

CONFLICT REPORTING IN THE SMARTPHONE ERA

FROM BUDGET CONSTRAINTS
TO INFORMATION WARFARE

EDITED BY DARIJA FABIJANIĆ, CHRISTIAN SPAHR,
VLADIMIR ZLATARSKY



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FOREWORD

Conflict reporting has increased again in importance, and at the same time it has radically changed in nature. The conflicts in Ukraine and in Syria are good examples of this. In both cases, the fronts are only about a thousand kilometres away from the mainland of the EU and the hostilities have massive repercussions for European politics: Ukraine, because the self-determination of a neighbouring country of the EU and the post-war order in Europe are here under threat; Syria, because it is a key to stability in the Middle East and a major cause of the refugee crisis.

Both conflicts are also symptomatic of the challenges which war correspondents have to confront today. Here there are not two clearly identifiable opponents anymore but several, or new kinds of, warring parties. In Ukraine, there is an undeclared war which threatens to become a 'frozen conflict', accompanied by massive international propaganda, also in the social media. In Syria, oversight is easily lost of the differing militias and their goals and how these are connected with the engagements of the major powers, the USA and Russia.

The political relevance of these wars for Europe is indisputable, since they affect European foreign and internal policy in many respects. The debates on EU enlargement and dealings with refugees and the Islamic world are particularly strongly affected. At the same time, foreign and war correspondents today have to meet increasing demands from their editors, subject to worsening conditions. The pressure on costs in the media market leads to reporters having to cover more and more issues and larger geographical areas, and the increase in speed through the internet demands that texts and multimedia reports are made available more and more quickly. Smaller budgets also lead in part to reduced security for journalists, for example if savings are made on protective equipment and local support, or if freelancers increasingly undertake work at their own risk which used to be carried out by permanently employed and well-protected editorial staff.

In the Balkan region, where the Media Program South East Europe of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) is active, the conflicts mentioned above and the pressures in the everyday work of journalists are particularly conspicuous. The present book was inspired by the results of an international KAS conference on the theme of war reporting in Sofia in 2015. Beyond existing recommendations of international organisations, it presents new trends in reporting of warfare and provides additional guidance from the point of view of our authors for secure, professional and ethical reporting from crisis regions.

Sofia, 4 October 2016

Christian Spahr

Head of the KAS Media Program South East Europe

1. INTRODUCTION

Dr. Vladimir Zlatarsky

On 13 February 2015, the Media Program South East Europe of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung hosted an international conference on the topic 'The truth dies first – journalists in conflict zones'. Two different major conflicts not far from South East Europe, namely in Ukraine and Syria, were the reason to gather renowned experts and journalists from the region as well as Germany and Ukraine to discuss the latest developments in conflict reporting.

One of the basic questions in the intense debate was how news can be produced in the most professional way in times of war. Answers were offered by experienced journalists who have worked for years in hot spots all over the world, such as Jörg Armbruster, Gregor Mayer and Elena Yontcheva, as well as journalists from a younger generation, like the Bulgarian freelancer and blogger Ruslan Trad. In practice, the conference turned into an exchange platform between experienced war reporters, media experts from NGOs and young journalists, who critically analysed the developments in war reporting and defined guidelines for the work in conflict zones.

In parallel, the team of the KAS Media Program set themselves another objective: to sum up and broaden the material discussed during the conference and add practical value to it. In a workshop, the participants of the Sofia conference developed a catalogue of guidelines for journalists in conflict zones, which has already been published online. It covered three important stages of journalist's work – preparation, field work and ethical aspects.

Based on this work, we addressed some of the leading journalists in the field of conflict reporting in order to describe the process of their work in more detail – starting with the departure to a conflict zone and ending with the publication of the material.

Our authors examined different aspects like recent developments in foreign reporting, preparations for the visit, safety in the field, professional coverage on the ground, ethical challenges and more. The objective of this book is to help journalists who pursue their profession in areas of conflict. We hope it may serve as a useful reference and also be an interesting read, especially to the young generation of journalists which unfortunately faces more and more challenges in reporting from regions of violence and war.

2. FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS UNDER TIME AND FINANCIAL PRESSURE

Dr. Susanne Glass

Our fast-paced globalised world compels foreign news journalists to navigate ever more complex challenges, not least because there seems to be a decreasing willingness on the part of media consumers to embrace complexity in the face of information overload. This has been part and parcel of most of my own experience as a foreign correspondent.

Technically speaking, it all began with a plain question in 1999: What sense would it make to be in the field, in Kosovo, if there wouldn't be any access to news agencies? 'How will she actually be able to report?' My colleague was sceptical. I could see why. After all, we sat together in the radio newsroom of Bavarian Public Broadcasting, keeping track of all incoming news items from various agencies, which seemed to be arriving every few seconds. The task at hand was to draw conclusions, categorise and summarise. I had just volunteered to go to Kosovo as a foreign news correspondent in order to cover the war. Access to agencies, internet or local telephone services were not state of the art in 1999s Kosovo. Such tools were simply unheard of. Only satellite phones afforded us contact with the outside world – if at all.

My former boss's reply to the question sounded simple: 'She will only be reporting on what she observes, hears and experiences by herself; only about what she really knows and thus can evaluate.' I often recall that discussion. In hindsight, it was probably the best ever professional advice I received. Yet, as simple as that advice may sound, even back then it wasn't easy to implement at all. Presumably, ever more advanced technologies and ever more breathless social media coverage will keep us on our toes.

Clearly, foreign correspondents can no longer invoke sporadically working telephone connections with the outside world as an apology, as I did in Kosovo 15 years ago. Nowadays, it is assumed that we are connected, wired and reachable at all times. Our job profile has changed as rapidly as technologies have advanced. Print, radio or TV correspondents as such no longer exist. Today's newspaper journalists shoot social video; they blog or publish their experiences on Facebook. Many editorial offices take it for granted that they do so. And yet, even though postings on social media websites are considered to be a private matter, no correspondent who has made a name for himself in connection with a large media outlet may assume that he is actually perceived as a purely private person when publishing his or her opinions on the internet. Multimediality entails that traditional demarcation between radio and television journalists – as they used to exist, for example, in our ARD offices¹ – are increasingly being dismantled. At the Studio Vienna/South East Europe as well as at the ARD Studio Tel Aviv, where I currently work, radio and TV now work together, share existing infrastructures and have a joint online presence.

On the one hand, these advanced technologies are wonderful because they enable easier access to information as well as quicker ways of checking it. The drawback, on the other hand, is that we cannot always verify the source of the information. Moreover, the information revolution as well as increasingly complex ways in which information impacts us steps up the pressure on correspondents to churn out ever more well-informed reports at a greater speed. This pressure is further intensified by current media efforts to increase their dissemination rates through websites as well as additional programmes and publications, often in spite of stringent austerity measures. This means that more programmes are produced by a shrinking number of journalists.

Alongside working as a foreign correspondent and later bureau chief of ARD Studio for Austria and South East Europe, I also served as the President of the Foreign Press Association in Vienna for ten years. When I took over the presidency in 2006, there were more than 200 accredited foreign correspondents in Vienna. At the time of my departure in 2016, about 140 remained. Many media organisations have had to reduce staff in their foreign correspondence offices or close them down completely. This had had far-reaching consequences: Colleagues who used to work in an office of three or even four journalists suddenly found themselves all alone at their desks. They were now hardly seen conducting in-depth interviews or taking advantage of other research options. They simply no longer had the time to do so. In cases where offices had been closed down, employees or freelancers are now flown in as and when required to cover important current news events. Much has been written about these so-called 'parachute journalists'. Often these jobs are filled by freelancers, preferably younger and thus less costly employees. I don't want to call into question the skills of these colleagues. Their situation certainly is a difficult one. Obviously, someone who is sent to a foreign country without profound knowledge or supportive contacts in order to report on current news affairs will probably struggle a lot more than an established journalist who is already based in the country. In addition, the position of freelance staff is per se weaker than that of permanent employees who would feel more at ease to question the editor's choice of topic or directorial approach. All this compromises quality.

Nevertheless, I'm not ready to pronounce analogue media such as print, radio or television dead. I believe in them, though in conjunction with digital media. Without doubt, in our globalised world there is an ever increasing need for profound assessments as well as credible and professional journalism. Yet, we should pause every now and then and reflect critically on how we can actually meet all these demands under the present conditions. What advantages do new technological and media possibilities offer and where are the pitfalls?

In summary, let us take a look back at Kosovo. Even though I used to be annoyed back then that connection with the outside world via satellite phone was so difficult to establish, in hindsight, I believe that the enforced breaks in reporting actually had a positive impact on the quality of my work. They allowed more time for research and reflection. Moreover, since Twitter or Instagram were not in use yet, fewer people seemed to aspire to the

role of self-promoter, for whom posting pictures of him- or herself, preferably against the backdrop of groups of destitute refugees, had become the main attraction to the job. Furthermore, there was a lot more variety in terms of differing emphases placed on individual topics. Clearly, all correspondents were reporting directly from Kosovo, though without any of the technological prerequisites that would have allowed them at any given time to read or check up on what others had published. This allowed for a certain amount of laxness, as mainstream media reporting had not become a driving force yet.

A big drawback though was that it was a lot more difficult to verify stories. At times, I even felt that there were targeted efforts to manipulate us, in particular during encounters with young children who told us stories that were downright horrific. Often, upon further inquiry, the very same children would repeat the account of their supposed experiences in exactly the same way, frequently also employing foreign vocabulary that seemed unusual for children their age. Obviously, these children had learned their narrative by heart in order to perform it. What the intentions of the adults behind these performances were, though, was another question. Moreover, many of the Kosovo refugees we met in camps in Macedonia were so traumatised that in their accounts they no longer seemed to be able to distinguish between their own experiences and those they had heard about. For example, we heard from various sources that Prishtina had turned into a 'ghost town.' It was rumoured that all residents had fled. Later, of course, this information turned out to be wrong. Today such information could immediately be verified with the help of various means of communication. However, back then it could not. I thus doubt, for example, that it would take long today to expose the following incident, which happened during the Macedonian crisis in 2001, as a lie: There were five of us, three print journalists, my interpreter and I. We had decided to travel to one of the villages, in which a leader of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) had entrenched himself, hoping to get an interview with him. It was quite a risky undertaking, though a worthwhile one, as we managed to get the desired interview.

Upon return, each one of us wrote his or her report. A few days later – I had almost forgotten about my own report – I had my editor on the phone. He inquired: 'Where are you now?' I replied: 'In Tetovo. Why?' – He: 'Really?' – Me: '???' – He: 'Well, I just read from your colleague XY that he is the only remaining journalist in Tetovo. All the others, he writes, have fled.' I was stunned and asked for the whole article to be read to me. Among other things, the article reported on how the supposedly last remaining foreign correspondent in Tetovo had travelled quite heroically and all alone to the KLA village we ourselves had visited. He had also fabricated a story about himself having come under fire while on his way to the village.

