



# GROUND TRUTH:

## A FIELD GUIDE FOR CORRESPONDENTS

### ***ground truth (n.)***

*A term coined by NASA referring to the calibration process used in satellite imagery. NASA states that ground truth is “one part of the calibration process, where a person on the ground makes a measurement of the same thing a satellite is trying to measure at the same time the satellite is measuring it.” The two answers are then compared to help evaluate how well the satellite instrument is performing. Usually, the ground truth is trusted more than the satellite.*

At The GroundTruth Project, we believe NASA’s technical definition of ‘ground truth’ serves as an apt metaphor for the goals of our organization, to calibrate truth in the digital age by being there to witness events as they are unfolding and to measure their impact on human lives. Amid the overload of information and often confusing data we face every day online, we seek to pursue ‘ground truth’ as a way to calibrate the information that is out there.

Our goal is to teach the next generation of journalists the value of on-the-ground reporting based on a human reading of events. And, like NASA’s definition of ground truth, we trust the human reading more than a technological ordering of pixels via satellite. We believe the human reading from the ground is what we need more of in order for the technology around us to bring complex issues into focus.

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# INTRODUCTION

We believe great journalism comes from being there on the ground to tell the stories that matter.

We call it “ground truth.”

It’s an old-school value, but one that is more important than ever in a time of great change in our industry and in the world we cover. There is exciting disruption and innovation in new media organizations and digital platforms. There is promising opportunity around emerging democracies and freedoms. And, at the same time, there are the growing perils of instability and conflict.

Across this tumultuous landscape, journalists need to be on the ground, working in the spirit of a free press. But never has it been more dangerous for journalists to do their jobs.

That’s why the GroundTruth Project has as its core mission to train and mentor the next generation of international correspondents and to provide them with the resources needed to produce in-depth reporting on social justice issues in under-covered corners of the world – and to do it safely. Learning how to report safely across international borders is a paramount concern in a time of rising danger for journalists reporting in the field, particularly for those emerging writers, photographers and videographers who often work as independent freelancers.

In August 2014, the horrifying murder of our friend and colleague James Foley, an American freelance journalist, drove home this point in a deeply personal and emotional way. Weeks later the murder of another American freelance journalist, Steven Sotloff, made it all too clear that freedom of expression is under attack by hostile groups around the globe. Both reporters, gifted practitioners of “ground truth,” were beheaded at the hands of the self-described Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. The gruesome acts, videotaped and streamed on the Internet by the Islamic State, shocked and outraged the world. That the terrorist group has only kept up its barbaric campaign targeting journalists and aid workers confirms that a new age of peril is upon us.

For this reason, the 2015 edition of GroundTruth: A Field Guide for Correspondents begins with a new set of standards concerning safety for independent journalists reporting around the world as well as for the news organizations that work with them.

The new standards, titled “A Call for Global Safety Principles and Practices,” were codified through a collaborative process that began last fall in the wake of the Foley and Sotloff killings. Over several months, The GroundTruth Project joined with several other leading news organizations and advocacy groups, including Thomson Reuters, the Associated Press, the Committee to Protect Journalists, the Frontline Freelance Register and the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, to draft a set of basic standards and practices that we hope will give rise to a shared culture of safety in journalism.

On February 12, 2015, our coalition publicly launched the new standards at an event at Columbia Journalism School, with more than 25 prominent news organizations and advocacy groups signed on and many more in the wings that we hope will join this important initiative.

This field guide has worked toward establishing a culture of safety since 2008, when I wrote the first edition as the co-founder and executive editor of the online international news organization GlobalPost.

The principles and the lessons it offers reflect the core beliefs I sought to bring in building the editorial operation at GlobalPost and now at The GroundTruth Project, which officially launched as an independent, nonprofit organization in the summer of 2014. The field guide is a statement of our own standards and practices as well as a place to share important lessons learned in the field through a thoughtful collection of essays by our colleagues.

This revised and updated edition includes a new essay by David Rohde, a veteran foreign correspondent and author, on kidnap for ransom and his advocacy on behalf of the families who have gone through this horrible ordeal, including the Foleys. Rohde, who was kidnapped for ransom himself, may know more intimately about this subject than anyone in journalism. His piece starkly frames a self-effacing essay by James Foley, first published in 2012, in which he writes about what drew him to cover conflict.

There is also a new essay by Gary Knight, the visual editor and co-founder of The GroundTruth Project, who helps to lead our educational programs. An award-winning photographer with more than 25 years of experience as a freelancer, Knight writes passionately in defense of freelancing as an expression of independence and about how the next generation of correspondents can shape a life and career as independent journalists.

This edition additionally offers an invaluable list of organizations that provide the specialized training and services freelancers need to do their jobs well on the ground around the world, from the essential first aid training offered by Reporters Instructed in Saving Colleagues (RISC) to the insurance policies made available through Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF).

As a whole, our field guide codifies our core principles at GroundTruth. We believe in fairness. We believe in accuracy. We believe the best reporting comes from the ground by people who not only report from but also live in and understand the culture and language of where they are reporting. We believe in listening and allowing yourself to be convinced by a point of view you may not have considered before. We believe good reporters do more than merely present two sides of an issue; they unearth facts and then consider all sides in a way that helps create a new understanding of the kinds of complex issues that we face globally.

We believe in giving voice to the voiceless. We believe in respecting different faiths and cultures and ways of seeing the world, and we believe there is added power to working together with colleagues who are from the places we are covering. We believe humor is a good way to get at truth, but we have little time for laughs at someone else's expense. We believe in connecting the dots and saying something important without resorting to the kind of opinionated reporting that shapes too much of the new media landscape. We believe in good storytelling.

While we adhere to “ground truth,” we are also mindful that there is never only one truth in any story. Our motivation at The GroundTruth Project is to uncover the many truths in every story through our reporting and fellowships — and to assemble these truths fairly and accurately in a way that enlightens and informs.

— CHARLES M. SENNOTT

*Founder and Executive Director*

*The GroundTruth Project, February 2015*

# A CALL FOR GLOBAL SAFETY PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

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COLUMBIA JOURNALISM SCHOOL, New York, February 12, 2015 — Over the last two years, killings, imprisonments and abductions of journalists have reached historic highs. These attacks represent a fundamental threat not just to individual news professionals but to the practice of independent journalism.

Locally-based journalists face by far the largest threat and endure the vast majority of murders, imprisonments and abductions. We call on governments, combatants and groups worldwide to respect the neutrality of journalists and immediately end the cycle of impunity surrounding attacks on journalists. At the same time, the kidnapping and murder of reporters James Foley and Steven Sotloff brought to light the growing risks faced by international freelance journalists.

The undersigned groups endorse the following safety principles and practices for international news organizations and the freelancers who work with them. We see this as a first step in a long-term campaign to convince news organizations and journalists to adopt these standards globally. In a time of journalistic peril, news organizations and journalists must work together to protect themselves, their profession and their vital role in global society.

Agence France Presse

Bloomberg

Committee to Protect Journalists

Frontline Club

Global Journalist Security

The GroundTruth Project

International News Safety Institute

McClatchy DC

Overseas Press Club of America

PBS Frontline

Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting

Reporters Without Borders

Rory Peck Trust

The Associated Press

British Broadcasting Corporation

Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma

Frontline Freelance Register

GlobalPost

International Center for Journalists

International Press Institute

Miami Herald

Overseas Press Club Foundation

Public Radio International's The World

Reporters Instructed in Saving Colleagues

Reuters

USA Today

## FOR JOURNALISTS ON DANGEROUS ASSIGNMENTS

1. Before setting out on any assignment in a conflict zone or any dangerous environment, journalists should have basic skills to care for themselves or injured colleagues.
2. We encourage all journalists to complete a recognized news industry first aid course, to carry a suitable first-aid kit and continue their training to stay up-to-date on standards of care and safety both physical and psychological. Before undertaking an assignment in such zones, journalists should seek adequate medical insurance covering them in a conflict zone or area of infectious disease.
3. Journalists in active war zones should be aware of the need and importance of having protective ballistic clothing, including armored jackets and helmets. Journalists operating in a conflict zone or dangerous environment should endeavor to complete an industry-recognized hostile environment course.
4. Journalists should work with colleagues on the ground and with news organizations to complete a careful risk assessment before traveling to any hostile or dangerous environment and measure the journalistic value of an assignment against the risks.
5. On assignment, journalists should plan and prepare in detail how they will operate including identifying routes, transport, contacts and a communications strategy with daily check-in routines with a colleague in the region or their editor. Whenever practical, journalists should take appropriate precautions to secure mobile and Internet communications from intrusion and tracking.
6. Journalists should work closely with their news organizations, the organization that has commissioned them, or their colleagues in the industry if acting independently, to understand the risks of any specific assignment. In doing so, they should seek and take into account the safety information and travel advice of professional colleagues, local contacts, embassies and security personnel. And, likewise, they should share safety information with colleagues to help prevent them harm.
7. Journalists should leave next of kin details with news organizations, ensuring that these named contacts have clear instructions and action plans in the case of injury, kidnap or death in the field.

## FOR NEWS ORGANIZATIONS MAKING ASSIGNMENTS IN DANGEROUS PLACES

1. Editors and news organizations recognize that local journalists and freelancers, including photographers and videographers, play an increasingly vital role in international coverage, particularly on dangerous stories.
2. Editors and news organizations should show the same concern for the welfare of local journalists and

freelancers that they do for staffers.

3. News organizations and editors should endeavor to treat journalists and freelancers they use on a regular basis in a similar manner to the way they treat staffers when it comes to issues of safety training, first aid and other safety equipment, and responsibility in the event of injury or kidnap.

4. Editors and news organizations should be aware of, and factor in, the additional costs of training, insurance and safety equipment in war zones. They should clearly delineate before an assignment what a freelancer will be paid and what expenses will be covered.

5. Editors and news organizations should recognize the importance of prompt payment for freelancers. When setting assignments, news organizations should endeavor to provide agreed upon expenses in advance, or as soon as possible on completion of work, and pay for work done in as timely a manner as possible.

6. Editors and news organizations should ensure that all freelance journalists are given fair recognition in bylines and credits for the work they do both at the time the work is published or broadcast and if it is later submitted for awards, unless the news organization and the freelancer agree that crediting the journalist can compromise the safety of the freelancer and/or the freelancer's family.

7. News organizations should not make an assignment with a freelancer in a conflict zone or dangerous environment unless the news organization is prepared to take the same responsibility for the freelancer's wellbeing in the event of kidnap or injury as it would a staffer. News organizations have a moral responsibility to support journalists to whom they give assignments in dangerous areas, as long as the freelancer complies with the rules and instructions of the news organization.

In conclusion, we, the undersigned, encourage all staff and freelance journalists and the news organizations they work with to actively join in a shared commitment to safety and a new spirit of collegiality and concern.

# GROUND TRUTH'S REPORTING GUIDELINES

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To those of us at The GroundTruth Project, “ground truth” is as straightforward as it sounds. That is, we are seekers of truths that come from reporting on the ground.

We first drafted these reporting guidelines for GlobalPost in 2008 as a way to lay down a set of beliefs for the online news organization as we prepared for its launch. In this updated version of the field guide, we are sharing these core principles as part of The GroundTruth Project's teaching mission.

# ONE: BE THERE.

It's all about being there.

We call it “ground truth.”

It sounds like a pretty simple concept. But it's not so easy when the ground you are on is a shifting, complex story that requires a deep background on the forces shaping the news. We have reporters who do this in places where there is ongoing conflict, like Iraq and Afghanistan; in places where there is a contradictory mix of poverty and opportunity, like India and Brazil; where there are ancient cultures to understand in a modern context, like China and the Andes. Our correspondents are gaining the knowledge that is needed to interpret current events in a way that allows our community of followers to see and understand what is happening, why it is happening and what it means.

This is not a new idea. It is just good, old-fashioned reporting.

But these days we believe there is too much distant analysis — not only at news organizations but also at international businesses and even in military and national security organizations — by those who are too far removed from the ground.

We believe international reporting requires you to be a first-hand observer of the events unfolding in the country you cover. We like to work with journalists who live in the place about which they write, and who know its language and culture. Many of you are native speakers or fluent already. And for those of you who are not, we encourage you to study the language of the places in which you are reporting.

We seek to develop and support the kind of authoritative reporting that can only come from a reporter who is living the story.

# TWO: BE SAFE.

We recognize that the world has never been a more dangerous place for reporters to practice the principle of “ground truth.”

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reports that journalists are facing the worst threat levels in the nearly 25 years since the group has been tracking that data. There were 73 journalists killed in 2013, a record number, and there were 61 killed last year. Ninety percent of these victims are local journalists. Their stories too often go untold in their own countries and unnoticed by the Western media. Things are bad, and getting worse. In the last six months, the killing of the messenger has reached a depth of darkness that few could imagine.

Aware of the perils to reporting, we collaborated with leading international news organizations and advocacy groups to create a clear set of guidelines for how to operate safely in the field. “A Call for Global Safety Principles and Practices,” included in this field guide, is an invaluable reference in this regard. Along with the “Resources for Journalists,” our curated list of groups that offer specialized training and services, these standards offer the kind of practical advice that can save your life and save the lives of colleagues. They do a better job than we could in spelling out how to work on a dangerous assignment and we hope that you heed their recommendations.

