linking](http://www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=117350#linking)

***Take the perspective of the AJC for your submitted rationale.***

You will be graded on how well you explain your decision based on the Poynter Ethics Tool and Principles readings.

Writing, spelling, punctuation and style also count, of course. This assignment is worth **two (2) daily grades**, so you should exercise care and edit and proof your work.