I could hardly believe what I was hearing, in particular as the colleague in question was actually seated two tables behind me, enjoying a Shopska salad in the company of other journalists. When I took him to task, he seemed surprised about my reaction: 'Come on, Susanne. I just made the story sound a little more interesting, quite a normal thing to do, isn't it?' Well, fortunately it is not. And yet, over the years, I have experienced again and

again that journalists describe situations as much more dramatic or dangerous than they actually happened, thus promoting themselves as heroic figures. Understandably, as in some cases they may simply feel under enormous pressure to deliver an original, cutting edge story. However, the point here is that not only are readers or viewers actually being deceived, such misinformation might also have a fatal influence on politicians or other key decision makers, and thus on the course of actual history.

At the time of Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, the technological possibilities had already immensely improved and changed. We now had to produce far more programmes, including more editions of for additional news shows, also in the internet. The main problem we faced now was the local infrastructure: Our hotel rooms were located on the 12th floor. Our broadcast van was parked in front of the hotel. On one particular occasion, we were scheduled as the lead of the evening news programme *Tagesschau* at 8:00 p.m. The line for the feed to Hamburg was booked, as usual, ten minutes earlier, for 7:50 p.m. I had just finished with recording the last sentence of my report and our editor had completed sound editing. The time was now 7:40 p.m., when all of a sudden a power outage occurred, affecting the entire building. When the power finally came back on, our editing equipment went on strike. The dreadful machine simply refused to eject the tape containing our report. When we had finally managed to get the tape out, we rushed to the elevator. It was now 7:55 p.m. Our line for the feed was already on air, though obviously without us. We glanced at the elevator. It wasn't working, probably also due to the power outage. Our last resort seemed to be the staircase. We were huffing and puffing by the time we reached the broadcast van outside the hotel at exactly 7:58 p.m. What can I say? We had made it, after all! Not least thanks to our incredible colleagues seated in the master control room of NDR² in Hamburg and in the van outside our hotel in Prishtina. As so often, things had fallen into place in the last minute. Our report was broadcast on time, at 8:00 p.m. The days following the declaration of Kosovo's independence turned out to be as exciting as this prelude.

Wrapped up in down jackets and mittens, we spent most of our time in front of our computers in freezing hotel rooms, writing and editing our reports. Almost every hour, I rushed up to the roof for yet another live interview, often several in a row. Meanwhile, our editor had to rush downstairs to deliver tapes with our current reports to our team in the van. It went on like this for days. Then one afternoon, I suddenly had an absolutely furious managing editor of the evening news in Hamburg on the phone. He seemed beside himself. The reason was a sequence, only a few seconds long, of a security guard stationed in front of the UN building in Prishtina. Our editor's complaint was that we had already used the shot in a previous programme. The image was not from the same day and hence in direct contravention of a very important *Tagesschau* guideline: All footage must be current, and if otherwise, the appropriate date needs to be referenced. The footage in question had simply slipped through during endless hours of reviewing raw material. Even though I could have bet that the security guard would have stood in exactly the same place near the UN gate, had we have returned to film him again a day later, my editing manager had a point. After all, his accuracy was legendary. But so were his outbursts of fury. In the midst

of all this stress, I felt quite upset. In hindsight though, I realise that it is reassuring to be able to rely on colleagues who pay that much attention to detail. This ensures quality journalism.

Furthermore, **it is equally important not to neglect the research part of our work, not even in times of extreme pressure or financial constraints.** This point became once more clear when we researched a story about a former Dutch peacekeeper. He had been psychologically traumatised because he, like others, had failed to prevent the Srebrenica massacre. He hoped to overcome his trauma by moving with his family to Srebrenica in order to make amends. I had come across his story in a Bosnian local newspaper in 2011 and was curious to meet him. After some effort, my TV producer in Bosnia managed to contact the man. I called him. Yes, it was true, he told me on the phone. He was planning to move with his wife and two teenage daughters to Srebrenica. His lock and key company in the Netherlands had already been sold. He was about to open a hotel in Srebrenica. He wanted to bring tourists and money to the town and thus create desperately needed jobs in this poor region. 'Well, we are coming,' I announced our visit. We planned to make a TV documentary about his extraordinary dedication.

I got on a plane to Sarajevo. Upon arrival, at 6:00 a.m., our team immediately embarked on the three-hour drive to Srebrenica. During a coffee break at about 8:00 a.m., I called the Dutchman to let him know that we would be arriving at the arranged time. 'Oh, no,' he said. He obviously had changed his mind. He was no longer in the mood to meet us. Too many journalists had contacted him and it all had somehow become too much for him. Obviously, this was not the first time an interviewee suddenly had second thoughts. But after all the effort we had put in, we were gutted. I used all my powers of persuasion to change his mind. Eventually, he agreed to a short meeting. Whether or not he would allow us to film him was left open. Upon meeting him, I realised why. The 40-year-old man was quite obviously mentally unstable. He had not overcome the trauma of Srebrenica. I told him that I had been traveling a lot in war and crisis zones as well and shared with him some of my own experiences. Soon, he could not stop talking about his own experiences. He had been in therapy after Srebrenica. At some point though the Dutch military had given up on him and decided he was a hopeless case, which cost him his job. Finally, he agreed to be filmed. He took us to the warehouse of Potočari where he had been stationed in 1995. He showed us the room where his camp bed had stood, the pub where he and his colleagues had gone for a drink after work. And then he showed us a dilapidated hotel in the centre of Srebrenica which he planned on purchasing and rebuilding. He told us that he would be creating holiday apartments in the mountains above the city or perhaps he would do something else such as hiring out cars to tourists. He drove a big Humvee. He would open a restaurant by a lake, together with his wife. Or he would be an organic farmer and sell vegetables. Or perhaps do all of it at the same time. It was clear to us that not a single one of these projects had taken off so far and it was questionable whether any of them ever would. I felt sorry for him. In Srebrenica, people were gossiping about him. He was known as 'the crazy Dutchman.' One woman summed it all up: 'We have already enough traumatised people of our own. We have no need for a traumatised Dutchman.'

Finally, *ARD Europamagazin*³ broadcasted the story in which we tried to convey all its conflicting aspects. Almost simultaneously, several other reports about the Dutch soldier in Bosnia appeared in various reputable international media outlets. In one report he featured as a hotel owner, in another as a successful organic farmer and in a third he let apartments. It was obvious that our colleagues had not bothered to actually visit the traumatised peacekeeper in Srebrenica. They had merely spoken with him on the phone and believed whatever he had told them.

A further problem in foreign news coverage crystallised in reports about refugees along the Balkan route in the summer of 2015: The constant dithering about whether or not to intervene. For an *ARD-Weltspiegel*⁴ report, we followed, together with our producer from Belgrade, a Syrian refugee family who were on their way from Macedonia through Serbia to Hungary. The young men and women all held academic degrees and spoke excellent English. Among the group were two young children and a pregnant woman. The idea of the story was to document their flight as realistically as possible. We wanted to show how refugees find their way through foreign cities, where and from whom they receive help and where dangers lurk. Naturally, I have internalised the guiding principles of journalism: **Journalists are not charities. Journalists should never be participants. They must remain outside observers at all times.**

After two days of filming, our Syrian family arrived by bus in Belgrade, clearly an alien city to them, at 2:00 a.m. in the morning. The children were completely exhausted. The pregnant woman was about to collapse. Thousands of refugees were already camped in the park in front of the bus station. Our Syrian family did not want to stay there under any circumstances. They preferred to spend the night in an affordable hotel of their own choice. Fortunately, they had the financial means to do so, though obviously no idea which direction to walk. We, on the other hand, knew very well where such a hotel could be found. The dreaded deliberations began. I resolved my internal conflict as follows: We would let them search for about 15 minutes on their own, observing with our camera how they would go about it. If they would not find a hotel within 15 minutes, we would help them. Clearly, this would have meant that we would actually intervene in the story. But then I didn't want to stand idly by when a pregnant woman was collapsing in the street, least of all film it. Luckily they found a hotel without our help.

At the Serbian-Hungarian border we got caught up in yet another dilemma. Our Serbian producer had accompanied our Syrian family on the Serbian side. I meanwhile waited with another team on the Hungarian side. At that time the best route for refugees to cross into Hungary was the railway tracks in the town of Röszke. We knew that. Our refugee family did not. A short while later, our producer told us by telephone that the family was already negotiating with human traffickers who offered to take them to another border crossing for a lot of money. From there they would in all likelihood not have been able to proceed. We sensed that the traffickers presented a real and present danger to our Syrian family who at this point turned to Zoran and asked him what he thought of the traffickers' plan. He told them the truth. Should he have lied to them?

At the Budapest train station there were colleagues distributing water and food to refugees. Some were criticised for doing so by colleagues back home at the editorial office. They were accused of taking sides. Such conduct was not appropriate for journalists, even when their action served a good cause. That is true in principle. In reality though, I would not stand idly by watching another human being suffering from thirst and hunger. Not if I could help it. After all, **we are human beings and not merely news coverage machines**. Yet, the dilemma behind all this is more than clear to me.

At some point back then, I also stopped following on social media. I simply could not bear all the hostility. When we did a story on a Syrian refugee boy, Nihat, we had met in Budapest, we received a lot of positive feedback. Nihat had approached our camera crew because he was desperate to learn something after four years without any formal education. He was dreaming of becoming a camera operator and we could offer him some hands-on practice as well as a little distraction. Many viewers were touched by his plight, but there was also terrible hatred targeted at us. Several anonymous viewers sent us images of dead refugee children via Twitter, with the following text attached: 'What a pity this didn't happen to you and your boy.'

I believe these developments present us with a major problem that affects our media landscape in significant ways. The fact that anybody can nowadays empty his or her 'bucket of garbage' onto the internet has opened the floodgates. It is easy and cowardly, and all happening under the protection of anonymity, though many seem to no longer shy away from signing their names to their hate-filled attacks. Is it because we feel less inhibited when interacting with a computer screen rather than with a real-life interlocutor? I believe that the media is perhaps too much driven by today's culture of 'Likes,' or 'Not Likes' for that matter. Perhaps we act on an underlying fear to be doomed by the latest new technology or to neglect the web community, thus allowing it at times too loud a voice which no longer actually corresponds to its real weight in relation to the other readers, listeners and viewers.

In order to avoid misunderstanding here, I do appreciate the opportunities opened up by new technologies and the social media. To me as a journalist it is of great value to be able to publish on the internet additional background information, full-lengths interviews or even stories in an innovative design, in cases where TV programme formats allow no space for it. I am more than happy to put in extra hours to this end.