A shared principle of all of the organizations working to promoting journalistic safety is that above all else, it is critical that you have clear communication with your editors about your whereabouts. Never begin reporting a story without a game plan for staying in touch and a full and careful assessment of the risks involved. At The GroundTruth Project, no journalist or reporting fellow will ever go on an assignment — particularly a dangerous one — without prior approval from a senior editor. And when on such an assignment, constant contact is required.

Virtually all of these organizations also recommend first aid and hostile environment training for reporters entering a conflict zone or dangerous environment. At GroundTruth, we are listening to these specific recommendations as well and implementing them as policy. Along these lines, the essay by David Rohde on this topic, new to the field guide this year, should be required reading.

# THREE: BE A LISTENER.

We believe strongly that the greatest correspondents **hear as many sides of an issue as possible before they begin writing or producing multimedia.**

The most memorable stories are the ones that surprise us, that contravene our preconceptions. And we believe these stories come from listening carefully to the community you are covering. They come from being fair and reporting without bias. Most of all, they come from listening.

We encourage you to give voice to the voiceless . **It is a big world out there and too often our news is shaped by politicians, diplomats and officials.** Of course, their pronouncements from press conferences and embassy briefings matter and affect lives, and we need them in our stories. But the best reporting is the kind that comes up from the street — the voices of the people who stand to be affected by the decisions of the powerful.

It is a customary practice in reporting these days, but back in the early 1960s when the legendary New York City columnist Jimmy Breslin was writing for the New York Daily News he broke new ground by listening and giving voice to the people he knew from the streets of New York. In perhaps his most vivid expression of this style of reporting, Breslin covered the 1963 state funeral of John F. Kennedy. Amid the dignitaries, the heads of state and the somber weight of the moment in history, Breslin interviewed the man whose job it was to dig the ditch where the fallen president's casket would be lowered into the earth. In the parlance of a New York City newsroom, it's now known as a **"gravedigger story."** **It's the story about the little guy that tells us what we need to know about a big moment in history.**

This may feel like old hat to experienced reporters. But we are aware that there is a new generation of international correspondents coming of age who may not always have had this training. So a reminder to the veterans and a plea to correspondents who are newer to the craft to bring this spirit of listening — and giving voice to the voiceless — to your work.

# FOUR: BE FAIR AND ACCURATE.

From careful listening comes fair, truthful reporting.

So listen to what people say and check the facts they provide. Check spelling, particularly the spelling of names, and be sure you have your sources' proper titles.

Accuracy matters, and the reputation of a news organization and your reputation as a correspondent rely on getting it right. There is a great axiom of deadline reporting: **When in doubt, leave it out. Live by that.** Only write about the things you know, the things you've seen with your own eyes and be sure you have clear and accurate attribution on everything else. If you live by these relatively simple and straightforward rules, you will always be on solid footing.

GroundTruth has a basic policy for corrections and clarifications, which can be summed up quite succinctly: When we make a mistake, we will always seek to correct it and let readers know we have done so. Any correspondent or reporting fellow whose work requires persistent corrections on issues of material fact will be warned that his or her relationship with GroundTruth will be terminated if the pattern of inaccurate reporting continues.

We try to discourage the use of unnamed sources. We believe it is far better to get a comment on the record. Sometimes it requires asking more than once, but persistence is better than accepting a blind quote and finding out later it is unusable.

**We understand that there are circumstances in which anonymity is necessary to protect the life or livelihood of a source, but that is the only occasion in which unnamed sources should be used.** In these cases, GroundTruth retains the right to request that a reporter shares with a senior editor any unnamed source used for a story.

GroundTruth also forbids any reporter from writing a story in which he or she has a vested economic interest or a clear political bias. The spirit of full disclosure matters in reporting and we request that you let us know if you believe there is any potential line that might be crossed during the course of your reporting.

We are aware that our correspondents operate in many corners of the world where there are different legal standards for journalism and different ideas about what constitutes fairness. But we hold to a very American tradition of journalism in this regard and one that we believe is a proud tradition.

**Our research shows legal precedent is being established that online news organizations will be held to the legal standards for reporting in the country from which they originate, which for us is the United States.** As the US perhaps more fiercely protects freedom of the press than any other country, we believe that good, honest, accurate and fair reporting from any place in the world will always put us on solid legal ground.

If you are ever working on a story that you believe is potentially libelous or if anyone you are reporting on threatens any legal action, you are obliged to get in touch with your editor promptly and directly.

# FIVE: BE HONEST.

GroundTruth is committed to transparency in all aspects of our work, from reporting and writing to production and funding.

Be sure you are accredited as a journalist and always work within the guidelines set by the press office in the country where you are working. Always identify yourself as a reporter when you are working in the field.

At GroundTruth, we forbid the manipulation of any work — including writing, photos, audio and video — in a manner that distorts or misrepresents reality. Any fabrication of quotes or made-up reporting will not be tolerated and will be grounds to immediately end a relationship with a correspondent. Plagiarism will also be grounds for terminating a contract or reporting fellowship. Plagiarism includes not only directly copying someone else's words, but it can also include heavy borrowing of quotes, ideas, images and insights without proper attribution.

We recognize that most freelancers must juggle work for several news outlets at once. We ask that you be fair and honest with us when you are balancing these sometimes competing interests. The simplest, best way to avoid problems is through clear communication and mutual trust. And that means we want to trust that the stories you are writing for GroundTruth are not appearing somewhere else, and that your work for us is unique. At times, we know you will rely on the reporting you've gathered in the field to write for multiple outlets. But, again, you are obliged to be sure that the stories are substantially rewritten if you are offering them to us for payment.

GroundTruth correspondents and reporting fellows should not accept gifts or any payment from a source involved in a story, nor should they offer any gifts or payment in return for getting a story.

If a correspondent or columnist is offered travel or lodging as part of a reporting trip, this should be discussed in advance with an editor. Typically, we will not permit such trips. But there are exceptions when GroundTruth believes it wise and sometimes necessary to accept, for example, free flights from international aid organizations or the military. We may also, for instance, allow our writers to take an expenses-paid trip by an industry group as long as the correspondent has clearly established with his or her host that none of the services-in-kind will influence the outcome of the reporting. If GroundTruth does accept such a trip, we will let viewers of our content know so they have full transparency and can judge for themselves if any undue influence has crept in to the coverage as a result. We the editors will be working very hard to be sure it does not.

# SIX: BE ON TIME AND BE IN TOUCH.

**Making deadline is critical no matter what news organizations you are filing for.** We accept that reality changes, that stories and the best of reporting plans sometimes don't pan out. Sometimes a better breaking story comes along. But when such circumstances occur, a correspondent must communicate a change in game plan with his or her editors and let them know well in advance if he or she is going to miss a deadline.

Communication is key. GroundTruth understands that freelancing is largely for the free-spirited. We do not expect those of you who are freelancers to be bound to us or to a daily schedule in the way a staff correspondent would be. But if you are working with GroundTruth as a reporting fellow or as a correspondent, we expect to be able to reach you in the event of an emergency or a significant breaking news story. So please be sure that we always have your updated contact information.

Our policy on communicating and sticking to deadlines is clear-cut: If a correspondent consistently misses deadlines or fails to stay in contact with us, they will be given a warning. If the pattern continues, their relationship with GroundTruth can be terminated.

# SEVEN: BE SOCIAL.

All journalists need to focus on building their own personal brands, and that is done most directly through social media.

Social media is not only essential to connecting journalism with a wider audience, but it is also increasingly part of the reporting and digital storytelling process. A large percentage of most news organizations' Internet traffic comes from social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, YouTube and Instagram. No company can thrive without consistent, creative sharing of published work.

We believe the same is true of correspondents in the field, whether they are early in their careers or veteran reporters. If you are trying to make your name known, increase the reach of your work, connect with sources and/or reconnect with people you already know, it pays to invest time in select social media accounts.

By sharing your work and communicating in different ways, you expand your network, become better known for the type of work that you do, and increase your access to jobs, fellowships, freelance assignments, awards and other benefits.

If you want to keep your time spent on social media to a minimum, find a platform or two that you're comfortable with, that is rewarding and that you're willing to spend at least a few minutes a day cultivating. As you build connections, you will contribute to a "network effect" that creates value for yourself, your colleagues and the organizations you work for.

As a next step, it may also make sense to create a personal blog using a platform like WordPress or Tumblr, a place where you can publish past and current work along with biographical and contact information. Though launching a blog is cheap and pretty simple, customizing and maintaining it takes an investment of time some people are not willing to make. In that case, it may make sense to create a professional profile on LinkedIn where interested parties can see your C.V. and samples of your work.

To get started building out your network, follow The GroundTruth Project on:



[www.twitter.com/groundtruth](http://www.twitter.com/groundtruth)



<https://www.facebook.com/groundtruthproject>



[www.instagram.com/groundtruth](http://www.instagram.com/groundtruth)

# EIGHT: BE A STORYTELLER.

Experiment with storytelling in the digital age and have some fun with it.

We believe that being an international correspondent is one of the greatest vocations in the world. It's a calling and an invitation to go out to distant lands, to find great stories and to report them back to a home audience or enlighten a global audience on the web. You can be covering serious diplomatic initiatives one day and writing about a fascinating crime story the next.

Put simply, we want you to find the great stories and tell them. And in this digital age, we want you to experiment with how you do that. We don't expect any of you to be experts at everything. We respect people who prefer to stick to their own field of expertise as writers, photographers or videographers. But we do invite all of you to experiment with reporting across different platforms.

We offer reporting fellowships that focus on mentoring and training correspondents in the art of storytelling in the digital age, and we hope that this new generation of correspondents will keep experimenting. We want photographers to try their hand at writing, and writers to try their hand at photography. And we want everyone everywhere to think about capturing live, breaking news events with video through your iPhone or any other device you can get your hands on. Be creative.

At the end of the day, great journalism is about great storytelling. And what we want more than anything is for you to go out and find great stories.

# RESOURCES FOR JOURNALISTS IN THE FIELD

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Many organizations are doing critical work to ensure the safety of reporters and advocate for free speech around the world. The GroundTruth Project has curated the following list of resources for all journalists reporting internationally.

## 1. COMMITTEE TO PROTECT JOURNALISTS (CPJ)

The Committee to Protect Journalists “promotes press freedom worldwide and defends the right of journalists to report the news without fear of reprisal. CPJ ensures the free flow of news and commentary by taking action wherever journalists are attacked, imprisoned, killed, kidnapped, threatened, censored, or harassed.” CPJ’s [Journalist Security Guide](#) “details what journalists need to know in a new and changing world. It is aimed at local and international journalists of varied levels of experience. The guide outlines basic preparedness for new journalists taking on their first assignments around the world, offers refresher information for mid-career journalists returning to the field, and provides advice on complex issues such as digital security and threat assessment for journalists of all experience levels.” CPJ’s [Journalist Assistance Program](#) provides “legal, medical, and relocation assistance to journalists at risk, along with support for families of slain and imprisoned journalists.”

 <http://www.cpj.org/>

 @pressfreedom

## 2. OVERSEAS PRESS CLUB OF AMERICA (OPC)

The Overseas Press Club of America is an international association of journalists working in the United States and abroad. OPC’s mission is “to encourage the highest standards of professional integrity and skill in the reporting of news; to educate a new generation of journalists; to contribute to the freedom and independence of journalists and the press throughout the world, and to work toward better communication and understanding among people.” Membership dues provide journalists with a network of experienced reporters, access to media related events, monthly newsletters, discounts at hotels, and press passes at club events around the world. The Overseas Press Club Foundation, a nonprofit affiliated with the OPC, provides internships and scholarships to aspiring foreign correspondents.

 <https://www.opcofamerica.org>

 @opcofamerica

## 3. FRONTLINE FREELANCE REGISTER (FFR)

The Frontline Freelance Register is a membership organization of freelancers that “aims to provide freelance foreign and conflict journalists with representation and a sense of community, vital in this fragmented profession.” FFR works to safeguard its members against physical and mental health risks that come with conflict reporting, recognizing that freelancers often operate without the financial and institutional support that is necessary when working in conflict zones. FFR seeks to help journalists by giving them a supportive network in order to meet these challenges. FFR membership is open to all freelance journalists who agree to uphold the organization’s [Code of Conduct](#).

 <http://www.frontlinefreelance.org/>

 @ffregister

## 4. REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS (REPORTERS SANS FRONTIÈRES)

Reporters Without Borders is a nonprofit organization that focuses on two areas of activity: fighting censorship or restrictions on freedom of information, and “providing material, financial, and psychological assistance to journalists assigned to dangerous areas.” Reporters Without Borders works across five continents, but keeps close contact with local and regional press freedom groups through its extensive network of correspondents. Reporters Without Borders protects journalists in the field by offering multiple tools and resources:

- » [Practical Guide for Journalists](#)
- » [Online security guide](#)
- » [Practical training sessions offered by the French Ministry of Defense](#)
- » Bulletproof vests and helmets on loan free of charge, available at the organization’s Paris headquarters. To obtain equipment, email [assistance@rsf.org](mailto:assistance@rsf.org).
- » [Insurance packages for freelance journalists covering conflict](#)
- » A Free “Press SOS” hotline for journalists in difficulty, available 7 days/week, 24 hours/day: (33) 1-4777-7414.
- » [Psychological support](#) for journalists on how to detect “posttraumatic stress disorder.”



<http://en.rsf.org/>



[@RSF\\_RWB](https://twitter.com/RSF_RWB)

## 5. INTERNATIONAL PRESS INSTITUTE (IPI)

The International Press Institute is a “global network of editors, media executives and leading journalists... dedicated to furthering and safeguarding press freedom, protecting freedom of opinion and expression, promoting the free flow of news and information, and improving the practices of journalism.” IPI monitors threats to media freedom worldwide and engages in advocacy to address them, including issuing written protests and conducting press freedom missions. IPI also analyzes proposed legislative and regulatory changes affecting news media for compliance with international standards, publishes extensive reports on global media freedom violations, and organizes training and professional development events. Membership gives journalists access to IPI’s wide network of media professionals, as well as discounted rates at IPI events, updates on IPI’s press freedom work, and more.



<http://www.freemedia.at/membership.html>



[@globalfreemedia](https://twitter.com/globalfreemedia)

## 6. THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR JOURNALISTS (ICFJ)

The International Center for Journalists “is at the forefront of the news revolution.” ICFJ’s “programs empower journalists and engage citizens with new technologies and best practices. ICFJ’s networks of reporters and media entrepreneurs are transforming the field. They believe that better journalism leads to better lives.”

 <http://www.icfj.org/>

 @icfj

## 7. INTERNATIONAL NEWS SAFETY INSTITUTE (INSI)

The International News Safety Institute “provides real-time, practical information, training and research to help journalists around the world do their jobs safely.” Along with distributing relevant and timely alerts and advisories, INSI also provides basic safety training free of charge, offers specialized security training for female journalists, and collaborates with universities to research the current status of press security around the world. INSI’s website features thorough information pages on all facets of international reporting, from preparation and insurance, to [guidelines](#) for dealing with abduction, navigating riots, or recognizing PTSD.

 <http://www.newssafety.org/home/>

 @insinews

## 8. REPORTERS INSTRUCTED IN SAVING COLLEAGUES (RISC)

RISC is a medical training program for freelance journalists founded by veteran correspondent Sebastian Junger. The four-day course focuses on vital life-saving procedures that could be used to help others (and oneself) when reporting in conflict zones. Graduates of the program also receive a combat medical kit that they are expected to carry with them at all times when working in violent regions. Courses are held three times a year in locations around the world including New York, London, Kosovo, Nairobi, and the Middle East. All course costs are covered by charitable donations; journalists only need to pay for their own travel and food expenses.

 <http://risctraining.org/>

 @RiscTraining

## 9. PULITZER CENTER ON CRISIS REPORTING

The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting promotes in-depth engagement with global affairs by supporting international journalism across media platforms and an innovative program of outreach and education. The Center funds international travel costs associated with reporting projects, with emphasis on issues unreported or under-reported in mainstream US media. Grants are open to journalists, writers, photographers, radio producers or filmmakers; staff journalists as well as freelancers of any nationality are eligible to apply. The Center also has an [active program](#) for students.

 <http://pulitzercenter.org/>

 @PulitzerCenter

## 10. RORY PECK TRUST

The Rory Peck Trust aims “to provide practical assistance and support to freelance newsgatherers and their families worldwide, to raise their profile, promote their welfare and safety, and to support their right to report freely and without fear.” The Trust recognizes the important role freelancers play in international newsgathering, and protects their ability to work safely by coordinating protection efforts with international and local partners. The Trust’s [Freelance Assistance Programme](#) gives grants, training, project support and ongoing practical advice for freelancers in any region. The Trust also provides [online resources](#) concerning safety, insurance, and best practices for journalists.

 <https://rorypecktrust.org/>

 @rorypecktrust

## 11. DART CENTER FOR JOURNALISM AND TRAUMA

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma is a project of the Columbia Journalism School. The Dart Center is “dedicated to informed, effective and ethical news reporting in violence, conflict, and tragedy” on the global scale. The Dart Center has a multitude of articles and online resources to help journalists deal with the personal and external challenges that come with conflict reporting. The Dart Center offers journalists fellowships, provides guidebooks and DVDs on best practices in covering trauma, and has training programs for conflict reporters.

 <http://dartcenter.org/>

 @DartCenter

## 12. HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Human Rights Watch “defends the rights of people worldwide” by scrupulously investigating abuses, exposing the facts widely, and pressuring those with power to respect rights and secure justice. “Human Rights Watch is an independent, international organization that works as part of a vibrant movement to uphold human dignity and advance the cause of human rights for all.”

 <http://www.hrw.org/>

 @hrw

# LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FIELD

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GroundTruth seeks to support an international community of correspondents, a band of freelancers scattered around the globe who view themselves as one tribe. We want to encourage and foster a sense of camaraderie that cuts across generations and across cultural and national boundaries. That sense of a common purpose is too often missing from the wonderfully independent, but sometimes isolating life of a freelancer, particularly in the digital age. So through this field guide we hope you might stay connected and share insights and stories from the field and learn from each other. When possible we hope you might also help each other in these times of both great uncertainty and abundant possibility for the future of journalism. We all have a lot to learn from each other.

To that end, we have collected essays from field correspondents over the last six years. Each of these dispatches from the field tells a story that offers a teaching moment, a new way to define “ground truth,” a cautionary tale or a celebration of the craft. We would like for this collection to grow. And so to any of you who would like to contribute an essay for next year’s field guide, please let us know.

# A LETTER TO FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHERS

BY GARY KNIGHT, 2015

CAMBRIDGE, Massachusetts – Being a freelance photographer is the most privileged job in journalism. Nothing else comes close.

There has been a great deal of discussion recently around independent journalists, or freelancers, and the perils they face. But I would argue that the fundamentals for this kind of work have not changed. And I would give the same advice to freelance photographers today that I was given over 25 years ago.

I would tell them that stories need to be told and you have to be close to people to understand and tell their stories. This kind of photography cannot be practiced in a hotel. That close proximity can increase the level of risk, but it is worth it. And the risks can be managed if you are thoughtful in evaluating your surroundings and managing your work.

While being a freelance photographer in under-reported corners of the world can bring great risk, it can bring great rewards as well. The single greatest reward may be that as a photographer you are forced to be among people, to share the intimacies of their lives and document how they navigate the turmoil around them. It's a privilege to be able to amplify their voices and to be there to bear witness.

## **Preparation:**

Some of the most important lessons I have learned are simple, obvious and very practical.

A sensible first step, if you are going to be in a place where you will be covering conflict, natural disasters, or an outbreak of disease, is to undertake a risk analysis. This sounds more complicated than it is. A good way to start is to talk with colleagues who are already on the ground or who have just returned. Better still, talk with local people or foreigners who have lived for a long time in the country you are visiting, preferably people with whom you have some connection deeper than finding them on Facebook.

Beware of experts who are not really experts, especially amongst colleagues. Be careful to test the information you receive with other sources and try to make sure at least one of them is local. Universities, local newsrooms and NGOs all have informed people who can help you.

An aspect of the risk analysis should also be a candid discussion with editors who you may be pitching for work to be sure, as much as possible, that expectations are managed. And you should read carefully through this field guide and be sure you have checked out the resources that other organizations listed in the guide have to offer. Get as much information as you can.

Another important step before you leave is to make sure a significant other and/or a responsible and

easy-to-reach next of kin knows where you are going and when you expect to return. While in the field, you should also create a new community everywhere you work. You want to cultivate people who will notice you are missing, and who understand your work.

When you have your risk analysis in place, you can start packing for the trip. Even that seemingly simple act of filling a duffle bag or backpack with what you need has to be carefully thought through.

My first rule of thumb is to be organized and liberated from distractions. So I travel with three identical shirts, socks, underwear and two pairs of identical trousers. That way you don't have to waste time wondering what to wear. I keep everything in the same place (for example, my light meter is always in my left breast pocket). When things go down around you, you don't want to spend time wondering where you put your fresh roll of film, battery or new card. I mostly use one lens on one camera (I leave the spares in the hotel or car).

I don't share this with you because I think I have anything to offer you stylistically; none of this is a fashion statement. I know it may sound slightly absurd, but I don't want to be distracted by choices that are not important. Keep your wits about you and stay focused. And keep away from Facebook and Twitter. Distraction is dangerous.

### **Respect:**

One of the things that makes freelance photography stand apart from other forms of journalism is that it's rarely a rung on the ladder to fame and fortune. It is not a step to being an editor or a celebrity. Let's face it, you will work largely in obscurity in a craft where the pay is bad and where very often the last person to be recognized and acclaimed on a big project is the photographer.

Use this to your advantage because that relative anonymity brings with the job a certain freedom. Freedom to roam and freedom to concentrate on the job at hand — representing the lives of others. You have to be able to immerse yourself in the lives of the people around you, the lives of ordinary civilians.

Yes, this proximity can bring with it a high degree of risk. But in my experience, local people are very often extremely generous in allowing outsiders into their lives, often because they want their story told and they want to feel connected to the world outside. They frequently see it as validating, especially in war, where they have little influence over the outcome. Treat the civilians you meet with dignity and respect in the way you act and the way you dress and by being mindful of local customs. If you do that, you will often see people open up to you in unique ways. On a very practical level, showing respect to locals may also result in them protecting you from those who might cause you harm, if they can. They might also end up being good advocates for you if things do go awry. And, of course, showing respect is just the right way to carry yourself in the world no matter where you are. Always be respectful.

### **Make no assumptions, and trust your own instincts:**

I was very nearly killed in my first experience of combat. The only thing that saved me was chance. I got into trouble because I made assumptions that the people I was with knew what they were doing. I followed them blindly because I had less experience than anyone in the group. It was 1989 and I went on a long-

range patrol with the Khmer People's National Liberation Army, a Cambodian resistance group allied to the Khmer Rouge, who were fighting the Vietnamese army and the Cambodian government. We marched from Thailand down a long valley surrounded by hills, passing through villages and camping near the only source of water under the only trees in the area.

I knew instinctively this was wrong. I grew up in rural England and knew from observing nature with my grandfather that hills are good observation points for predators. Water and trees are where all prey seek refuge. I presumed that some villagers would telegraph our movements especially as this was a civil war where no side could claim universal support in any village. I trusted the unit commander, but he had grown up in Paris and had bought his commission. My trust came from a lack of confidence in my own judgment rather than confidence in his. We were hit by a multiple rocket launcher while we slept in our hammocks at noon. The unit took extremely high casualties.

It was a quick lesson in understanding that assumptions are dangerous and sometimes fatal. To survive this kind of work, I would need to learn fast and trust my own instincts. Working in war or violent, unpredictable areas leaves few opportunities for second chances, and if you are going to do it you need to treat it seriously. You need the best preparation, the best training, the most focused mind and the best support you can find. You also need to be surrounded by the best people. Choose your colleagues in the field carefully.

### **Think local:**

The most valuable travelling companions are often local people, or locally based foreigners with good local knowledge. Having colleagues who understand how to read the roads, how to sense when things aren't quite right and who can understand what is going on around them is invaluable. They also have the most at stake, and are most at risk. That has a way of focusing the mind, often making them safer and better able to calculate risk. Local people also can help you challenge your own prejudices and broaden your point of view. Most Western correspondents learn what they know from reading or listening to other Western correspondents, and that often perpetuates misconception and reinforces the status quo. A good local companion will help you become better informed, and make you a better correspondent. If you hire a local person to work with you, it is important to understand the special responsibility you have for them. When you leave, they stay behind. They and their families and their community may pay a price for what you do. Always think about those you are leaving behind.

### **Think independently:**

Team up with someone who has good knowledge and experience, someone you can trust. It is always preferable to share the burden of decision-making; it expands your resources and when you are weary your partner can be strong. But it can also be a disaster if you choose the wrong partner. Freelance photographers often have as much or more experience in conflict and violence reporting than the writers with whom they are assigned to work. Writers who are staff may decide they are in charge because they are full-time employees. Most good writers and those with considerable experience will understand the value of working with a photographer who has experience and knowledge. The respect for each other should take shape quickly. If it doesn't, don't be afraid to propose cutting loose and working on your own.

Any responsible photo editor will understand that this is sometimes necessary and wise. And, if the editor doesn't like it and you feel strongly, turn down the assignment. You cannot afford to be a passenger with no voice in a war zone. Trust your gut instinct.

**Question authority:**

I would avoid the culture of hanging out in bars or embassy compounds with diplomats, political operatives and generals. It is dangerous to assume they know more than you do. Even if they do, the chances are they will not share the truth with you, or each other. The fact that less than 1 percent of the journalists in Kuwait who went to cover the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 made it across the border is testament to that.