But the dose makes the poison. At the train tracks in Hungary, I met an overburdened colleague who seemed close to collapse. He told me in despair that he could no longer cope with the number of programmes his station had asked him to produce. He was feeling close to burnout. It would have been a second episode as he had suffered already from burnout before. To remedy the situation, he had cancelled half his scheduled programmes. Later, I saw that he had sent almost 100 (!) tweets in one hour. No surprise that he felt so exhausted.

During our refugee crisis coverage, we also encountered an overly emotional outcry in response to the more or less monothematic manner in which all media suddenly reported. Other important topics that would be covered in 'normal times' suddenly no longer happened on TV, on the radio or in print. Clearly, these neglected topics had not become unimportant as such. Yet, in response to the monothematic design of the coverage, many media consumers no longer wanted to watch, listen or read about anything related to the topic 'refugees.' Fortunately, this problem is now increasingly being recognised.

Broadly speaking, the willingness to embrace complexity is decreasing in our fast-paced world. Rather than accepting it as a *fait accompli*, we should take a stand against this trend. **Our ever more complex reality cannot be captured in 140 characters on Twitter. Nor should it be painted in black and white. Attempts at this kind of reduction will inevitably fuel fears and emotionality.** Solid and continuous foreign coverage is an important step forward in counterbalancing this trend. Clearly, this requires journalists who are enabled to report in a non-agitated manner on a wide range of topics of their own choice.

About the author:

Susanne Glass is acting bureau chief of ARD Studio Middle East, covering Israel and the Palestinian Autonomous areas since 2016. In her recent book 'Grenzerfahrungen' (2016) she writes about her experiences as foreign correspondent in South East Europe. She served as President of the Foreign Press Association in Vienna between 2006 and 2015. Glass was ARD correspondent for Austria and South East Europe between 1999 and 2015 and acting TV bureau chief since 2014.

¹ ARD (full name: Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland – Consortium of public broadcaster in Germany) is a joint organisation of Germany's regional public-service broadcasters. The ARD is the world's largest public broadcaster. It was founded in 1950 in West Germany to represent the common interests of the new, decentralised, post-war broadcasting services – in particular the introduction of a joint television network.

² NDR (full name: Norddeutscher Rundfunk – Northern German Broadcasting) is a public radio and television broadcaster, based in Hamburg. NDR is a member of the ARD consortium.

³ ARD Europamagazin is a magazine broadcast with news and background information about policy and developments in Europe.

⁴ ARD Weltspiegel is a magazine broadcast for foreign reporting.

3. WAR REPORTING OVER TIME – JOURNALISTS BECOME TARGETS

Darija Fabijanić and Oliver Vujović

War reporting is as old as journalism itself. Stories and historical accounts were written after the end of conflicts to give details of the events that transpired. Thus, a type of journalistic narrative about most wars has reached us through time. The first war correspondent is probably the painter Willem van de Velde the Elder who during the First Anglo-Dutch War observed a naval battle between the Commonwealth of England and the Dutch Republic from his boat close to the Dutch coast near the village of Ter Heijde in 1653. Henry Crabb Robinson covered Napoleon's battles for *The Times* in 1808/1809. William Hicks wrote letters describing the Battle of Trafalgar which were published in *The Times* (1805). However, most experts agree that modern war reporting can be traced back to the beginning of the 19th century, and in particular to the Crimean War (October 1853 – March 1856) and William Howard Russell who wrote reports from the front lines for newspapers all over Europe. This is regarded as the first modern example of conflict reporting. At the time it took numerous weeks for a written text to be published. William Howard Russell later covered the Indian Rebellion (1857), the American Civil War, the Austro-Prussian War, and the Franco-Prussian War. Other prominent war reporters of that time were Ferdinando Petruccelli della Gattina who reported on the Italian Wars of Independence (1848/49, 1859, 1866) and the Franco-Prussian War (1870 – 1871), and Jules Claretie who wrote for *Le Figaro* about the Battle of Custoza (1866).

A lot has changed since those early days. But one aspect has remained the same throughout the years: being a war reporter (also known as special correspondent) means doing one of the most dangerous jobs in journalism.

A comparison of the reported numbers of journalists killed in conflict zones reveals a significant difference. According to Reporter Without Borders¹, 176 journalists were killed in Iraq between 2003 and 2010. In the Vietnam War which lasted 20 years, 63 journalists were killed. Two-thirds of the total number of journalists who lost their lives worldwide in 2014 died in conflict zones. Conversely, in 2015 the number of journalists killed in war areas was lower than those killed in 'peace zones'. However, only a slight decrease in the number of journalists killed in conflict zones was registered. Comparing these numbers to the two World Wars, more war correspondents die today than back then. During World War I only two journalists were killed and in World War II the official number of killed journalists was 63. These numbers indicate the changes in war reporting and illustrate the developments that have taken place over time. In this chapter we will describe the changes that have occurred and give examples for recent developments in conflict reporting.

Reports from journalists during World War I became more vivid as photography brought the conflict closer to audiences. Pictures were an addition to written material, the only form

of journalist reporting at the time, and a new feature for print media. Newspapers were the primary source of information prior to and during World War II. However, during World War II, with radio broadcasting and newsreels, new channels of information emerged. After television became part of peoples' daily life, the Vietnam War was the first conflict, which TV correspondents could narrate by transmitting information through moving images. As a result, the consequences of war became even clearer to the audience. According to Yolande Stolte, the Vietnam War was also the first war in which journalists were considered to report with 'greater neutrality' at least in the Western hemisphere, on account of the stronger focus on the ethics of war as compared to World War II and lower government control of the press. This applied mostly to US journalists who, for the first time, could be truly critical of their own military. Previously, war reporters were an instrument used by governments and different forms of censorship were applied to their reports. Moreover, journalists used to present themselves as patriotic and supportive of their country and many media were part of the 'propaganda apparatus'. With the Vietnam War and TV broadcasting this has changed because new media outlets emerged and media diversity increased. This resulted in an upsurge of public debate and criticism about the war.²

The wars in former Yugoslavia were another major turning point in war reporting. For the first time, journalists were viewed as targets. In previous conflicts wearing a blue flak jacket with the word 'Press' on it meant being off target. For example, in El Salvador in the mid-1980s, journalists were protected by being accredited and visible. In the wars in former Yugoslavia this traditional safeguard made them a target.³ Today it is sometimes better for journalists to work in disguise, particularly in multi-stakeholder conflicts like the one in Syria.

Becoming a target also meant that journalists were becoming key players in conflicts. For warring parties and governments, journalists are not only a source of information but actors to be reckoned with. Warring parties not only began to perceive journalists as targets, they were also using them as a vehicle for propaganda in a brand new way. In the smartphone era propaganda stratagems differ from those employed during World War II since journalists are manipulated in ways that are vastly more subtle and sophisticated.⁴

After the end of the Cold War, professional opportunities for covering conflict also increased. New technologies provided journalists with new tools: in the 1990s satellite telephones improved the quality of reporting and facilitated the exchange of information for journalists and media outlets. Connections to editors were further improved by the advent of GSM and mobile telephones. Today smartphones, laptops and the internet are indispensable to war reporters. However, modern communication devices also carry risks on account of reporters using them as storage devices for a great deal of job-related and personal information and the fact that they make it much easier for the parties in a conflict to locate journalists (i.e. with the help of hackers).

New technologies also mean competition for professional journalists, having made reporting easier for non-professionals. A smartphone and an internet connection are sometimes all that is necessary to write a story.⁵ Due to 'citizen journalism' and social media, full-time

journalists are finding it increasingly difficult to sell a story. The situation is compounded by the emergence of war tourists who travel to conflict zones, not only out of curiosity, but to write about their experiences in a personal way. Narrative accounts from such trips are easy to publish in blogs or via other online channels. Hence competition increased from hobby journalists who expect less money for their story or – in case of war tourists – no money at all.⁶

Hobby journalists and some freelance correspondents lack experience in the field and are thus more prone to risk, getting themselves into dangerous situations as a result. It is therefore hardly surprising that since 2008 Reporters Without Borders has commenced counting bloggers in its statistics, expanding the category to include citizen journalists once again in 2012.⁷ Young, inexperienced journalists tend to go to conflict zones to make a name for themselves. They often go on a mission without any training. Professional preparation is a must for any journalist working in a war zone. A high standard of training by NGOs or the military is expensive and a cost that many media outlets – in times of financial constraints – are reluctant to cover. Media outlets should also provide special insurance for conflict reporters, but often this is not offered as part of the package. Journalists are thus taking more risks by going without either insurance or training, or both.

As seen in Iraq, new conflicts bring new developments and trends in war reporting. With the Iraq War in 2003, the so-called 'embedded journalism' was effectively mainstreaming. In previous conflicts journalists had already been attached to the military, but during the war in Iraq for the first time 600 journalists were embedded with the military in an organised and systematic manner. It was now easier for journalists to give more vivid accounts, fleshing out the narrated stories.⁸ At the same time, criticism was levied on embedded journalism, mostly targeting the limited access to information and one-sided perspective. Journalists are bound to the military perspective as they are effectively part of the troops on the ground. A biased perspective is easier to adopt, although reporters and the military may have different goals.⁹ The military can influence media representatives with its information policy in order to have selected facts reported in the news or suppress other facts from becoming public. It is thus more challenging for journalists to remain neutral or understand the full context. In this sense, embedded journalism runs the risk of being used as the military's puppet for 'propaganda'.¹⁰ Additionally, some journalists reporting from war zones are able to provide reports only under conditions of military censorship. In both cases such framework information should be presented clearly to the viewers or readers through a note by the news presenter or editor.

A specific group of reporters are military journalists, who are state employees providing print, radio, television and photographic information for internal military audiences.¹¹

Developments in the general media environment and current challenges of news reporting also affect the work of war correspondents. News budgets are small, meaning that a small number of newsrooms can afford their own foreign correspondents, let alone war reporters. It is even more expensive to send a reporter to a war zone on account of the

specific risks and needs for preparation and support. Many media outlets therefore prefer to use freelancers and stringers instead of permanent staff.

Freelancers have to organise their trip on their own and initially cover all their expenses themselves. Such expenses are often not reimbursed and need to be paid from the honorarium of the journalist. For example Francesca Borri, an Italian freelancer who reported from Aleppo, received around 70 US Dollar per piece. Her costs were however 50 US Dollars per night for sleeping at a rebel's base under horrible conditions – under mortar fire on the ground on a mattress soaked with yellow water. Moreover, car rental was an extra 250 US Dollars per day and insurance an additional 1,000 US Dollars per month. These costs did not include a fixer or translator.¹² Such costs are difficult for freelancers to cover as they do not have a media outlet to fall back on.

Freelancers tend to take extra risks, e.g. not hiring translators, security guards or staying in cheap hostels due to being poorly paid.¹³ For this reason, some editors therefore do not buy stories from freelance journalists on ethical grounds, wishing to discourage them from getting into dangerous situations. Journalists should not put themselves in harm's way for a story. On the other hand, not buying stories from freelancers might cause the situation to further deteriorate. Pressure from competition might increase even more, pushing freelancers into taking even greater risks to write a story.¹⁴ This means that the current framework conditions in war reporting are not conducive to the entry of newcomers.

A refusal on the part of freelancers to go to a conflict zone on account of the conditions described above will mean less reliable information about the events taking place in areas of conflict. The only available information might be provided by the parties to the conflict who would be reluctant to disclose all facts or would only release propaganda content. Access to information is always limited, even in the field. Journalists are often not allowed access to certain parts of a country as governments refuse to issue visas or close borders without notice. In order to be able to provide more than a one-sided view, journalists would sometimes enter a country illegally.¹⁵

Another challenge for high-level conflict reporting is a growing leaning towards sensationalism. This is especially prominent in the weak media markets of South East Europe, where media quality is generally lower and yellow press is widespread. Conflicts are often covered from an entertainment perspective, with a focus on violence and suffering. It is even more absurd that a conflict in which civilians are dying would receive less attention than a journalist being hurt. The parties at war are aware of this and have previously intentionally endangered journalists. 'I'm quite clear the rebels deliberately set us up to be shot at by the Syrian Army. Dead journos are bad for Damascus', said Alex Thomson who was in Homs.¹⁶ With sensationalism in their minds, journalists often leave out wider contexts behind a conflict and only show certain or polarised views.¹⁷

Less quality-conscious media outlets have little use for information that journalists gathered on the spot, preferring to publish stories by going through news agency reports

or online news and just commenting on them. They no longer carry out in-house research. For example, Islamic State (IS) propaganda videos are filmed and arranged in an easy-to-view manner, along with user comments. This does not necessarily correspond to reality as reports from the field are rarely used for background verification. News from war zones raise TV news ratings and printed media sales. Editors should strive to secure quality reporting at all times.

War reporting has always been and will always remain a dangerous job. Whether in Eastern Ukraine or Syria, abductions and killings of journalists have become a commonplace. Even if the parties at war do not endanger journalists' lives, they certainly try to manipulate or obstruct their work. Moreover, journalists need to always bear in mind that each conflict is different, i.e. that it might be easier to talk to the Taliban than to the IS.¹⁸ These different contexts need to be taken into account during preparation. Further recommendations for journalists will be presented in more detail in the following chapters.

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⁶ Borri, Francesca (2013) 'Woman's work – The twisted reality of an Italian freelancer in Syria', Columbia Journalism Review, see http://www.cjr.org/feature/womans_work.php.

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¹¹ Luckwaldt, Adam (2016) 'Overview of Journalism Career in the Military', September, see www.thebalance.com/overview-of-journalism-careers-in-the-military-2356495.

¹² Borri, Francesca (2013) 'Woman's work – The twisted reality of an Italian freelancer in Syria', Columbia Journalism Review, see http://www.cjr.org/feature/womans_work.php.

¹³ Bennett, Daniel (2013) 'The Life of a War Correspondent is Even Worse than You Think', July, see www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/07/life-war-correspondent/313463.

¹⁴ Caesar, Ed (2014) 'Shooting the Messengers', GQ Magazine, 22 August, see <http://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/war-reporting>; Reporters Without Borders (2013) 'Journalism in Syria - Impossible job?', November, <https://rsf.org/en/reports/journalism-syria-impossible-job>, p. 14.

¹⁵ Reporters Without Borders (2013) 'Journalism in Syria – Impossible job?', November, see <https://rsf.org/en/reports/journalism-syria-impossible-job>, p. 15; Reporters Without Borders (2015) 'Einreiseverbote für Journalisten', September 17, see <https://www.reporter-ohne-grenzen.de/ukraine/alle-meldungen/meldung/einreiseverbote-fuer-dutzende-journalisten>.

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4. EFFICIENT PREPARATION FOR MISSIONS IN CONFLICT ZONES

Christian Mihr

More than 750 journalists have been killed since 2005 in the course of, or as a result of, their work. They have been targeted because of their occupation and on account of their stories and investigations endangering propaganda of one or the other side to a conflict. Syria provides a sombre case study of such persecution. Since 2012 it has been among the three deadliest countries for journalists, and editors are increasingly reluctant to deploy staff there in light of the growing risks that journalists might be kidnapped, taken hostage or even beheaded. The rapid progress in information and communications technology has given rise to a new danger for journalists: **surveillance of their activities and interception of their data**. Digital safety remains a constant challenge.

Therefore, this text gives an overview of what journalists should think about when they prepare for a mission in a war zone. These recommendations are largely based on the long-standing experience of Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontières, RSF) as a press freedom watchdog supporting journalists in conflict zones. This experience is also reflected in the 'Safety Guide for Journalists. A handbook for reporters in high-risk environments'¹ which Reporters Without Borders has been publishing and updating together with the UNESCO for several years and which has laid the ground for this text. The recommendations are largely meant for freelance journalists, as their contract counterparts are normally better supported by their media.

The brief overview starts with some organisational matters, continuing with preventive security measures and some psychological aspects, and ending with some practical information on seminars and financial aspects.

First of all, write down the 24 hours SOS hotline of Reporters Without Borders: +33147777414. If a journalist's family needs help because he or she is missing or has been imprisoned, you can also call the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC): +41792173285.

Before leaving, the RSF/UNESCO Safety Guide recommends that every journalist asks themselves the following questions:

- Do I know enough about the place where I am going?
- Is the subject sufficiently newsworthy to justify the risks that I am taking?
- What are the potential risks and how well prepared am I to cope with them?
- Have I worked out a procedure to stay in contact with my news desk and my family?
- Do I really want to go and am I physically and psychologically prepared?

Insurances and digital safety

Reporters Without Borders offers insurance for freelance or affiliated reporters covering war zones and armed conflicts as many insurance products do not cover illness, repatriation, disability and loss of life. Also, reporters are often assigned to cover conflicts without any insurance. The main reasons are exorbitant costs and unavailable information. Reporters Without Borders has signed an agreement with APRIL International Canada to offer competitively-priced coverage to freelance reporters. More information about the insurance is available on the RSF website². Other insurance providers are listed on the website of the Rory Peck Trust³. When you conclude an insurance contract please notify your family or colleagues of the insurance details and give at least one person the power of attorney to liaise with the insurance company, if necessary – this should include the right to renew the insurance contract in case you have been kidnapped.

Many reporters still underestimate the importance of digital security – both their own and that of their sources – in difficult areas. Making sure that the confidentiality of your communications and data is protected is quite easy. Many encryption tools are available but sometimes their variety may appear confusing. A journalist does not have to be an IT specialist to follow some basic recommendations.

Before even thinking about making your computer secure or installing software for data or communication encryption, adopt certain habits by following these common sense tips to help you avoid having your e-mail account or computer hacked. To access the web on a laptop or computer, the HTTP protocol (hypertext transfer protocol) is typically used. A protocol is a set of rules and requirements that allows two machines to communicate with each other. HTTPS is the secure version of the HTTP protocol. More information on details how to use the HTTPS protocol is available on a special website⁴ of RSF: Additional security while surfing brings TOR which anonymises all browser communication. More information is available on the 'Security in-a-Box' website of the organization Tactical Tech⁵.

The easiest way to encrypt e-mail communications is installing 'Open PGP – Pretty Good Privacy (PGP)'. There is even an alternative to Skype called Jitsi. You can find details both about PGP and Jitsi on the 'Security in-a-Box' website as well.

For war reporters and investigative journalists, the use of common messengers like WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger is not recommended as there is an excellent and secure alternative called 'Signal'⁶. Even if Facebook introduced end-to-end encryption for both the Facebook Messenger and for WhatsApp they didn't make the source code public. That's why 'Signal' is much more trustworthy.

Physical security preventions

A traditional recommendation for journalists before going to war zones is that they make it clear that they are journalists and not combatants by writing 'Press' on their helmet or jacket. However, in countries like Syria journalistic independence is often challenged. This is why nowadays an individual risk assessment is needed more than ever before. Before every trip, journalists should check that they have up-to-date maps and try to avoid using applications such as Google Maps, etc. to minimise the chance of being tracked. An attempt should also be made to become familiar with all checkpoints in advance, including how to behave at the checkpoints of the different warring parties. Having stringers with local knowledge is also a must.

To prepare their trip journalists should always get in touch with colleagues who have been on the ground to get recommendations for experienced stringers who speak the local language. Prior to any trip journalists should inform their newsroom and agree to be in touch every 12 or 24 hours to confirm that they are alive and well.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) lends bulletproof vests and helmets at no cost to journalists travelling to dangerous areas.

Donated by the French Defence Ministry and National Gendarmerie and by the companies, EnGarde and SafeGuard Armor, these Category IV bulletproof vests weigh about 15 kilograms and can be borrowed by leaving a cheque for 2,000 Euros as a deposit. On some models the 'Press' sign on the back can be modified.

Besides providing a deposit, the journalists who borrow vests must also be or become RSF members. Khaki-coloured composite helmets weighing about 1.5 kilograms may be borrowed under the same conditions (with a deposit of 500 Euros).

RSF can also lend a personal distress beacon. Provided by the company Sierra Echo, it is small and light, and equipped with a GPS location system that allows emergency services to locate the bearer anywhere in the world in an emergency. A deposit of 1,000 Euros is required.

Journalists borrowing any of these items must also fill out a form specifying where they are going, providing their contact details and the contact details of the person to be notified if necessary. More information is available on the RSF website⁷.

Health check

If you are not in good physical and psychological condition, you are advised not to go to a zone of conflict or war. You should therefore always visit a doctor and a dentist beforehand and update your vaccinations. Please do not forget to update your international vaccination card. A detailed overview of vaccinations is included in the RSF/UNESCO Safety Guide where the following vaccines are listed:

Standard vaccinations:

- Diphtheria, Tetanus, Polio
- Whooping cough
- Measles, Mumps, Rubella

There are some country-specific vaccinations as well – some are compulsory (seek advice from the health authority in your home country)

- Yellow fever (sub-Saharan Africa and Amazon region)
- Typhoid fever (developing countries)
- Hepatitis A (developing countries)
- Hepatitis B (for long trips)
- Rabies (for remote areas)
- Japanese encephalitis (rural areas in India and South East Asia)
- Tick-borne encephalitis (temperate areas of Central and Eastern Europe)
- Meningococcal meningitis groups A+C+W135+Y (Sahel, compulsory for Mecca)⁸

Seminars

There are many seminars and workshops, which aim to prepare reporters for missions in zones of war and conflict. In a rapidly changing environment, one should check the website of the Rory Peck Trust, which gives an overview of approved First Aid and Hostile Environment Trainings, on a regular basis.⁹ The German army offers free training for German journalists.¹⁰

About the author:

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⁴ We Fight Censorship.org, 'Secure your browsing', see <http://www.wefightcensorship.org/article/secure-your-browsing.html>.