If you want to know what is happening, find your own sources. Make friends with the local taxi drivers who will know the roads intimately, get to know local junior military commanders and senior non-commissioned officers. But don't be seduced by power. People in power are almost by definition far removed from the ground. And photographs are taken on the ground.

**Be honest, with others and yourself:**

Your job is to represent what you see as honestly as you can, it is not to give clients in New York, Paris or London what they think they want. Don't be afraid to challenge preconceptions, rather than reinforce them. Don't make assumptions based on your own prejudice. Have an open mind. Be open to admitting you don't understand what you are looking at and try to understand it more fully. That effort will make you a better storyteller, it will make you a more honest and less partisan journalist and it might save your life one day.

*Gary Knight is Co-founder and Visual Editor for The GroundTruth Project, Co-founder of the VII Photo Agency and Founder of the Program for Narrative & Documentary Practice at Tufts University.*

# BRING KIDNAP FOR RANSOM OUT OF THE SHADOWS

BY DAVID ROHDE, 2014

NEW YORK - The questions from the family of James Foley during the final months of his captivity should have been easy to answer. Is it legal for an American family to pay a ransom to a terrorist group? Is the US government willing to have a third country pay a ransom? What might freeing Jim cost?

Instead, myself and dozens of other journalists trying to help the Foleys provided them with muddled answers. Some journalists, including me, advised the Foleys to raise and pay a ransom on their own. Others told them the US government might secretly work with a third country to broker Jim's release. And all of our estimates of what it might cost to free Jim were wild guesses.

In the end, we failed Jim and his family.

The death of James Foley and fellow American journalist Steven Sotloff is a wake-up call for American journalists and news organizations. Their deaths are the clearest evidence yet of how vastly different responses to kidnappings by European and US governments can save European hostages and inadvertently doom American ones. Hostages and their families realize this fully—even if the public does not.

This spring, four French, two Spanish and one Danish journalist held hostage with Foley and Sotloff were freed—after their governments paid ransoms through intermediaries. In July, a New York Times investigation by foreign correspondent Rukmini Callimachi found that Al Qaeda and its direct affiliates had received at least \$125 million in revenue from kidnappings since 2008—primarily from European governments. In the last year alone, these terrorist groups received \$66 million.

Publicly, European governments deny making these payments. But former diplomats told Callimachi that ransoms are paid through intermediaries. Kidnapping as a fundraising tactic is thriving and payments are rising. In 2003, a ransom of roughly \$200,000 was paid for each captive, Callimachi found. Today, captors reap millions per captive.

The cases follow a grim pattern: Hostages are abducted, months pass with no news from the captors and a threatening video or email is then sent to families. In some cases, the militants ask that kidnappings not be made public so that the ransom can be paid quietly.

The abductions appear similar because they are coordinated. The practice has become so lucrative that Al-Qaeda leaders in Pakistan help oversee negotiations for affiliates. Militant groups spread across North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia now roughly follow the same protocol.

Hostage-taking is now so pervasive that at least one major aid organization told me it no longer sends American aid workers to areas where they might be abducted. Instead, the group is sending citizens from European countries with governments that will pay ransoms.

The divergent US and European approach to abductions is not working. It fails to deter captors or consistently safeguard victims.

The Foleys and many other families of kidnap victims are intensely frustrated with the American government response. US officials refused to coordinate their response in any way with European governments, according to the Foleys. Other families who asked not be identified because their loved ones remain in captivity say they feel ignored by US government officials.

In October, a person involved in negotiations to free Americans held captive in Syria told Shane Harris of Foreign Policy that “no one’s really in charge” of hostage negotiation in the American government. Harris described an unclear policy where the White House and State Department oppose the payments of ransoms made by governments or families. But the Justice Department and the FBI believe the US should turn a blind eye if a payment is made by a family.

The Foleys were warned by a White House official that if they paid a ransom for their son they could be prosecuted under laws that bar Americans from providing material support to terrorist organizations. At the same time, the FBI told the Foleys the government would turn a blind eye and not prosecute them.

A debate has erupted as well about the news organizations’ willingness to participate in “media blackouts” regarding kidnapping cases. A decade ago, news organizations began agreeing to not report the kidnappings of journalists in Iraq and Afghanistan as abductions there spread. Security experts at the time said that publicity raised captors’ expectations for a large ransom and could also endanger hostages.

Joel Simon, the executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, questioned the efficacy of blackouts in a piece in the Columbia Journalism Review published last September.

“Initially, I supported the use of media blackouts in selective cases. But more recently I have come to doubt that it is an effective strategy,” Simon wrote, noting that there was scant evidence that blackouts had facilitated negotiations. “Meanwhile, because the news is suppressed and sometimes never released, blackouts themselves stifle the public debate and undermine the media’s own credibility.”

Simon is right. Blackouts are well intentioned but their use should be re-examined. In some cases, withholding details about an abducted journalist’s religion, as occurred in the Sotloff case, makes sense. But one inadvertent outcome of blackouts is that they reduce the pressure on the US government to have a coherent policy for responding to abductions.

Through our reporting, we journalists can help spark debate about kidnap for ransom and how to respond to it. Clearer American government policies, more open discussion on the payments of ransoms and better coordination between the US and Europe is desperately needed. Policymakers should be forced to answer for their actions in these cases.

The current haphazard approach is failing. For Foley and Sotloff, the world of kidnap for ransom must be brought out of the shadows.

*This article was adapted from columns published by Reuters and The Atlantic on August 20, 2014. David Rohde is a Pulitzer Prize-winning foreign correspondent who worked for the New York Times. In 2009, he was captured in Afghanistan and held for seven months in Pakistan before he managed to escape. Since this article was written, the US government has announced that it is reviewing its policies relating to kidnap for ransom and how the government deals with families of victims. No findings of this internal review have been released to date.*

# STEPPING BACK TO ASSESS A BAD DAY IN LIBYA

BY JAMES FOLEY, 2012

*An American journalist who worked as a freelancer for GlobalPost, Foley was captured in Syria in November 2012 and then murdered senselessly at the hands of the self-described Islamic State in August 2014. His kidnapping in Syria was not his first experience as a hostage. Foley had been detained in Libya in 2011 while on assignment for GlobalPost and then released after 45 days. This essay was written in early 2012.*

MISRATA, Libya — I was captured by forces loyal to Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi on April 5 and held for 45 days before being released. Now seven months later, I am back covering the rebels as they have succeeded in taking the capital and beginning to establish a new government.

It's good to be back. This story matters and I wanted to be here telling it from the front lines.

But just about every day since I was freed and just about every moment I am here reporting from Libya, I have been reflecting on the lessons learned from that harrowing experience. I saw a colleague killed. My family was thrown into a world of constant worry. The news organization I work for was thrust into a situation of working around the clock on my behalf.

It's fair to ask why did I go back, and why am I still drawn to the story? It's fair to ask if there were mistakes made and it's important to think through how I will avoid making them in the future.

So let me walk through that day and try to address some of the lessons learned along the way.

Our idea that morning of April 5, the day we were captured, was to go to the front in eastern Libya to see fresh battle damage from the night before and spend the day with the rebels.

Libyan fighters on both sides of the conflict were known for being late sleepers. We believed it was early enough to get a look at the front line and take an assessment of what the rebel positions were before the fighting started.

The pattern in Libya had been quiet mornings followed by rockets and mortar attacks in the afternoon. The problem is that we were assuming that pattern would hold, just because we hadn't seen any morning fighting before.

Three other freelancers and I jumped in a scout bus and headed past the last checkpoint towards the Gaddafi-held town of Brega. We knew it was risky. The burning vehicles we passed were signs of fresh

fighting. But we didn't step back to take a better assessment, and we should have. Being careful in assessing your reporting every step of the way is the key to making good decisions. Before we knew it, some teenagers on the side of the road informed us that the Gaddafi forces were 300 meters away.

Minutes later, two Gaddafi military pickups topped the crest of the hill and bore down on us firing their AK-47s. We were too far away from the retreating vehicle that had brought us, and there was just too much gunfire to run for it.

We hit the ground. Any reporter who's been under direct fire knows the body reacts before the mind can process what is actually happening. The mind will even present the illusion of a way out, but the flight or fight instincts are fully in control. We burrowed ourselves as much as possible into a small sand dune on the side of the road, as the Gaddafi vehicles slowed to a stop upon seeing us and continued to fire on [us with] full or semi-automatic [weapons].

From behind my sand dune, I heard our colleague Anton cry, "Help, help." His voice carried the tinge of a serious injury. I shouted if he was OK.

"No," he said, in a much weaker voice. The awful reality kicked in. I imagined he was bleeding badly.

The soldiers might not even know we were reporters. I jumped up, holding my hands and walked towards them, yelling the word for "journalist" in Arabic.

I was struck across my chin with the wooden butt end of an AK-47. I was then hit in the head and punched in the eye. All my self-preservation instincts were to not fight back and to be limp and completely complacent.

We were tied up and taken to a loyalist safe house in Brega. Later that afternoon the three of us were transported to Sirte and two days later to Tripoli, where we spent weeks languishing in a series of prisons. We were never beaten again. We were generally well fed. But we didn't get to make a phone call home for almost 20 days and didn't see a western official for almost a month. And when these 'privileges' finally did come they were largely due to a tremendous amount of international advocacy on our behalf.

As I have indicated, I have taken a lot of time to reflect on the decisions that led me to the front lines on that day, the mistakes we made that led to the loss of a colleague who was senselessly gunned down, and how we were able to improve our chances once in captivity.

Many journalists have a desire to get to the front lines to experience what the feeling and taste of the conflict is really like. For some of us who cover conflict, this is an undeniably alluring part of the job, but the front can carry an attraction that is perhaps more of an infatuation with taking risks than with real journalism. My decision making that day was clouded by an adrenalin-influenced desire to be there first, to push the limits further. I had had some success covering the front lines, and I wanted more of that. And in aggressively pursuing that desire, I failed to more carefully assess the terrain. That was the key mistake.

Anton Hammerl was shot with an AK burst and quickly bled to death. Anyone of us could have been him. To what end were we in the line of fire that day? The answer is unclear.

I've learned in the hardest way that a journalist has to give great thought to their risk assessment. You have to ask yourself what facts and impressions need to be verified with ones own eyes and what can be verified by other means, if you take one step back. Do I need to go down that unknown road, past that last checkpoint? Or, can I wait to gather the accounts of those soldiers and civilians who just went down it and are now retreating back?

I was doing a lot of video, so my impatience and competitive desire to get front-line footage weighed over what would have been a better plan. In this specific scenario, we should have developed relationships with a more organized rebel group, who could have provided real protection and access.

But there are other lessons worth sharing. Some of the steps we took after we were captured were the rights one and, I believe, helpful in gaining our release. While in captivity, certain common sense behaviors probably helped our chances to eventually be freed at a time when NATO was bombing the capital where we were being held.

First, we always told the truth and were consistent with the facts. When you're captured by one of these regimes you are at the mercy of interrogators and a secret police apparatus that has been disappearing people for decades. We told the truth to our interrogators down to the number of stories we'd filed.

At every step of the way we tried to be compliant and friendly with guards, drivers, interrogators and judges. We tried to be gracious and calm. We made real friends with fellow Libyan prisoners who shared with us extra food, cigarettes and clothes. I'm convinced if we weren't freed by the tremendous efforts of our news organizations, NGOs and international groups, my fellow Libyan prisoners would have gotten us out when Tripoli fell.

At one point I refused to do a second interview on State TV. Some might say that on one level it was a mistake. That is, State TV footage would have given my family and colleagues further proof that I was alive and doing fine. But there is another argument that refusing a request at some point in your captivity draws the line for your captors of how much they can exploit you. You have to know when to stick up for yourself and do it as politely but firmly as possible.

Above all, I had to find a way to keep up hope and strength. I prayed as much as I could, kneeling with my fellow captives whether they were American Christians or Libyan Muslims. The act of collective prayer and building faith in a higher power to guide me through the situation I could not control was perhaps the critical piece to maintaining the right attitude to locked prison cells and kangaroo courts. My patience and my faith that I'd be released was all I could control.

I used to be the one who went down the road. I took it as a challenge, but after almost losing my own life and spending 44 days in captivity, I now ask myself very carefully, as one colleague put it— to what end?

Now that I'm back working in Libya, I still assume some risks. Just being here is a risk. But I have incorporated greater safeguards like morning and evening check-ins with editors. (I should note that this requirement was actually spelled out in GlobalPost's Field Guide and I should have lived up to the requirement with my editor more carefully.)

And now more than anything, I have a sense that no short-term news story that involves an adrenaline fix is worth the pain of what could happen if you don't make that decision to step back and assess the situation before moving forward.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF FIRST AID TRAINING

BY TRACEY SHELTON, 2013

NEW YORK — The ‘bodies’ covered in blood lay strewn across the concrete. Smoke canisters added to the confusion of the scene. A random woman dressed in a full burqa stumbled along, bumping us as we scurried about throwing tourniquets and bandages on our ‘patients.’

We worked as fast as we could, but tourniquets came loose. We made some wrong calls on those we were trying to help and we didn’t manage to save them all.