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5. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM A MILITARY POINT OF VIEW

Dr. Mila Serafimova

Six lessons can be formulated from a military standpoint about war reporting and how to better prepare journalists and keep them safe:

1. There is an **ongoing need for effective safety training for reporters** on account of the multitude of conflicts worldwide that are both increasing in number and becoming more intense.

2. There is a growing need for **four main types of training** for reporters in conflict zones: reporting in conflict zones, regional safety, first aid and digital security. These four types of safety training are being offered by **national and international professional organisations of journalists and/or in cooperation with Ministries of Defence** and military education institutions.

3. **War reporters from the Balkans and other regions should be trained in multinational groups before going to a war or conflict zone** because their numbers in each country are often too small to justify the development of separate training programmes at national level. The NATO KFOR peace support operation in Kosovo entailed elements of such training.

4. Embedded war reporters must follow the same security procedures and measures as military personnel. It is also necessary to observe certain **ground rules** and commit to doing so by signing a dedicated declaration. The ground rules concern the safety of reporters and that of the military contingent. They include: passport and visa requirements, accreditation procedures and badges, accommodation, medical care, transportation and movement in the field, escort rules, embargoes and release of information, visual recording rules and imagery, communication equipment, etc.

It should also be noted that according to military regulations the **'life of the military personnel and the success of the military operation are more important than journalistic professional requirements.'** This is one of the principal reasons for the setbacks continually experienced by journalists, such as not being able to release all information immediately, particularly when it may endanger a military operation. This is a price all journalists must pay while their safety remains precarious at all times. Although **embedded journalists** are targeted by kidnappers or suffer attacks less frequently than independent war correspondents, they still operate within the main theatre of war and can be injured or killed.

5. For safety reasons, **media must be accredited** prior to being granted access to an area of operations and **should be escorted at all times**. There is a 'registration only'

option for journalists who do not wish to become accredited. In this case, public affairs officers only explain safety, operational security and logistics regulations and may provide background and operational context, but will not provide protection and escort. The military encourages the access of media to operations, regardless of whether the journalists are accredited and embedded or act as war correspondents and freelancers. However, the NATO and its Member States typically only host representatives of accredited media. The military provides escort for accredited and hosted journalists. The duties of the escort are to:

- brief media on expectations and re-iterate and enforce ground rules. Public affairs officers should know what reporters expect to cover and arrange it in accordance with the ground rules;
- facilitate media work through security and within military facilities. Security procedures should be explained to reporters in advance and public affairs officers are responsible for hosting reporters at field headquarters or units, including providing them with protective equipment (body armour, helmet, protective clothing) and instructing them how to use it. They are further responsible for providing life support (accommodation and food) and access to communications and transport, depending on local situation and prevailing conditions;
- ensure compliance with timelines and military procedures. The journalists' need to cover events 'live' and to use modern communication techniques should be in accordance with the military security procedures and the rules of usage of military communication systems;
- put military terms and concepts into context. Public affairs officers are obliged to explain military terms and concepts to the journalists;
- explain and enforce Operation Security (OPSEC). Media coverage from the field can influence the operation and endanger the lives of military personnel and the reporters, thus operation security rules should be followed by the reporters;
- hold a post-action review and assessment upon completion of the escort. The evaluation of support received is a foundation for mutual understanding between media and military and is the appropriate tool for establishing confidence and ensuring effective media coverage.

6. **'Being safe or finding the truth'** is a real-life dilemma. However, in the 21st century the truth is often relative on account of the different nature of war and prevailing moral relativism. Every party to a conflict has its own 'truth'. To ensure maximum objectivity, journalists should always endeavour to cover all sides of a conflict. In Afghanistan, for example, reporters provided coverage of the NATO troops mission and life at military units or the mission headquarters, with many saying that the ground rules for accreditation (Article 79, Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Convention, 1977) at the ISAF Headquarter constrained them in carrying out their duties in a professional manner, adding that they preferred to work under the war correspondent protection (Article 4, Geneva Protocol III, 1949). They arranged meetings and interviews with local leaders of the different groups in the conflict without external assistance because the exclusive coverage of the military

perspective can be related to lack of objectivity. However, working on their own often put them in danger.

Journalists in a conflict zone have to be continually informed about challenges in the field, which preclude the blanket protection of media professionals. It is up to the journalists and their employers to make adequate arrangements for their safety and ensure that they are well prepared for the assignment. This includes training in risk evaluation and the principles of working alongside the military in a rapidly changing environment.

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6. NO TIME FOR SUPERHEROES – SAFETY IN THE FIELD

Jutta Sommerbauer

I will start with a personal confession. When I first came to Ukraine to cover the conflict, I was unprepared. When in January 2014 I strolled over the Maidan, Kyiv's independence square, where protesters had built a camp made of tents, stacks of wood and rubble and fortified with bags of ice, I was simply lucky to be there on a peaceful, sunny day. As we all know from news reports, it could have been quite different. Back then, I was not aware of the risks I was taking.

Only when I travelled to Crimea a month later and faced Russian soldiers with automatic rifles in their hands, looking at me with a hard-nosed attitude through their balaclava masks, I suddenly understood that something was different. The atmosphere in Simferopol and Sevastopol was heated, thugs were roaming the streets, policemen were turning a blind eye towards what was happening and airplanes from Kyiv were no longer landing and leaving. The security situation was changing rapidly, day by day, hour by hour. Journalists were frantically following the story of Russia's military intervention in Crimea, working day and night. It began to dawn on me that personal safety is always a necessary precondition for a great story.

In this article, I want to share some tips and strategies that I have come to appreciate during my further reporting trips. The advice was gathered through personal experience, in talks with colleagues and from journalists' handbooks, the most useful being quoted at the end of the article. Most of the tips are straightforward and quite easy to follow.

Only when you are aware of risks you can avoid them

Conflict reporting is often portrayed as an obscure field that requires bravery, heroism, and superhuman abilities. While it certainly requires psychological stability and physical health, nobody needs supermen or superwomen in the field.

Quite on the contrary, one of the most important things before you go is to know your limitations. You should know with crystal clarity why you want to go, and how far you want to go. How much risk do you want to take? When you don't feel like travelling to a conflict zone, don't do it. Don't let yourself be pressured by your boss or your colleagues. Once you decide to go, try to anticipate the context that you might be confronted with. This will help you to think about possible risks and develop strategies how to minimise them.

Having your papers in order and all the paperwork done prior to departure is of utmost importance. Just to give an example: If you want to cover the conflict in the Ukrainian Donbass and wish to access the conflict zone, it will take around two weeks to obtain

permits and journalistic accreditation requested by the two conflict parties (Ukrainian army and pro-Russian militias). Thorough preparation is needed; otherwise you might get stopped at one of the checkpoints and be sent back. Familiarise yourself with the requirements. Typically, you need to liaise with press services of both sides and inform them about the details of your planned trip. To visit areas close to the front line, special military accreditation might be needed. Having a national press card or a letter by your editor might help additionally.

Try to research as much as you can about the place where you are going. Familiarise yourself with the conflict, its root causes, and the overall security situation. Before you go into the conflict zone, you need to check if it is safe to travel on that day. Diverse sources (news sites, social media, personal sources in the region, NGO contacts, local authorities) will help you to get a fuller picture. Be aware of the fact that the security situation might change rapidly.

Always take photocopies of all your documents with you. Don't forget to get necessary vaccinations and additional medical insurance for conflict reporters.

When travelling to a conflict zone, always take your flak/ballistic jacket and helmet with you. Even if it is calm for now, the situation might change quickly. In situations of imminent danger, body armour can help protect vital organs. Know your blood type and scribble it on notebooks and in your wallet. Further necessary equipment: first aid kit (know how to use it), medicine, batteries for your devices, torch, lighter/matches, pocket knife, map, and plenty of water. Always have enough cash on you and keep it in different parts of your luggage.

You need to have a contact person outside – someone who knows where you are staying and where you are travelling. You need to call or text this person regularly. This person should be instructed what to do in case you stop calling. Also inform your embassy about your trip. Discuss your plans and story ideas with your editor.

Have your documents ready: How to access the war zone

Each war zone is different. Some conflict zones might be off limits and are only accessible with the help of one of the warring sides (embedded with army/militia). Other conflict zones can be reached relatively easy – in a private car or even by public transport, as it is the case in Eastern Ukraine. As a journalist travelling on your own you have other options than a TV team with expensive equipment. Which way to choose depends on the security situation and the terms of access.

Another question that will arise during your visit: Should you always be identifiable as a journalist? Or should you try to blend in with locals? While you should always display your 'press' badge during front line visits, in times of civil unrest or a violent coup, you might rather want to keep a low profile to prevent getting targeted. While you should definitely

never lie about who you are, you should be deliberate about how you present yourself in different situations. There is no general recipe.

However, there is one rule: Always dress in distinctly civilian clothing. Don't wear camouflage outfits or army backpacks, otherwise you are running the risk of being mistaken for a combatant. Don't carry any material that could get you in trouble (e.g. 'propaganda' literature, badges with political slogans that might anger one of the parties to the conflict).

Always have your papers on you and be ready to show them. Be respectful at checkpoints and follow orders. Never take pictures or talk on the phone while spending time there. Checks are a stressful situation for soldiers and gunmen too. The calmer you are, the quicker you will pass.

Eat, drink, relax: How (not) to behave in a conflict zone

'A good driver can save your life; a bad driver can get you killed. Never trust men in sports cars.' This is one of the 'so true' sentences Rosie Garthwaite gives in her book 'How to avoid being killed in a war zone'. Having a good, knowledgeable and trustworthy driver is crucial in a conflict zone. Not being local, you need to rely on someone who knows where he is going, who knows alternative routes and who is aware of mine hazards. The car needs to be in good shape and able to drive on a variety of roads. Valid car registration is a must. Never go with a sleepy, drunk or aggressive driver. Don't drive after dark.

Depending on your destination, the security situation and whether public transport is safe and reliable, you also might want to consider taking public buses or trains. In Eastern Ukraine for example, local trains in the separatist territories don't get stopped by gunmen and can be a useful, if somewhat time-consuming alternative to road trips.