“If you are going to kill someone, now is the time to do it,” said one of our first aid instructors, Sawyer Alberi.

Out of context, such a sentence might sound pretty terrible. But the callousness of it drove home the importance of what we were doing: training to perform emergency first aid on the mannequins doused in fake blood and on a few actors posing as our ‘patients.’

The reenactment of a battle scene took place in the backyard of the Bronx Documentary Center in New York City, hosting a training session provided by RISC, or Reporters Instructed in Saving Colleagues. The initiative to train reporters in emergency first aid was started by Sebastian Junger after the death of his dear friend and colleague Tim Hetherington with whom he produced the award-winning documentary about the war in Afghanistan titled “Restrepo.”

Hetherington died from an arterial bleed after being wounded in a mortar blast while reporting on the frontlines in Misrata, Libya. Tim and photographer Chris Hondros, who was also killed in the attack, like so many of us, were both freelance journalists working in a conflict zone along side other freelancers. The kind of training that RISC now provides is the kind of training that might have saved the lives of Chris and Tim.

Through RISC, Junger, an award-winning journalist, author and documentarian and a member of the GlobalPost editorial advisory board, is instilling in all of us a sense that freelancers and the news organizations they work for need to be sure that anyone who reports from a hostile environment has the right training to do so.

So when we gathered in the Bronx for this training session, we were not just patching up fake casualties; we were practicing for what may one day be a very real situation.

Over four days of training, we would have plenty of time to learn from our mistakes. We knew what we were learning could mean the difference between life and death for ourselves, our colleagues or people we

meet in the field.

As I stabbed a 5-inch needle into the lung of my fake patient, it was hard not to wonder what on earth had led our little group of 24 freelance correspondents to choose a career that is likely to see us in need of these battlefield medical skills.

I have been asked many versions of this same question countless times. Why take life-threatening risks to report on someone else's war? While thousands flee a battle zone, why do we run headfirst into it?

For me, the reason is the same as it is for the men we photograph fighting and dying on the battlefield. We believe in what we do. Our cause is not political, religious, tribal or territorial, but is definitely a vocation and a craft that you have to believe in if you are going to take risks to do it. This pursuit, put simply, is to be there as a witness to war and to enlighten people about what is happening on the ground. Without judgment, we are trying to capture war in all of its complexity, its human drama and its often terrible consequences.

Even though we believe in the necessity of what we do, we also know first hand that there is no glory in unnecessary risk or senseless death. We see what it does to people, to families, to friends. If we think about our own families going through such agony, how could we not take every precaution to keep ourselves as safe as possible?

My circumstances may be somewhat different than most. I was never one to settle down. I've lived my life very much alone. I have no one waiting at home for me. In fact, I don't even have a home and haven't had one for many years. If my circumstances were different, I might rethink my career choices. But for now, if someone has to take a risk to get crucial information to the world, I have often felt that it is better me than my colleagues with partners and children.

I don't fear dying for what I believe in, but I do fear capture or disappearing without a trace. There is no pain worse than the agony of not knowing. This is something I never want my family and friends to know.

Looking back, I have made my share of bad calls. I've been too trusting, too eager, too flippant with the dangers. I covered the whole Libyan revolution without ever having regular contact with anyone in the outside world. In one incident, I was attacked in my hotel room by armed assailants in the middle of the night. I narrowly escaped kidnapping by getting free of my binds and jumping from the balcony. Looking back, I know that if I had gone missing it would have been weeks, maybe months, before anyone even realized I was gone.

I was lucky, but in Syria you need more than luck.

After the kidnapping of my colleague James Foley in November in Syria, I learned a horrible lesson about the kind of information that can help in tracking down a missing journalist.

I now keep an updated list of all my contacts in each area with my editor and a close colleague including phone numbers, Skype handles and Facebook addresses. I check in every day with changes of plan, stories I'm working on and interviews I'm planning. I have a solid base of contacts and commanders from

secular to extremists who could help track me down if anything went wrong.

I only use trusted contacts that I have known and have been working with for many months and do not reveal my travel plans or where I am staying to anyone outside of this circle. A lot of these methods are spelled out in this field guide and in the essays by other correspondents. But as the risk to journalists in the field continues to rise, I am reminded that it is incredibly important to be sure to stick to the plan and live up to the advice and the expectations on how to operate safely in a dangerous place.

I was lucky I began working in Syria over a year ago when things were very different. Back then the real danger came from the regime. There was a certain level of trust within the opposition forces. If I was asked to begin covering Syria for the first time now, I'm quite sure I would refuse. Without an already well-established network in country, I simply couldn't operate the way I do.

Most importantly, keeping low key and blending in as much as possible, particularly when traveling and returning to a home base is crucial. I dress as much like a local woman as possible and imitate their behavior in the street so as not to draw any unwanted attention. I know most female reporters are opposed to such measures, but these days in Syria a headscarf can save your life. I'm quite sure it has saved mine more than once.

Lastly, I would encourage all journalists working in conflict zones to take the RISC course in battlefield medical training. Knowing how to treat wounds may very likely help you save a life one day, maybe even your own.

*Tracey Shelton is a freelance correspondent covering Syria and the Middle East. Based in the region since 2009, she has worked in conflict zones in Syria, Iraq and Libya. Shelton was part of the GlobalPost team that won an Overseas Press Club Award in 2011.*

# ON WHAT IS REQUIRED TO BE PREPARED FOR COVERING CONFLICT

BY SEBASTIAN JUNGER, 2010

My rule is that you need to be able to carry everything you have for a mile. By that I mean that you can put everything you're bringing on assignment into a bag with straps, sling it over your shoulder and walk for a mile without any problem. I'm not sure why I feel so strongly about this except that it makes you leave at home things you don't really need, and it enables you to operate independently of anything or anyone in whatever foreign country you've just flown into.

So what do I put in this bag? First of all, I feel I should be able to sleep outside without too much hardship. That means carrying a sleeping bag in colder climates and some sort of mosquito-net tent in warmer ones. That frees me from making my plans around hotels, towns and transportation. I bring a satellite phone for the same reason (the Iridium that I use charges \$1.49 a minute anywhere in the world, which is a lot cheaper than local cell or landline).

I bring four or five reporters' notebooks, a box of fast-writing Uniball pens and a micro-cassette recorder. Recently I've also started traveling with a mini-DV camcorder that is small enough to always keep with me. I filmed a mortar attack on a refugee camp in Liberia because I had a camera with me, which later allowed me to support the publication of my article with video images that were broadcast on television. That kind of media convergence is increasingly important in today's market.

In many countries people don't drink coffee, which I personally feel a deep, almost desperate need for in the morning, so I always travel with a (plastic) jar of crystals. I bring a standard medical kit that has been beefed up with sterile needles, a military tourniquet and an "Israeli" compression bandage. I almost always come down with dysentery on my trips, so a stomach medicine is a must, as are re-hydration salts, antibiotics, pain killers and – in the tropics – anti-malarials. If I am going to be embedded with a Western military I bring a bulletproof vest and helmet; otherwise I leave it at home. (They cost a thousand dollars and in some countries you'll lose them at the first checkpoint.)

I always have a flashlight, a folding knife and a cigarette lighter in my pocket. Never bring a compass, binoculars or two-way radios to a civil war; inevitably someone is going to accuse you of being a spy, and items like that could lead to an extremely dangerous situation. If you bring a map, make sure there are no contour lines on it, for the same reason. I bring a copy of one of the books I've written, just to prove that I'm truly an author. Many countries – including the United States – have used journalism as a cover for espionage, so indignantly declaring that you're a working member of the press won't help you much.

One idea you're going to find yourself dragging from one war zone to another is the assumption that risk and good journalism go hand-in-hand, and that if you're not getting shot at, you're not getting the story. That's wrong, though not utterly, absolutely wrong; as with most things, it's a matter of degree. There's

not much to take notes on when you're under fire except what the rocks look like that you're hiding behind. That said, risk is incredibly attention-getting: A little fear can bring a story into focus that you might otherwise be falling asleep on.

Likewise for the reader, a story where the reporter is clearly scared is a story where the reader finds himself invested in the outcome and on the edge of his seat. Fear is one of those primary emotions — along with hate and love and shame — that organize human society and propels us through our lives. When those emotions show up, everyone in the room notices and pays attention.

No good journalist, however, would ever incur risk for the hell of it — or for the narrative drama of it. That would be terrifically indulgent and would entirely miss the point of good journalism, which is to report on the world while simultaneously keeping one's ego to a minimum. But that same lack of ego also means that neither should one value one's life absolutely. There are stories — the siege of Sarajevo in the 1990s, for example — that are so terrible and important that it is acceptable to run risks in order to get the word out.

Reporters died covering the siege of Sarajevo, and I'm sure they died terrified. It's not a nice feeling, that terror, but sometimes it's an unavoidable part of an important job. When the time comes to write the story, however, you have to make sure that your experience illuminates the experience without become the central point of it. You are not starring in an action movie, in other words.

My first step, after I get home from assignment, is to go through my notes and interviews with a red pen and underline the good stuff. Then I write a sort of "inventory" of what I have — including whatever historical or geopolitical material might be relevant. Once I have that, I start chunking out the basic structure of the piece. I try to alternate between "scenes" and "sections." Scenes convey information indirectly but compellingly: A conversation at a bar that is utterly anecdotal, but that poignantly illuminates the tragedy of sex trafficking. Sections impart information directly but are boring as hell: A brief history of the Eastern European country where sex trafficking happens. For obvious reasons, the sections require a lot of work and a lot of journalistic restraint. "Being a good writer" usually just means knowing when your reader has started to get bored.

So, structure: You start with a scene, get the reader to care about the characters (or, occasionally, the writer), then give them whatever information they need in order to make sense of the scene they just read. Without the information, the scenes are just action-movie theatrics; without the scenes, though, the information is academic and uninteresting. Rhythm is everything, particularly with the drier material. People will read anything if the rhythm within the sentences is right. The entire piece has a rhythm too; it ebbs and flows with tension, and you have to exploit that to keep people reading.

The quiet stretches are as necessary as the dynamic ones, and the interplay between the two is one of the things people mean when they talk about "structure." A lot of things in life have the same structure that a compelling piece of writing has: An attention getting start, a lull, a gradual build to a great height and then a careful dismantling. Careers, romances, lives, nations often follow that same basic template. It's not rocket science, but you do have to pay attention.

You'll wind up with a piece that thoroughly investigates a small — probably tragic — sideshow in the great,

ongoing drama of the world. If that is all you do, you'll have accomplished one of the most important roles of a free press, which is the wide dissemination of information. Occasionally, though, you'll have written something that uses a particular story to illuminate a greater truth about the world, about humanity, about hope or suffering or loss. Great journalism doesn't require that, but it occasionally attains it. You'll know it when it happens. It is, in my opinion, one of the most powerful and intoxicating feelings one can have.

*Sebastian Junger is a member of GroundTruth's Board of Editorial Advisors. He is The New York Times best-selling author of WAR, which documents the experience of a single platoon in one of the most violent pockets of fighting in Afghanistan. He also co-directed with Tim Hetherington the documentary "Restrepo,"*

# A HALF-CENTURY OF COVERING FOREIGN WARS

BY H.D.S GREENWAY, 2009

“To see life; to see the world; to eyewitness great events; to watch the faces of the poor and the gestures of the proud; to see strange things — machines, armies, multitudes, shadows in the jungle and on the moon... to see things thousands of miles away, things hidden behind walls and within rooms; things dangerous to come to...to see and be amazed; to see and be instructed.”

These were the words Henry Luce used for his 1936 prospectus for a new publication he was starting: Life Magazine. His words capsulized all the romance, adventure and — dare I say it — glamour of a foreign correspondent’s life.

I would not diminish the excitement covering Washington, or city hall, or the tumultuous world of sport. But “to see the world; eyewitness to great events; to see things thousands of miles away; things dangerous to come to, that is the provenance of reporting on countries and cultures other than your own.

And what a tradition it is: William Russell reporting from the Crimea, scene of the famous charge of the Light Brigade, G.W. Steevens, whose book “With Kitchener to Khartoum” is here in my library as I write, Richard Harding Davis, whose dispatches from Cuba in the Spanish American War enhanced his already considerable reputation, Ernie Pyle, who died in the Pacific covering the GIs he loved, David Halberstam in Vietnam, Dexter Filkins of Fallujah, and on and on.

None can say it isn’t important work. Here stands America, still the greatest power on earth, deeply involved in two wars, and nuclear issues with Iran and North Korea, an emerging China, and a sullen Russia, with any number of problems with those who favor us, and those who hate us, and everybody in between. How can a democracy make intelligent decisions if it is not informed what’s going on beyond its borders? Without foreign correspondents the giant is blind, barging into the furniture in an unfamiliar room.

America, blessed as it is, has not experienced war on its soil since the last of the Apaches were suppressed a century ago. Nor have Americans experienced great famines, revolutions, devastating poverty, and dictatorship, too often the provenance of the foreign correspondent.

The best of them have a knack for digging deep into the countries and cultures they are living in without ever losing their sense of “gee whiz,” the ability to bring it all fresh and new to their readers, never losing a sense of for whom they write. There is no substitute for living in another country, when your down time, the chance meetings, the conversations, all turn out to be grist for the mill of understanding.

I began my life in the news trade as a young ensign in the Navy, tasked with putting out a fleet newspaper. It was the late fifties, and the Algerian war raged as France tried to hang on to its empire. I slipped a short

essay into the paper about Algeria, only to hear from the ship's executive officer.

While the Algeria article may have been informative he said, it "read like a political science text book." What the fleet wanted was "names, scandal, political dirt, murder rape, love nests." His favorite lead from the old New York World was: "'Hell,' said the duchess, 'let go of my leg.'"

My first lesson in journalism: you have to captivate the reader not bore, or preach to him.

I joined Henry Luce's empire in the early sixties, when TIME and LIFE were at their zenith, with bureaus, stringers, and correspondents in all the strange places of the planet. Life Magazine was still then bigger than television, and had fulfilled all that Luce's prospectus had asked of it. Then it was the Washington Post, and then the Boston Globe, where I was asked to build up a foreign news service with bureaus in strategic places – all to be torn down when newspapers began to relinquish their mission to inform, which they had always seen as a public service as well as a business.

I look back, now, on the fifty years since Commander J.T. Straker, US Navy, brought me up sharp for being pretentious, and I would change very few of those years.

I watched the great hemorrhaging of refugees from East Bengal, during the painful birth of Bangladesh, the faces of the poor in long columns you could spot from the vultures in the sky, waiting to compete with dogs to eat the dead. I watched the gestures of the proud when Anwar Sadat changed history in Jerusalem.

I have seen inspiring things, such as the wall coming down in Berlin, and things dangerous to come to, despairing countries, burning towns, guerrillas and brigands, and shadows in the jungle where enemies lay in ambush. I have been shot, teargassed, and thrown in jail. I have interviewed the captains and the kings, a couple of queens, and more than a few knaves. I have been amazed, as well as instructed, and sometimes, I like to think, it has helped someone understand something about things thousands of miles away.

*H.D.S Greenway was foreign editor and editorial page editor of The Boston Globe and a foreign correspondent for The Washington Post and TIME magazine. He is the author of the newly published book, "Foreign Correspondent: A Memoir."*

# TEACHING IN HELMAND

BY JEAN MACKENZIE, 2009

KABUL — “But we have to do the story. If we ignore this incident, then the people who did this will never be punished. It is our job.”

There is nothing worse than hearing your own words coming back to you.

The speaker is an Afghan journalist, we'll call him Aziz, a young man of 20 who has barely completed high school. He has just broken a story that no one, including me, wanted him to do. Having heard that foreign forces had gone on a rampage in southern Helmand, Aziz gained access to a closed ward in a private hospital in Lashkar Gah by posing as a family member. Once in, he proceeded to interview a man whose throat had been slit, allegedly by foreign troops. He was now ready to go public, and I had been fighting him every step of the way.

The story was compelling, the sources convincing. But the subject matter was just too explosive. It was the kind of piece that could easily feed into Taliban propaganda, and create even greater difficulties for the beleaguered foreign forces in southern Afghanistan.

I had been in Helmand for about a year, conducting workshops for local journalists and journalist wannabes. Helmand, capital of the world's opium poppy industry and center of the Taliban insurgency, is one of the more challenging assignments I've had in a career that has spanned several decades and more than a few continents. But the response from a small but dedicated group of Afghans had surprised and delighted me.

Training reporters can be a frustrating and largely thankless task. Afghanistan is littered with the messy remains of two-week workshops in which seasoned hacks try to boil down the experiences of a lifetime into easily digestible sound bites.

Not surprisingly, this often results in a group of half-formed journalists with fancy certificates and heads full of nonsense. But when taken seriously by trainer and trainee, the relationship can prove immensely beneficial to both sides.

I had become a journalist the old-fashioned way, absorbing the rules from editors and colleagues, while adding a large dollop of instinct to my seat-of-the-pants education. Now, for the first time, I had to try and explain my methods to a group of eager but untutored reporters, most of whom had limited schooling and a drastically truncated world view.

Difficulties arose when I had to answer questions. This is Afghanistan, and a war zone, and the answers mattered.

Can one be a “real” journalist while working for the government? How far do we go to get a story? Or

the most common question in the insurgency-wracked south: Do the principles of fairness, balance, and impartiality extend to the Taliban?

In class we may insist that the trainees find and interview Taliban to give substance to a piece on civilian casualties or school burnings. But the local government, as well as the international forces, may then grumble that the journalists are “providing the enemy with a platform for propaganda.”

On the other hand, a journalist whose coverage of the insurgency is a bit too critical may soon land in real jeopardy.

“If I write bad things about the British soldiers, then Colonel Charlie may stop inviting me to press conferences,” laughed one trainee, referring to Colonel Charles Mayo, at the time the spokesman for the British forces in Helmand. “But if I say bad things about the Taliban, someone will come and cut off my head.”

Safety is the primary preoccupation in Afghanistan. No one wants to assign a story that gets a reporter killed. This is especially difficult when you are training hotheaded young Afghans, who trust everything to Allah while taking almost impossible risks.

“We want to go to Musa Qala,” said Ahmad, one of the brightest of the group. Musa Qala, then a Taliban outpost on the other side of an extended no-man’s-land, was certainly a great story. But how could anyone get there?

“We’ve been negotiating with the Taliban,” he confessed. “They say they’ll guide us in.”

Five reporters spent almost a week on the story – at one point being held by a rogue Taliban group that called headquarters asking for permission to shoot them. They made it in and out, gaining footage and copy that went around the world.

The greatest danger they faced came when they returned to the supposedly safe, government-controlled area. The provincial police chief promptly issued a warrant for their arrest. Three of them went underground for several days; two of them spent a night in jail.

Try explaining that to your class.

I spend quite a bit of time talking to Afghan journalists about their “mission.” I can quote chapter and verse about journalism as the “bridge” between the people and those in power; I tie myself in knots trying to explain the concept of a “watchdog press” to touchy Afghans who become extremely offended when they think they are being compared to canines.

And I mean it, of course I do. But now Aziz was looking at me earnestly and asking me to stand up for what I said I believed in, with his story about an alleged massacre by foreign forces. He had done an excellent job and his piece was solid.

Do I say “publish and be damned?” Or kill the story to keep the peace?

In the end, we went with the story.

Predictably, it produced a firestorm. The British military base reopened its inquiry; the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations got involved. Other media picked it up, and I spent months answering queries. The journalists who did the research were briefly detained by the authorities, and told not to engage in such subversion again, a warning they have blithely ignored.

Our training project was, perhaps coincidentally, discontinued shortly after the article appeared.

Was it worth it? Absolutely. The journalists in Helmand walk a little taller now. Frankly, so do I.

*Jean MacKenzie trained journalists in Afghanistan for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting for several years. She served as a senior correspondent for GlobalPost and is currently a lead reporter on a GroundTruth Special Report in Afghanistan.*

# REPORTING IN FALLUJAH

BY MATT MCALLESTER, 2009

NEW YORK — The US-led attack on the Iraqi city of Fallujah in November 2004 was the most intense combat in which the American military has taken part since the Vietnam War. The main battle lasted just over a week. I spent that time embedded with an Army unit, 2nd Battalion - 7th Cavalry Regiment out of Fort Hood, Texas. There were a number of lessons about reporting on combat and reporting in general that I learned or re-learned during that very intense week, and in the weeks and months after the battle. I did some things well, some things badly.

In most embeds, it works this way: You get assigned to a battalion or a company, which gives you, respectively, about 800 or 200 soldiers to chat to. That's obviously too many for a story of any length. So you have to go microcosmic. You have to get to know soldiers who like you and whom you like, who are good talkers, with whom you can see yourself spending a lot of time. These very few people are going to have to be the way you tell the story of a major battle involving thousands of soldiers. Don't crowd them or pretend you're their new best friend forever. Just hang out a bit and build it up. If in doubt, it's better to shut up than to jabber away. Don't name-drop dangerous places you may have been to. They don't impress easily.

I focused on a platoon (about 30 soldiers) and then narrowed it down to one squad, which was eight men. One of them would die in the battle. Most would be injured.

What I didn't do well enough was get to know them personally. At least, not as much as I should have. A battle is distracting and exhausting and scary so I spent much of my time trying to stay alive, getting to know the senior officers and speaking with lots of other soldiers. I should have built up more comprehensive biographical and character sketches of the squad I had migrated toward. I should have known where they all grew up, what their favorite bands were, the names of their kids, why they joined the military. I knew only some of that. If you're going to focus, focus properly.

And then one day they stormed a house and got outnumbered and cornered. One of them, a guy I liked, was shot dead. All but two of the others were shot and injured.

I wasn't there and I remain deeply conflicted about this. I sat out that morning mission for two reasons: I was exhausted, and there was beginning to be a repetition about my stories that did not, it seemed to me at the time, compel me to go on every mission and put myself in such extreme danger all the time. Part of me has always felt that I made a very smart call, that I would almost certainly have been shot too had I been present when the squad had stormed the house full of insurgents. But another part of me feels like I failed – because I let them down on a personal level, by not being there to witness their worst moments, and because I missed the story. As a reporter, I felt I had dropped the ball.

I still don't know what lesson to draw from all of that. Did I make the right call or not?

But here's one I re-learned soon after: the story, like most stories, was tellable after the fact. You do not have to be present. Sy Hersh was not at My Lai or Abu Ghraib. He just asked the right people what happened there. The two uninjured soldiers were happy to tell the story of what one of them called a "mad minute from hell." I spoke to the dead soldier's father on the phone, from his home in Texas, and with the soldier's young wife. I also spoke to the battalion commander's wife, who had gone to the soldier's widow's home shortly after an officer had broken the news to her. The story came together days after the event, and I think it was perhaps as meaningful storytelling as anything I could have put together had I been in that house.

One final lesson I remembered in the aftermath of Fallujah and then duly forgot again: to keep reporting on the same story strands, to revisit, get updates, see what has changed, keep in touch. I did this at first, returning to Iraq a few months later to see the same soldiers again, to explore how the battle and their grief had affected them. We sat and talked for hours. They opened up in ways they didn't have the time and inclination to do in November. And the passage of time itself had added layers to their stories.

After that, I kept in touch with some of them but I pretty much felt I had done all I could with these guys. I sent a condolence email to the dead soldier's sister when I heard that her other brother had also been killed, in a military "accident" in Afghanistan. They were the first American brothers to be killed in the two main theaters of conflict in the post-9/11 wars. It was a tragic coincidence and a poignant daily news story for sure, but based on the facts I had I made a judgement that it was not a strong enough narrative for a longer magazine piece.

More than a year later, I opened the magazine I mainly work for now and saw a story by another reporter about my soldier, José, and his brother, Andrew. Andrew, it turned out, was desperately upset by José's death. He had not had an "accident" in the field of battle, as had been reported. He had killed himself with his rifle. It was a moving, powerful story. I had not kept reporting the story. I should have delved further and not trusted the facts "as reported," but confirmed on my own what had really happened. I will try not to do that again.

*Matt McAllester is Europe Editor at TIME. For 13 years previously he was a reporter for Newsday and spent much of that time as a foreign correspondent. He has covered conflicts in Kosovo, Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkey, Nigeria and Lebanon*

# PERILS OF REPORTING IN RUSSIA

BY MIRIAM ELDER, 2009

MOSCOW — It was October 2007, about a year after I moved here, when my friend Stephen disappeared.

No one knew where he was. His friends didn't know, his colleagues didn't know, his boss didn't know. Weeks later, we learned that Stephen, a journalist for Agence France-Presse, had gone on holiday and never came back. The rumors spread quickly. Had he gotten a Russian girl pregnant and fled out of fear? Had he gotten a taste of the West and remembered how nice life was there? None of it made much sense.

It was only in April 2008 that we, his friends in the Moscow press corps, got the full story, or at least Stephen's version of it. He had organized a going away party in Kiev, being too scared to enter Russian territory to say goodbye to his friends or even pick up his things.

Sitting around a long table at a Ukrainian restaurant, around 20 of us gathered to listen to Stephen's story. One night in early 2008, Stephen told us, he stopped a gypsy cab to take him home, as he did most every night. The driver was talkative, and friendly. They talked about music. They talked about life. The driver asked Stephen what he did, and he said he was a journalist. The driver said he had recently retired from the Ministry of Defense. The ride ended with the driver, Alex, saying he had very interesting information and contacts on things like Iran and Afghanistan and it would be a shame if they never met again. Stephen, an eager journalist, had his interest quickly piqued. They began hanging out — at Moscow cafes or at Alex's dacha (country house).

Alex, who by then said he used to work for the GRU, the Soviet Union's foreign intelligence agency, did indeed have information — satellite photos that he said showed alliance vulnerabilities in Afghanistan — that he passed on to Stephen, who was reluctant to keep them in his possession but incapable of resisting the urge of A Great Story.