In case you don't speak the local language and need help with contacts, hiring a fixer (person, often a local journalist, who helps the foreign correspondent researching a story; arranges accommodation, interviews, acts as translator) might be necessary. Ask colleagues who have been to the area for recommendations. Another good contact point are journalists who work for a local media outlet.

Team up with trusted colleagues whenever possible. Fellow journalists are not only a great source of information. Sharing expertise will also help you to produce much more sound stories. Sharing rides will not only help to cut costs, but will greatly improve your safety. Clarify the purpose of the trip and the responsibility of everyone involved before departure, always share information with all group members. After an eventful day, having a chat with colleagues will also help you to come to terms with the events you witnessed.

Not only news conferences or official contacts, but also international organisations or NGOs that are located in the conflict zone can be a great source of information. These

experts often have loads of knowledge and insider information about the situation on the ground.

Choosing the right place to stay is another crucial point. Which part of a city is relatively safe or doesn't come under attack? Where are other journalists staying? Also pay attention to the surroundings of the building you are located in: Are there any buildings in the vicinity that might become a target of an armed attack or street protests? Pay attention to the quality of the building (a run down but solid brick building is preferable to a fancy glass tower!). Take your room on the safe side (in case of artillery fire or crowd violence), close to the fire exit. Don't stay on the ground floor (risk of burglary) and don't stay in places that are being frequented by military/militia members.

Take care of your health. Work out; even gymnastics in the hotel room or climbing up staircases will do. Try to stick to a healthy routine; eat and drink regularly. Don't drink a lot of alcohol; never take drugs. Take regular breaks. If you notice symptoms such as insomnia, nightmares, anxiety, anger, depression or inability to concentrate, don't try to ignore them. Try to identify the causes of the symptoms, talk about your feelings with a trusted person. If the symptoms don't go away, consult a doctor; also consider leaving the conflict zone. Leave as long as you are able to make the trip safe home.

Always have an exit plan 'B' ready in case your plan 'A' collapses.

Front line or back country? Story ideas and safety rules

There is a wide variety of stories that can be covered in a conflict zone – from mass demonstrations and front line dispatches to subtler and 'quiet' background stories about the human cost and social consequences of the conflict. Usually, the humanitarian dimension of a conflict is underreported, while many journalists visit one hot spot after the other and focus on front line news. Which stories you pursue is ultimately your choice, as it is you who are taking the risks. Don't let yourself get talked into a story that is not worth the risk. If you feel a story is too risky, don't do it.

If you choose to embed yourself with the army or a militia, be sure to go with people you trust, clarify the security situation and the code of conduct beforehand. Be sure that your embedding is not being used as part of a PR campaign. Make it clear that although you spend time with a conflict party, you are still an independent professional. Never ask combatants to stage a scene or fire at a target for you. Do not touch weapons.

Familiarise yourself with the basic rules of how to react in case of mine threats, heavy weapons and small arms fire. The ICRC handbook 'Staying Alive' (cited at the end of this article) contains a detailed description. If you cover protests or street riots, stay on the side lines. Don't happen to be in the centre of the riots. Always look for possible exits or safe places where you could hide in case of an emergency.

What do people think about you? Public perception of journalists and security issues

As a Western journalist in a polarised (media) environment you won't be considered 'neutral' in the conflict zone – neither by locals nor by international colleagues. Just to give an example: In the non-government controlled parts of Eastern Ukraine, where pro-Russian authorities frequently draw on anti-Western propaganda, you might encounter antipathy, mistrust or a certain level of aggression against Westerners. Some people might even suspect you of being a spy. On the other hand, journalists in conflict zones also might be expected to help or solve the problems of the local population. People in distress may put hopes in you that you cannot fulfil. Dealing with this can be a source of conflict and can be stressful for the journalist as well.

Be aware of the public image and role of your country in the conflict: Is your home country perceived as neutral, as a stakeholder, or even as a party to the conflict? This might have effects on your personal safety, but also on how people react to you and on their willingness to talk with you. Pay attention to local media, to how they cover the conflict, and carefully follow statements of the ruling elite on issues such as foreign powers, foreign media coverage, or alleged espionage.

Communication matters

Communication is crucial in a conflict zone. As with your contact person, establish clear communication standards with your editor. Tell them where you are and where you are planning to go. If you work on sensitive issues or political investigations, it might be a good idea to publish the story only after you have left the war zone.

When it comes to the protection of your sources, adhere to the 'do no harm' principle. Make sure you do everything to protect the source. What consequences might the source face for meeting with you? As a foreign journalist, you will be able to leave a dangerous environment, but it is the locals who stay behind and might face persecution.

Some advice for safe communication: For security reasons, buy local prepaid telephone cards in cash. Use different numbers and overall different means of communication (personal, internet, phone) with a contact to make tracking/tapping of your communication more complicated. Meet in public places if you suspect you are being followed. Don't leave sensitive material in your hotel room! Make sure to transfer sensitive material in due time or have it stored in a safe place.

Further reading, online resources

Garthwaite, Rosie (2011) *How to avoid being killed in a war zone*, Bloomsbury Publishing.

Roberts, David Lloyd (2005) *Staying alive – Safety and security guidelines for humanitarian volunteers in conflict areas*, ICRC Guidebook, see <https://shop.icrc.org/staying-alive-safety-and-security-guidelines-for-humanitarian-volunteers-in-conflict-areas-506.html>. (for humanitarian volunteers, but also extremely useful for journalists)

Smyth, Frank, Lowenthal, Tom, O'Brien, Danny (2012) *Journalist Security Guide – Covering the news in a dangerous and changing world*, Committee to Protect Journalists, see <https://cpj.org/security/guide.pdf>.

Webster, Mark (2015) *Ukraine: Reporting Conflict – A practical guide for journalists*, Thomson Foundation's Guidebook, see http://www.thomsonfoundation.org/assets/News_Features/2015/Ukraine_MWebster/Ukraine-guide_2303_X-1a_SL.pdf.

About the author:

Jutta Sommerbauer covers current affairs in Eastern Europe and human rights issues. For the past three years she has frequently travelled to Ukraine and reported from Kyiv, Crimea and the Donbass region. Her book on the conflict in Ukraine was published in 2016 by Kremayr & Scheriau publishers, Vienna ('Die Ukraine im Krieg: Hinter den Frontlinien eines europäischen Konflikts', eng. 'Ukraine at War. Behind the Frontline of a European Conflict'). After a five-year teaching assignment in Bulgaria, she is now editor and reporter at Die Presse daily newspaper in Vienna. Jutta Sommerbauer is a graduate of the University of Vienna, where she studied political science. She then earned a master's degree at the Universities of Sofia and European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder) in Media Studies and Intercultural Communication.

7. HELPFUL EQUIPMENT AND LOCATION-DEPENDENT KNOWLEDGE

Ruslan Trad

Recent events in Turkey on 16 July 2016, with a failed coup attempt and the subsequent response of the state against the plotters, also attracted attention due to the fact that the events were streamed live online. It could be said that this is the first attempted coup that was fully covered due to social networking online. Thanks to smartphones, these events reached the wider public outside Turkey. Journalists released updates and video footage. Today, anyone who wishes can be part of the information flow. But there are some important things that must be considered when someone is dealing with journalism at the frontline or problematic areas.

The lack of experience, combined with the lack of funds could turn out to be a risky and even deadly combination. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 219 journalists have been killed in battles, shootings or crossfire since 1992. This number includes 68 freelancers. In Syria, the most dangerous location for journalists today, 43 reporters have been killed since 2011 and 13 journalists and 17 internet activists are held in prison, while the number of public and internet activists is at least 130.

The issue with safety is directly related to the available funding. Most western journalists spend between 1,600 US Dollars for a helmet and vest, which might rise to up to 3,000 US Dollars if additional training is included. Insurance is often expensive, which means that less money can be spent on the so-called fixers and on other people who could help during the planned trip. The fixer is someone local who can help you with information, translates for you, or acts as your guide in the area you want to cover, and this person is a required part of the preparation before going into the area. So, one of the first steps is to find someone with skills and contacts, ideally someone recommended by other journalists. There are Facebook groups that help with this such as 'The Vulture Club', which is one of the biggest in this field, or 'Yemen Logistics', specialised in Yemen and region. At least, there is a group of journalists working in the region of Balkans and South East Europe, organised in a group called the 'Balkan Press Club'.

Additional contacts on the ground can help you with the covering of the story and to secure your safety. These people you can find even when already there.

Less money for a fixer means a greater chance for the situation on the spot to go poorly, or even become dangerous. Could a freelancer from the Balkans provide the necessary funds for a successful trip?

I believe it to be rather hard. My personal experience shows that often traveling to a conflict zone is made difficult by insufficient experience, lack of training and funds, which a journalist

is bound to come up with himself for the most part. The trouble is not so much the lack of organisations and programmes offering training, advice, equipment and means of financing, but rather the fact that in many cases the journalists – both professionals and freelancers – have almost no information about these institutions, as it is the case in Bulgaria.

While you are on the spot, you take notes, which can help you with the writing of the whole story once you're back home. While reporting from a conflict zone, there is a big chance that you are being manipulated by the events in your surroundings. For the sake of authenticity, we are obliged to take a step back and look at things from another perspective and get a bigger picture – regardless of how hard that is. It means that it is important for the journalist to speak with people living in these areas, to know the background of the event. This will help to understand the event and the whole situation.

It is quite an endeavour to send a report in the evening, after spending the entire day on the battlefield or in the midst of a public protest.

Emotions sometimes take the upper hand and you feel that you can't refrain from expressing a certain personal point of view toward what has happened. It is in this moment that you need to take a deep breath. You need to remember that you are broadcasting war not so much for people in front of their TVs, but rather because of the people affected by the war. Telling their stories could bring you financial benefits, it is true. But it is their lives that teach the important lessons to anyone watching the horrors of war from a safe distance.

Reporting from a conflict zone is more dangerous than ever. Until the end of the Cold War it was at least clear whose side the different states were on; now the situation is quite more confusing. The media groups and organisations have changed drastically in the past two decades, while the political and diplomatic reality of the post-Cold War world has been shattered into smaller fragments. The result is the existence of multilateral conflicts, which should be reported in multilateral terms.

Freelancers nowadays play a substantial role in presenting the situation in conflict locations, even though conditions on the spot are usually poor and the prospect of good payment is dim. The motives behind one's decision to go to the front lines and report usually go beyond the framework of a simple explanation. The stories of people living in these locations are important for understanding each war. And understanding a war could help us in avoiding mistakes, made in the past or in other societies around us.

Some advice to journalists traveling to conflict zones:

The most important advice: research, research and research.

Getting insurance: There is an option through Reporters Without Borders, who are dealing mostly with freelancers. Their insurance is cheap and covers first aid expenses. It would be wise to consider an insurance package that includes kidnapping.