He didn't tell his editors at AFP. Planning a move to Bloomberg, Stephen was hoping to publish a story in a major US magazine during the brief period he was tied to no organization.

Stephen then did indeed go on vacation — to Scotland, where he met up with a friend who used to work for the CIA. He recounted his tale. And that was that. Embassy consultations followed, as did extreme paranoia. Stephen, and State Department officials, became convinced that he had fallen for one of the oldest tricks in the Soviet playbook, with agents gathering kompromat (dirty information) on an unsuspecting journalist to be called up whenever the need struck. With the disks sitting under his desk at the AFP bureau, Stephen easily could have been branded a stealer of state secrets. He will probably never come back to Russia.

Whether true or not, it served as a cautionary tale. When a cabbie who once picked me up from a reporting trip to Siberia began telling me about his past work at the Interior Ministry, and how he had reels of video showing Russian missteps during the Beslan school hostage siege, I nearly accepted an invitation to his

dacha outside Moscow. Then I thought otherwise. Information, so hard to come by in Russia, never comes that easily here unless ulterior motives are at play.

These are the fears foreign journalists in Russia face. As long as you're careful, and alert to the dangers, it's relatively simple to avoid ensnarement.

Our Russian colleagues aren't so lucky. Since I've been in Russia, so many journalists have been killed, or died in mysterious circumstances. Anna Politkovskaya and Anastasia Baburova, both reporters for Russia's last remaining liberal newspaper, Novaya Gazeta, were shot dead, Politkovskaya in a contract killing that took place in her apartment building, and Baburova as she tried to catch a contract killer who had shot the liberal lawyer with whom she was walking after a press conference. The death of Ivan Safronov, a reporter for the Kommersant newspaper, who was investigating shady arms deals to Syria and Iran, was officially ruled a suicide, but nearly everyone believes he was thrown out the window he allegedly jumped from.

The targeted tend to be those reporters who attack the direct (usually financial) interests of corrupt officials and businessmen. That, in turn, leads to self-censorship. Foreign journalists also fall prey to that. Every time I write the words "Ramzan Kadyrov," the name of the ruthless president of Chechnya who has been accused of ordering many killings, I double and triple check that nothing can be taken out of context, that every word is necessary. Russian businesses have become lawsuit happy. Its more brutish citizens still prefer the law of the gun.

*Miriam Elder was a correspondent in Moscow for The Boston Globe, GlobalPost and the Guardian before joining BuzzFeed News as Foreign Editor.*

# 23 YEARS: REFLECTIONS ON ZIMBABWE

BY ANDREW MELDRUM, 2009

Robert Mugabe had been defeated at the polls and it appeared his days in power were numbered. He reacted by deploying his war veterans — men who supposedly fought 25 years earlier to end white-minority Rhodesian rule — to invade white-owned farms and beat up supporters of the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). It was March 2000.

Civic leaders, church organizations and women' groups, lawyers, doctors and many others organized a peace march to urge all Zimbabweans to work together for the good of the nation.

Police first tried to block the march and arrested a few dozen participants. But as the numbers of marchers swelled from hundreds to thousands the police relented and the procession began through downtown Harare.

I followed the march, scribbling in my notebook details like the rainbow banners held aloft and the marchers singing, 'Give peace a chance.' I interviewed march leaders and police. When passengers on a full bus saw the march was safe, they joined in. Construction workers on steel girders high above waved and whistled their approval. A giddy, happy atmosphere rose up as the march reached First Street, the center of Harare. It appeared to be a resounding success.

"War vets! War vets!" swept the warning through the crowd. Down the block I saw a group of men running towards the march, brandishing sticks, stones and iron bars. I stood next to a policeman between two parked cars, taking notes of the threatening band of Mugabe's enforcers.

CRACK! I was lying on the pavement. A large chunk of cement lay by my head. It had apparently had been hurled at me and knocked me out. I staggered to my feet and a few feet away saw a man in convulsions who had been beaten unconscious by the rampaging war vets. The police were nowhere in sight.

I started interviewing people about what had happened. I saw blood on my notebook and realized my head was bleeding. A fresh warning came that the war vets were returning for a second attack. I crouched behind a vehicle in a used car lot and watched as Mugabe's supporters beat anyone they found. The police were escorting them.

I stayed behind the vehicle for some time, thinking about how I had seen Zimbabwe change in the 20 years that I had lived and worked there, from a country reveling in freedom and optimism to a place ruled by threats and violence. I knew then that Mugabe would never accept to leave power peacefully and would use any amount of violence to stay in office.

I wrote a vivid account that day, for the Observer, and gave nearly a dozen phone interviews to CNN, NPR, the BBC and other networks. But more important than getting a compelling first-hand account of a key event, I learned several lessons.

The first was to keep my distance from violence, whenever possible. Somehow I felt my notebook was a shield that protected me from violence. Previously whenever a situation was volatile, my reporter's nose took me to the center of the action. I learned to watch from a safe distance.

I also learned that many groups see the press as an enemy and do not respect the journalist's role as a neutral observer. Perpetrators of state violence, for instance, are threatened by a journalist's work to document what happens. They will target journalists for violence in order to silence their work.

I knew to stay at arm's length from governments, political parties and other organized groups. They all have their own agendas. Sometimes their objectives will fit in with what I want to do as a journalist, but only up to a point, and it is of primary importance for the journalist to maintain his/her independence.

I learned that objectivity only goes so far. In the case of Zimbabwe I saw many American journalists fall over themselves in order to try to give an objective portrayal of Mugabe, i.e. to show Mugabe in a favorable light. Some wrote that the peace march provoked the war vets to attack. All witnesses agreed that the war vets viciously attacked a peaceful, legal gathering.

The shortcomings of "reporting both sides of the story" became more pronounced when uncovering evidence of systematic state torture in Zimbabwe. The documentation of torture by police and other state agents was convincing, yet some journalists persisted in giving 50 percent of the weight of their story to denials by Mugabe and his officials, including their criticisms of those who had uncovered the torture. Such stories left the reader to decipher what was really going on in Zimbabwe.

I came to see that as a miscarriage of journalism. I believe that all journalists have a responsibility to report human rights abuses and torture. We have a responsibility to give a fair account and to give all points of view, but that objectivity should not prevent us from presenting damning evidence and letting the reader know what is happening.

*Andrew Meldrum was a Deputy Editor for Africa at GlobalPost before joining the Associated Press in Africa.*

# REFLECTIONS ON FOREIGN REPORTING AND SAFETY

BY SIMON WILSON, 2009

WASHINGTON — I have yet to meet a foreign correspondent that does not have some kind of insecurity. So let's get mine out of the way up front.

I am not a 'real' foreign correspondent.

Oh, and I'm a coward.

For more than a decade, I have had the privilege of traveling the world courtesy of a beloved employer — the BBC — and witnessing some of the defining events of our generation.

But I have done so, for the most part, as a television producer, a strange hybrid of a job which mystifies most people. During the course of a particularly long interrogation, an Israeli border official summed it up best:

"Ze reporter is the important one," she told me, "he says ze words. Ze cameraman he takes pictures. But you, what do you do – I don't understand." Four hours later, I fear she was none the wiser as we were somewhat grumpily ushered through. And to this day I am still not sure exactly what it is I do. Except for not being the important one.

As for the coward thing, far more eloquent practitioners than me have written of the drug-like quality of foreign reporting and especially of war reporting. It is all true. This is a particularly addictive profession and like addicts we all make our own personal pact with the devil. Some will dive in fearlessly — at least for a time. Others hate themselves a little more each day for what they are becoming. Some of the heroes are the ones who turn around and go home.

Most of us find some sort of uneasy compromise, making what we think are reasonable concessions to family and loved ones, while still taking risks which the rest of the world would find insane. Few things are certain in this business, but for sure getting killed, injured or kidnapped unnecessarily is not a smart move.

So here are some reflections from the past decade or so on times spent trying to stay safe with BBC colleagues in dangerous places so we could do what we came to do. They are offered as one colleague might to another; over a beer in a hotel bar after a long day out on the road in some godforsaken corner of the world.

Point one is to have a plan. It is certainly possible to stumble around on a story and still do great work. But it is not the percentage game. As one celebrated BBC wartime cameraman liked to say: "If you have a plan you can always change it. If you don't have a plan you're probably already f\*\*\*ed."

The plan might be as simple as: Get up, eat breakfast, head for x town or y village. The important thing is that someone somewhere knows where you planned to start the day. If something goes wrong, it gives them somewhere to start looking.

In Gaza in 2007, there were a number of threats facing western journalists, including the risk of kidnap by Palestinian groups. As the bureau chief responsible for our office there, I had helped draw up our rules of deployment, which included a lengthy letter from correspondent Alan Johnston about what to do in the event of his kidnap.

When the terrible news came in March of that year that Alan had been taken hostage by a shadowy Islamist group, the document proved invaluable. As is now standard practice for BBC correspondents operating in high-risk areas, we had agreed code words for Alan to give to prove he was alive or under duress. But just as important was a cool-headed assessment from Alan of who we should turn to for information, who would be likely to offer genuine help and who would be more likely to lead us up the garden path.

In Alan's case, we did receive his proof of life code word through intermediaries after several weeks, providing some comfort to his family. The planning and preparation itself were only a small part of the efforts that eventually led to his safe release after almost four months. But they were a crucial starting point and helped the BBC have an element of control over a difficult situation from the outset.

A lesson that is much harder to prepare for, but which most experienced correspondents will attest to, is that danger often comes from the least expected quarter. In 1999, as NATO warplanes bombed the former Yugoslavia, I covered a lesser angle of the story from inside Montenegro, the junior partner in the Yugoslav Federation led by Serbia.

Working with the BBC's legendary and brilliant war correspondent Brian Barron, I was certainly aware of potential dangers. NATO cruise missiles were hitting targets at the airport a few miles from the hotel where we were staying in the capital, Podgorica. One night a group of us went up to film them from the roof and were literally knocked off our feet by a series of huge blasts. On the streets, the Yugoslav 2nd Army was under attack and liable to take out its frustrations against potential symbols of the west, such as BBC journalists.

But danger was the last thing on our mind one sunny spring morning as we headed into the central park in Podgorica to record a piece to camera — the part of a television report where the correspondent addresses the camera directly. There was no bombing and few troops were on the streets. However, unbeknownst to us we had stumbled into the area where a group of particularly thuggish Serbian paramilitaries was hiding out.

What followed was one of the nastiest incidents I have experienced. A nightmarish half-hour drive into a forest with each member of our team having a loaded gun pressed into their chest. When I asked our brave local translator Lydia what was being said in the car, she replied directly and rather chillingly: "They think we are NATO spies. They are debating whether or not to kill us."

A few months earlier, the BBC had put me through our standard Hostile Environment training course,

which included a remarkably realistic mock abduction. At the time, I had found the whole thing somewhat amusing. As our vehicle bounced along the forest tracks and the muzzle of a rusty-looking Kalashnikov raked up and down my chest it suddenly seemed somewhat more to the point. I remembered the advice from our trainers, themselves former members of the British Special Forces: Stay calm, think straight, keep a low profile, try not to exacerbate the situation. It also helped having someone as experienced as Brian with us. Whatever the reason, after some scary moments we were eventually handed over to the army and, after a 24-hour interrogation, released.

I took a couple of lessons from that experience. Firstly, we had taken our eyes off the ball and gone filming in an area that we hadn't checked out because it seemed safe at first glance. Preparation is everything — especially in television where one rarely travels with a team of fewer than four people. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, we had given ourselves the best chance of emerging from a nasty incident unscathed by staying reasonably cool under pressure. If any member of our team, Correspondent, Producer, Cameraman or local fixer had tried to make a run for it, the result may well have been tragic.

Another side of working in difficult and dangerous environments is the psychological effect they have on journalists and the people they work with. Considerable work has been done in recent years on the potential effects that sustained exposure to conflict can have. A number of organizations, including the BBC, now routinely offer counseling and other therapies to teams returning from particularly dangerous environments. Managers are also trained to be on the lookout for the signs of trauma and stress.

One less explored area is the extent to which journalists can look out for each other in the field and in some cases avoid or minimize future problems. I remember vividly the first time I was sent to a seriously dangerous place, Albania in the spring of 1997. My job was primarily one of coordination and there was little need for me to travel far from our hotel in the capital Tirana. As the place descended into chaos and anarchy and the sounds of shooting came ever closer to the hotel, I became almost paralyzed with fear.

Fortunately an experienced older colleague realized what was happening and with great delicacy created a situation that would involve me spending the day out on the road with him. We had some scrapes and had to pass through various dodgy checkpoints. But the day showed to me that the world outside the little bubble I had been operating in was not actually that frightening. From that day on, I was calmer and able to concentrate on the job I was meant to be doing. It was a valuable lesson and on a number of occasions I have intervened in similar situations.

These are tough times for foreign journalists. The financial pressures mean that if we are lucky enough to have jobs, then we are expected to file more and more with fewer and fewer resources. The world is also undoubtedly a more dangerous place for us. Through most of history, the biggest danger facing a correspondent was to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, to get caught in someone else's crossfire. Now we ourselves are often the target, whether it is governments who want to dissuade honest and accurate reporting or militant groups who see us as an extension of the Western powers they hate.