Equipment: Wear a vest and helmet and bring a first aid kit (see also chapter 'No time for superheroes – Safety in the field'). If you are in Israel or Palestine, be careful with the passport stamps by Israeli authorities, since there are Middle East countries which will not let you in with any such a stamp in your passport. Be careful what type of equipment you are allowed to bring to the country and what is prohibited. In Tunisia, for example, it is prohibited to enter the country with a drone in your baggage.

Being familiar with dangers: Before going to a dangerous location, such as Syria, you need to get familiar with the weapons that are used there and their effects (for example special bullets that go through thinner walls, etc.). It is important to know the number and identity of different military or separatist groups and the countries involved in the conflict. It is also very important to get as much information as possible about the region in which you are going to operate and the people who will be there to meet you.

There are many other cases where working on the ground requires greater care towards the story. For example, if you are in Morocco, be careful with speaking about Western Sahara conflict that figures so prominently in the modern history of Morocco. You will encounter difficulties if you are not familiar with the reality in Ukraine and tensions in society on Russia question. Or try speaking without preparation with representatives of various minorities in Lebanon – will certainly cause many questions and ultimately your mission may not succeed.

I was in a dispute concerning the persecution of Christians once. Most people believe that this just occurs in the Middle East. This is not true. In 2014 I covered the refugee wave from Burma (Myanmar) in Thailand. The majority of people are Christians displaced by Buddhist militias. Burma is not on the radar of the news and there is limited coverage of crackdowns not only on Christians but also on Muslims. Many people do not believe there are militant Buddhists – before I saw the refugee camps in Northern Thailand, this used to include me. I had difficulties understanding the conflict thanks to my personal stereotypes and lack of knowledge. In this case, doing some research on the last decades of the history of Burma was a good first step.

So, the journalist has to do research before going to the area and has to know the background and specifics of the society.

Have a plan: It is important that you don't devote your entire attention to the front lines. True stories are hard to find there. Yes, you will see shooting and clashes, and people dying, but most stories worth telling and the people who can provide you with them are seldom at the front. Before departing toward conflict zones, make sure that the risk is acceptable and that you have a backup route for leaving the fighting zone – plus an alternative plan because sometimes flights are cancelled or roads are blocked by the authorities, rebels, protesters, or locals. If you can use a local car for transferring to other area that is a good option because using a local car is type of 'camouflage' and you will be more flexible.

Overall, the work of journalists in conflict zones is associated with many emotions. This work is also related to responsibility – responsibility to yourself and to the audience. When we cover a conflict we should not stand on one side or another, our personal views notwithstanding. The responsibility is to local people, to society in your own country, and to the truth. These must be the priorities for writing a story.

About the author:

Ruslan Trad is a Bulgarian freelancer, journalist and columnist with focus on Middle East and North Africa. He is the founder of the Forum for Arab Culture and author in 'Global Voices Central and Eastern Europe' and Co-founder of 'Global Voices Bulgaria'. Former author and contributor in 'Foreign Policy Bulgaria'. Member of the Association of European Journalists (Bulgaria). He was correspondent in Lebanon, Turkey, Iraqi Kurdistan, North Thailand and Tunisia.

8. SEPARATING FACTS FROM FICTION IN CONFLICT REPORTING

Dr. Kurt Pelda

When I reported from the mountains of Afghanistan or the bush war in Angola in the 1980s it could take weeks and in some cases even months for my articles and TV films to be published. News, at least from such remote or exotic places, was much slower than today because there was no affordable satellite communication and no internet. This, of course, has changed dramatically. But at the same time it has become much easier for states and non-state actors alike to monitor journalists and impede their travel. Today, it is a matter of minutes for a customs official or a militia commander to check a journalist's name on Google. This makes it more difficult for reporters to travel under the camouflage of tourists or business people to countries with conflict zones. One thing has not changed though: Most conflict parties want to prevent inconvenient facts from coming out. In the mid-eighties the Soviet ambassador to Pakistan told journalists that they would be killed if they travelled illegally to Afghanistan to report about the struggle of the rebels against the Soviet invaders. I went there anyway but I was warned.

What we hear today from the regime in Syria and its allies, Russia included, is not much different. Journalists were a target then and they continue to be a target today. In addition, when I travelled with Afghan rebels in the 1980s, kidnappings of journalists for ransom or even grisly executions of reporters were practically unheard of. In places like Syria the risk of being kidnapped by Islamist extremists or simple criminals has become much bigger than the danger of being killed or wounded by air raids or in the fighting.

So if someone wants to report accurately from a war zone, he first needs to face all these challenges because only a journalist who is free and alive can bring the story out. Doing research in a war zone is much like going after facts in Europe or America were it not for the hazards mentioned such as the risk of being kidnapped. Getting from A to B can be a challenge in a war zone because there might be a frontline in between and then there usually are cultural differences as well. In the Middle East or in Africa it is, for instance, pretty useless to interview people on the phone or via Skype unless you really know them well. You have to meet face-to-face because in those countries people do not discuss important topics on the phone or online. When talking to an old man, a high-ranking officer, tribal leader or rebel commander, you do not start the interview by asking personal questions. Pressing for answers regarding military secrets or human rights abuses committed by the interviewee's fighters could arouse suspicions that you are a spy. And this can become really dangerous.

First, you have to show your respect by drinking tea and exchanging courtesies for quite a while. A good reporter is patient in a situation like this. Do not refuse an offer to eat with the interviewee, even if the food contains meat and you are a vegetarian. This could be

considered very rude. Explain what you are doing in the conflict zone and why your work might be important for your interview partner and his organisation. Do not ask obvious or stupid questions. Asking a prominent warlord basic questions such as how he spells his name or what his exact age is could be disrespectful as you are supposed to know the answer already. If you do not, you ask one of his subordinates later, thereby hiding your own ignorance and not losing face in front of the 'big man'. In order to survive and to get the information you need, you have to win the sympathies and respect of the people that accompany and protect you. That means that you even might have to lie when it comes to personal questions asked by the locals. Admitting that you are gay, Jewish or atheist, for instance, can get you in serious trouble in some parts of the Middle East or Africa.

All of this sounds obvious, but you would be surprised how many Western journalists I met in war zones that actually did ask stupid questions or gave away personal details that could endanger them. It helps a lot if you have done your homework and know a little about the interviewees, the region where they live, their organisation, the military situation and so on. You should not only fake respect when meeting a potential war criminal but also get his respect by showing him that you already know a few things. I recently interviewed a very powerful Islamist warlord in the Libyan capital Tripoli who rarely speaks to Western journalists. After I waited a long time for him and showed my respect by talking around the bush while drinking tea – without mentioning his past as a drug dealer and petty criminal – I started asking him questions about the Islamic State (IS) in Libya. As I had done a lot of research and had spoken to quite a few other interesting Libyans about the topic, I could ask precise questions about the recruitment and supply routes of the terrorists. The warlord, a bitter enemy of those extremists, then started to give me a lot of valuable details about the organisation and modus operandi of the Libyan branch of the IS. Later on I heard from one of his subordinates that the man was surprised. He apparently said that he had never before met a journalist with so much previous knowledge about Libya. If I need his assistance in the future, he will remember me.

Subordinates of warlords or top military chiefs can often be a better source of information than the interviewee himself. They often do not know about how certain questions are sensitive. Once in the Kurdish part of Syria I was interviewing a high-ranking officer of the Kurdish militia fighting the IS. During the filming of the interview, one of the subordinates said that the officer had received years of military training 'in the mountains' of neighbouring Iraq by the Turkish-Kurdish workers' party PKK. The PKK is considered a terrorist organisation by the US and most European governments, so the commanders became furious that his subordinate had given away information that he had intended to keep secret. The poor guy who had spilled the beans later begged me not to include his statement in my report. As it did not fit my story anyway, I left it out and sent him a copy of the broadcast to prove that I kept my promise. This way I found a friend in Syria who will go a long way to help me on future assignments. Still, the information proved valuable as it strengthened my personal conviction that the Kurdish militia under the banner of the Syrian PYD party is simply a branch of the PKK. I am including this here to show that to be successful and safe at the same time, you need a network of friends and sources

that cannot only give you information about important developments but also warn you about impending dangers. One of the most important factors is therefore building trust. It is a long-term investment in a region where you want to build a network of friends and sources. They are not only indispensable during a trip to a conflict zone but also very useful for gathering or verifying information when you are far away in your home country.

All parties to a conflict disseminate propaganda and, of course, they try to misuse journalists for their needs. They might show you only what helps their propaganda and hide the rest from you. The risk of being misled is especially big when you are 'embedded' with a highly organised and centralised force, be it a regular army or a rebel group. If you are depending on one group only for your travel needs, interview partners and so on, you might be manipulated into believing false information. Interview partners might have been coached. Assume, for instance, an armed group or army unit brings you to a destroyed village that they just conquered recently. The fighters allow you to interview a family that claims to have lived here before the population was massacred and points to the destruction of the houses. They also say that the killers were terrorists and that they feel safe with the fighters that you are travelling with. What may strike you as odd is that the statements of all the family members sound very similar, especially when it comes to praising the fighters you are 'embedded' with. Then your war experience might be telling you that the damage in the village stems from air raids and the 'terrorists', the armed groups accused by the 'witnesses', do not have an air force. Simple questions testing the interviewees' local knowledge like who used to be the priest or imam or where did you buy your groceries, or questions about the history of the village can help you to decide that the witnesses are in fact plants trying to fool you. They might have been brought to the village from far away with the only purpose of blaming the massacre on the other side, the enemy, the terrorists or whatever they are called.

Sometimes you do not know the area yourself and it is hard for you to verify answers about the geography or topography of the place. Ask those questions anyway and try to find the right answers later on. Compare them with what you heard from the witnesses. Geolocating the places mentioned in the interviews combined with a close look at satellite pictures and testimonies of independent persons with knowledge of the area can help you to debunk fake interview partners or misleading answers. Once, in the Western crisis region of Darfur in Sudan I was taken to a group of African rebels to a hill that had been used before as a military camp of a militia or the army. Some trenches, spent cartridges and food tins as well as Arabic writings on some rocks pointed to a former military presence on the hilltop. People in neighbouring villages told me that government militia took villagers away and brought them to the encampment. There, they were interrogated, tortured and many were killed and buried. The rebels showed me a few alleged mass graves. To be sure about the content we should have opened the graves and checked on the bodies. There was no time for this but I took the GPS position of the place and after coming home I had a close look at satellite pictures of that hilltop. I could immediately spot the suspected mass graves; they were actually much bigger compared to what I had seen on the ground.