So now more than ever, we need to be both smart and organized. There are other top tips that one picks up along the road; with finding a trustworthy local fixer probably chief amongst them. But the greatest resources in the field remain, as they always been, experience and common sense. Bringing those to bear

on the fascinating but unpredictable stories we choose to cover is probably one of the bigger challenges of the job. And if I had my time again with that Israeli border guard, I think that's what I might try to explain.

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# THE IRAQ WAR: A WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE

BY JANE ARRAF, 2009

There are times — many times — you will wonder whether it's worth it. The unique mix of danger, tedium and discomfort is the hallmark of war reporting but it's the added element of being kept in the dark — often literally — that will make you wonder why in the world you signed up to be embedded. That's part of the bargain of being with the military — you give up all physical freedom for access and a modicum of security. And sometimes, no matter how much planning you've done, no matter how many contacts you have, you will find yourself stuck in a Bradley with seven large strangers for six hours in the dark while a battle rages on around you.

In WWII reporters flew on bombing raids and sent back morale-boosting stories about the troops. In Vietnam they moved relatively freely along the battlefield and sent back footage and stories that contributed to undermining support for the war. The military has had an uneasy relationship with the media ever since. Journalists stuck in Saudi Arabia saw very little of the 1991 Gulf War. By the time 2003 came around, the concept of embedding reporters with front-line military units resulted in what might be the best-covered conflict in history.

Five years into the war in Iraq, embedding still gets you to places you couldn't otherwise get to and insight into issues you couldn't otherwise cover.

It's a soda straw view though that takes work to put into context.

The military is like a foreign country. You will need friends there to navigate a system essentially designed to move huge numbers of uncomplaining soldiers and to keep out journalists and other intruders. At worst it can leave you stranded for days in transit tents waiting for helicopters that inexplicably leave without you. At best it is a front-row seat to history, worth every drop of the risk.

Although you will find soldiers and officers who believe as much as we do that a free press is essential to a strong democracy, a lot of them deal with us because they have to — because it's become part of their mission to engage with the media. The military aim, often to get out 'good news stories,' and ours, simply to get news stories, are inevitably prone to collision. But unless you or the person you're dealing with is a total jerk, on a day-to-day level it generally goes fine.

Being accepted by the military is a series of tests — most of them invisible to us — but occasionally taking the form of questions such as: "Can you scale a wall?" At the end of the day, on almost all embeds being able to scale a wall in body armor is less important than forging the necessary degree of trust. The trust that while what you write and report might not make the military look good, it is what actually happened. Finding the balance between getting close to the soldiers you're covering and maintaining the necessary

degree of distance is trickier.

There are widely varying degrees of access. Unless you're happy with whatever they give you or tell you or wherever they send you, be prepared to be thought of as difficult — particularly if you're a woman. There are worse things.

Don't assume if you're a woman that female soldiers or Marines are automatically going to bond with you — not only do they have their own problems, they're just as likely to dislike the media as the next guy. One of the great things about being a female reporter in conservative societies is that you can talk to local women who are often more outspoken and candid than the men.

Learn some of the language. You have a better chance of sitting in on the CUB — the commander's update brief — if you know what it is and less chance of being stuck on a base if you know how an AMR — an air movement request — works. Knowing the military ranks and who does what is crucial. Covering the military is often all about knowing what questions to ask.

You will need to know more than the soldiers do about the history and culture of the places you're in. They are highly attuned to the requirements of staying alive the way we are not. The rest of it? Not so much.

A lot of minimizing risk is common sense but any training is good training, including the conflict zone courses run for reporters. Think of the worst-case scenario, the odds of it happening and what you're actually getting out of the risk you're taking. You should worry but don't let it paralyze you. One of the things you really should worry in advance though is what will happen if you're hurt. Embed rules require that you've arranged health insurance. That doesn't even begin to cover what you would live on if you couldn't work anymore.

You will likely stay in terrible places. If there is actual fighting going on, there will literally be no place to stay except inside a Bradley, or MRAP or a Stryker or a Humvee. And yes, a restroom is completely out of the question. Everyone gets over the embarrassment really quickly.

It's kind of a given that the worse the accommodations, the better the story. Unless you are with the British. Enduring the dust-ridden, coffin-like concrete bunkers within tents they stay in to guard against the slightest risk of mortar attacks guarantees you only get either sleep-inducing or 'you've-got-to-be-kidding me' briefings from a public affairs officer and a bewildering array of explanations as to why you can't get off the base.

Apart from the ability to file, you don't really need as much as you think you do. There is nothing like RPG rounds and gunfire to make you realize that there are worse things than sleeping on the ground and not being able to take a shower for a few days.

At the opposite end are what you will remember in retrospect as among the most glorious places you've ever stayed. Once it was the suite where Rumsfeld was put up at the visitors' guest house where I would have jumped up and down on the giant bed had I not been preoccupied with the miraculously fluffy towels in the marble bathroom. More often it's anywhere that has sheets and a real bed and the wonderful feel of hot, running water.

You have to be prepared to see the most horrible things and find a reason why it's worth seeing them. It's tempting to focus on death and on near-death experiences but, however riveting, they're only a part of the story.

If you do this for a while in an active war zone you will have been through more firefights and IED attacks than many of the soldiers you are covering. That's when it may be time to go home.

*Jane Arraf was Baghdad bureau chief for CNN before working as a freelance correspondent in Baghdad for GlobalPost, The Christian Science Monitor and Al Jazeera. She contributed to The GroundTruth Project's award-winning Special Report "In the Land of Cain and Abel: How the ancient Sunni-Shia divide is shaping the modern Middle East."*

# ON BEING THERE . . .

BY WILLIAM DOWELL, 2009

GENEVA – Reporters enjoy a definite advantage over diplomats, government officials. The reporter is there to write what he observes, not to make moral judgments or to push a political agenda. More important, the reporter is often the man on the spot. As the famous Polish journalist, Ryszard Kapuscinski, once put it, “I often found that when I was heading towards the story, everyone else was moving in the opposite direction.”

If a diplomat talks to a guerrilla leader or bandit, it means that the government he represents may be willing to make a deal. A reporter is simply after a good story and for that reason he can often go where others can't. More important, he may be a bridge between opposing sides. Often these informal contacts come to naught, but occasionally they pay off.

In the late 1970s, I was stringing for both ABC News and TIME magazine in Paris, when I was assigned by TIME to work on a cover story about torture. The idea was not to make a moral judgment but simply to try to find out whether it worked or not. Paris is full of former political prisoners who have experienced “enhanced interrogation” techniques, and I quickly compiled a list of a dozen people who had either been tortured or had something to say about it. One was an articulate Iranian student leader named Sadegh Ghotbzadeh, who claimed the CIA had been training the Shah's secret police SAVAK. I never knew if his allegations were right, but I liked him, and I ended up on his mailing list.

A few months later, I called Sadegh, who by then was regularly commuting to a Parisian suburb, Neauphle-le-Chateau. He had become Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's man in Paris. On the phone he said I was welcome to attend Friday prayers. Khomeini, he said, was going to turn out to be very important. I had a friend working as a political officer in the US embassy in Paris. “Have you talked with these guys?” I asked. “We can't,” he said. “Everyone would think that we were encouraging them.”

A year later, the Shah had himself gone into exile, and I flew to Tehran to cover the final stages of Iran's revolution as part of ABC News' bureau on the scene. Within a few days, I was standing in the arrival lounge of Tehran's international airport when an Air France jet arrived with Khomeini, Sadegh and Ibrahim Yazdi, another articulate Khomeini supporter I had gotten to know in Paris. Outside the airport, thousands of people had gathered in the street.

It was impossible not to be moved by the enthusiasm of the moment. Tehran, in the heady days immediately following the revolution, was both jubilant and dangerous.

While different groups maneuvered for control of the city, one of Khomeini's people showed up at the hotel where most of the reporters were staying and asked if we wanted to go to a press conference. We were driven to a high school that Khomeini had been using as his headquarters, and ushered into a large room on the second floor. Seated on wooden chairs across the front of the room were the generals who had led

the Shah's military forces, including the Imperial Guards. Hoveda, who had been the Shah's prime minister at one point, and who had been imprisoned by the Shah just before the revolution, sat glumly to the side on a battered wooden school chair. Afraid of being killed in the random chaos, he had called Khomeini's men and surrendered voluntarily.

What followed was an apparently civilized deconstruction of the revolution as seen by the opposing sides. Ibrahim Yazdi moderated. When the questioning turned to Hoveda, Yazdi seemed to lose control. "Admit that you are a war criminal!" he screamed. Hoveda turned to him calmly, and said, "I assume from your tone of voice that you are one of these people who are now in charge. All I can tell you is that six months from now you will look back and find that you have done things you never thought yourself capable of."

When our session ended, the generals were taken to the roof of the school and shot.

A few days after the executions at the school, I went to the TV station to send some satellite footage, and ended up crouching in the basement as an intense firefight began outside. Sadhegh was crouching across the hall from me. He had just been named Iran's new foreign minister. He smiled and we both waited for the shooting to stop.

Not long afterwards, Sadegh was edged out of power and briefly flirted with selling carpets. Then I heard that he had been executed, allegedly for agreeing to take part in a failed coup attempt. He had flown too close to a flame that was essentially unpredictable, and in the end had been devoured by it.

A decade after the Iranian Revolution, I had married, had a baby and decided that freelancing was not exactly a sound foundation for raising a family. ABC News had already started downsizing its European coverage, so I went to TIME's chief of correspondents and suggested that he pick the worst shit hole in the world and hire me as a correspondent. "If you don't like what you get, you can always fire me after six months," I reasoned. "Actually, he said, "How'd you like to go to Cairo?"

It was the summer of 1989, and I spent the first few months traveling around the Arab world. Then I heard that Sheikh Fadlallah, the spiritual leader of Hezbollah, Lebanon's Iranian-backed Shiite militia, might be willing to talk. Fadlallah had not talked to anyone until then. He was being blamed for the US embassy bombing which killed most of the CIA's experts in the region, and it was also holding American hostages, including AP's Terry Anderson, in Beirut.

The CIA, Mossad or both, had tried unsuccessfully to assassinate him, and so many journalists had been threatened or kidnapped in Beirut that international news organizations had agreed en masse to a blanket ban on reporting there. To make matters worse, Hezbollah had just kidnapped the head of the UN observer force, an American Marine lieutenant colonel, William Higgins, and hung his body before sending grizzly videotapes of the dangling corpse to leading news agencies.

Fadlallah wanted to meet in Beirut despite the ban on reporting there, and he offered to arrange for transport along a secret Syrian road bypassing frontier checks. I was tempted, but by now I'd seen enough friends like Sadegh vanish after taking too many chances. It was not the kind of thing, I decided, that you wanted to rush into.

Fadlallah finally agreed to meet at a secret location outside Damascus. A grand ayatollah, he was dressed in black robes and the mandatory black turban. He had disconcertingly bulging eyes and a long beard. In contrast, his men, dressed in well tailored charcoal gray business suits and were armed with sleek Swedish submachine guns. They positioned themselves behind the trees in a pleasantly shaded garden.

We reminisced briefly about Iran's revolution, what it had been like at the beginning, and meeting Khomeini during Friday prayers at Neauphle-le-Chateau. Finally, Fadlallah decided that there had been enough small talk.

"So, what do you want to know?" he asked.

"You have just shot an American lieutenant colonel," I said. "You videotaped his hanging body and sent the tape to the news media. Now everyone in America hates you. What did you get out of that?"

Fadlallah paused for a moment. "Some of us feel that you Americans are not really interested in what America does outside your country," he said. "All you really care about is kicking back with a six-pack of beer and watching Monday Night Football. But what you do as a country causes enormous pain in this region. Some of us, I do not necessarily speak for myself, feel that the only way you can understand that pain is if you feel that pain yourself."

"So, where do we go from here?" I asked.

Fadlallah paused again, choosing his words carefully. "President Rafsanjani and I believe that the hostages are no longer of any use to us," he said. "We feel that if we could show the Majlis (Iran's parliament) that there is more to be gained by releasing the hostages and turning to diplomacy than in holding on to them, we might be able to let them go."

"What kind of sign do you need," I asked.

Fadlallah explained that the US had frozen Iranian funds in the Hague. If they could be released, that might be a signal.

When I got back to Cairo, I found out that TIME had cut any mention of hostages out of the interview. If they had left that part in and made the offer public, the likelihood of a deal might have evaporated. A few days after the story ran I received a call from Larry Heinzerling, AP's vice president, who had been assigned to negotiate Terry Anderson's release.

"I understand that you talked with Fadlallah," Heinzerling said.

I told him that I had and added, "I think that it is something that should go to the White House."

"That is why I am calling," he said.

I faxed him the full transcript. A few months later, the funds were quietly released, and not long after that the hostages were set free. Fadlallah's message, it turned out, had been only one of a wide array of signals from the Iranians that they were willing to make a deal. The important thing in this case is that

someone was there to listen.

Being there is what it is all about.

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