Because all sides of the conflict want to feed journalists with their own propaganda, the most important factor remains the visual inspection, the appearance. If you have experience from several war zones, it might become difficult to fool you. One has to be very careful about alleged massacres unless you have had a look with your own eyes at the crime scenes and unless you have spoken to several witnesses independent of each other. One should be especially careful if the only evidence presented is photos or videos of the atrocities on a smartphone. Even if the pictures are genuine, they might be old or from a different place than alleged. For example, photos purported to show the destruction caused by Israeli fighter jets in the Gaza strip turned out to be instead from Aleppo in Syria. Once I spent a lot of money for a promising story about defectors from the IS. I travelled to Şanlıurfa, a Turkish town near the Syrian border. There I met a middleman who said that he made a business smuggling the defectors out of Syria. I could speak and film several women and men whose statements seemed genuine and made sense. But then I asked the middleman for physical evidence, pictures proving that the interviewees had been members of the Islamic State. He gave me a few photos that I found suspicious immediately. Some showed women in black niqabs with Kalashnikovs. They were wearing headbands with writings in Arabic. The eyes on the photos did not match those of the veiled women I had interviewed. Although the photo quality was too poor to decipher the writing on the headbands, their design reminded me of those in use with the Palestinian Hamas. When I did a Google reverse search I could find most of the photos on sites not related to Syria or the IS. They were used before in a different context and the middleman had just downloaded them from the internet. It might have been that only the photos were fake and not the defectors themselves. Nonetheless, I never used their statements or the video footage. I should have asked for physical evidence before making the trip.

How disastrous it can be to rely on witness statements only without any visual inspection of the site in question is shown by the experience of a German daily newspaper. In 2012, a big massacre of civilians occurred in the central Syrian region of al-Houla. Although UN investigators quickly blamed the army and government militia for the killing of more than 100 civilians, the correspondent of the newspaper told a completely different story. Based on some 'witnesses' that he interviewed in regime-held areas, he claimed that it was in fact the rebels who had committed the crime. When I first read his account I stumbled over one sentence. First, the reporter quoted an AP story (Associated Press) in which a witness said that the perpetrators had their heads shaved bald and were wearing long beards. He then concluded: 'This is how fanatic jihadists look like and not the government militia.' Had he checked the Facebook profiles of a few of those militiamen he would have known that these people like to wear long beards and shave their heads bald. His ignorance concerning this detail made me doubt the whole story. His badly researched account was later debunked by a German news magazine whose correspondent had made the effort and travelled with the rebels to al-Houla to get a personal impression and witness statements. The UN also published the report of its commission of inquiry into the massacre. It said: 'The commission found that Government forces and militia were responsible for the killings in al-Houla'.

Occasionally I met other Western journalists in war zones who refused to travel in cars with fighters bearing arms. It may be that such a refusal might make sense under certain circumstances, but in general dyed-in-the-wool pacifists should not go to war zones. War reporting has a lot to do with weaponry. For your own safety and for the sake of the quality of your stories you should have at least some basic knowledge of infantry weapons, tanks and airplanes generally used in today's conflicts. These are usually older equipment and they can all be found on Wikipedia. A journalist who cannot distinguish a US-made M 16 assault rifle from a Soviet-era AK-47 or an American F-16 fighter jet from a Russian Sukhoi Su-25 should probably not report from a zone of conflict. First, you need to know the impact of the weapons used in the area you are covering. This helps you to decide which kind of cover is sufficient and which is not. A car or a brick wall usually do not protect you against infantry weapons. A house protects you against tank shells if you choose the right side of the building but it might not help against mortar fire because mortar bombs travel high into the sky before falling down on you. Basic knowledge of weaponry also helps you to avoid making grave journalistic mistakes. For instance, since the Russian intervention in Syria lots of reports have emerged blaming Russian pilots for the bombing of hospitals and other war crimes. Now, both the Russian and the Syrian air force use old Soviet-era attack aircraft such as the Sukhoi Su-24. Witnessing an air raid by such a plane does not help you to decide whether it was Russian or Syrian because the jets usually fly much too high. It is therefore not possible to identify the insignia on the wings. To be sure about a Russian air raid means that you need to be able to distinguish between different types of airplanes like the Su-25 or Su-34 which are in use with the Russian air force but not with the Syrian.

War reporters should not only have some knowledge about arms and military tactics but also about the kind of wounds inflicted by different weapons. This helps to avoid drawing wrong conclusions regarding who might have been responsible for the deaths of civilians, prisoners of war or victims of massacres. The terror attack of the IS on the Bataclan theatre in Paris of November 2015 is a sad but enlightening example. There, it was not journalists but police not used to seeing battle injuries who were jumping to conclusions. They had seen bodies of victims without eyes and limbs and they believed that the terrorists had chopped off heads and gauged out eyes. This in turn led some media and right-wing outlets to speculate about torture and other atrocities committed at Bataclan as if the terror attack was not cruel enough already. The details were included in more than 900 pages of an official investigation report, and it was one police officer who claimed that there had been torture at the Bataclan. The British Mail Online concluded, for instance: 'French government "suppressed gruesome torture" of Bataclan victims as official inquiry is told some were castrated and had their eyes gouged out by the ISIS killers.'

Islamophobes used such reports to agitate indiscriminately against Muslims. Journalists who had read the whole report would have known better though. For instance, it later turned out that the police had not found a single knife or other sharp object suitable for chopping off heads or limbs of human beings. The police officer in question did not see the corpses himself but was told about them by another officer. But that witness might have seen impacts of shots fired by AK-47s from a short distance. A shot fired to the head can

rip out an eye, leaving a gaping wound. A suicide vest can tear off limbs. But such wounds look much different than when limbs are chopped off with a knife. To gain some experience with wounds caused by fighting or during massacres I recommend that journalists have a closer look at corpses on the battlefield and to visit hospitals in war zones. This is, of course, gruesome but it helps you do a better job. Ask doctors and medics in those hospitals about what kind of weapons cause which kind of wounds. Having a look at the dead and wounded will remind you each and every time that war is a terrible massacre even if it is called 'war against terror' and when modern precision weapons are used. The 'collateral damage' of those so-called smart bombs, the disfigured civilians who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time do not look much different from the victims of suicide attacks. Both of them were definitely innocents. In the end, visual inspection and appearance is the most important tool of a war reporter. Coupled with knowledge and experience it will help you to distinguish facts from fiction and propaganda.

About the author:

Kurt Pelda reports since more than 30 years from war zones all over the world. He travelled to conflict zones from Afghanistan, via Liberia, Somalia and Congo through to Darfur, Libya, Syria and Iraq. He worked for the Neue Zürcher Zeitung (2002 – 2010) and the Financial Times in New York (1999 – 2001). Pelda received his PhD from the University of Basel in 1998.

9. ETHICAL CHOICES WHEN JOURNALISTS GO TO WAR

Aidan White

Introduction

The world is a more peaceful place than it used to be. Objectively, the killings in wars in Syria and Iraq produce horrifying statistics, but globally the level of deaths due to conflict remains below that of previous decades. For instance, the Vietnam War alone claimed more than 2 million lives; in the 1980s the eight-year conflict between Iran and Iraq led to half a million fatalities; and the death toll from genocide and civil war in Africa, the Balkans and Sri Lanka in the 1990s topped a million.¹

Nevertheless, war and terrorism are still making headlines. Prime time news routinely features the carnage of violence and conflict from Syria, Iraq, the Kurdish regions of Turkey, or further afield from the simmering tensions in Ukraine, Myanmar and the troubled border regions of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Thanks to the communications revolution, the world has become more connected and people are closer to the frontlines than they have ever been, but they struggle to find unbiased and reliable information when the news agenda is crowded out by intolerance and war-mongering.

Everywhere, media wars are fought across the global information landscape and there is intense pressure on reporters and editors to take sides. Media-savvy terrorists stalk the social networks and battalions of government spin doctors are deployed across the internet.

Reporting conflict provides the greatest ethical challenge to journalists. It is not easy to maintain the highest professional standards and there are many shocking examples of media failure and even complicity in acts of violence and inhumanity as shown by the genocide in Rwanda, war in the Balkans and grotesque propaganda around the Ukraine conflict.

Nevertheless, journalists must do what they can to avoid hate speech and inflammatory coverage. But how is that done in the heat of battle?

The Ethical Journalism Network, which aims to strengthen the capacity of media professionals to report in an accurate, fair and humane way, argues that in times of war people need more access to reliable information. Quality journalism is vital for people to:

- Better understand the roots and reality of conflict;
- Create an information space for dialogue;
- Provide context and analysis that may open the door to reconciliation and peace.

Without accurate and sensitive reporting that provides insights into the mindsets of all those involved, people cannot make judgements and potentially influence the course of events by giving or withholding their support for the conflict.

But in times of war, all sides engaged in conflict do so without any sense of balance – no one says the other side probably believes their cause is just, or acknowledges the bravery of enemy soldiers. They abandon notions of fairness and objectivity and use propaganda and lies to demonise the enemy, its leadership and its people. Journalists have a responsibility to counter this threat.

Professionalism and patriotism

Journalists who work in or near a conflict zone see at first-hand the brutal and inhumane consequences of making war. They rarely promote propaganda based upon skewed notions of romantic patriotism or tribal allegiance for long.

Often the media people who shout most loudly and most fearlessly are those who front programmes and pen articles from the safety and comfort of their offices.

In the ethnic and territorial wars fought in the former Yugoslavia, where government-controlled channels like Radio Television Serbia became advocates for the war, and in the recent Ukraine-Russia conflict (*Russia Today* comes to mind), some media abandoned all pretence at objectivity and became cheerleaders for armed confrontation.

In this charged atmosphere governments strive to recruit everyone – including journalists – to a patriotic and flag-waving cause. It is an atmosphere often filled with hate and emotion.

But journalism must not be hijacked to provide stereotypes and propaganda. Ethical reporting must portray events and people in an informed context, avoiding the vivid contrasts that governments prefer in their own black and white visions of the conflict.

Reporting from the battlefield may present journalists with a personal conflict of interest. They may become confused when faced by the legitimate urge to defend their community and their culture.

But the role of a journalist is to provide their audience with fact-based information, to show humanity and to strive to tell the truths that need to be heard, even if they offend their own political leaders in the process.

The thoughtful and ethical journalist is a good citizen. They demonstrate their patriotism by doing their job professionally. They know that it is always in the interests of their country and community to strive to tell the truth.

It has always been like this, ever since the first recognisable war correspondents put on their boots to report an earlier war over Crimea in the mid-nineteenth century. But reporting war has never been easy. As former *Sunday Times* Editor Harold Evans points out, truth gets buried under the rabble-rousing and rubble of war. Only after the conflict, he says, is there time to sift the ashes for truth.

In his updated edition of his award-winning book *The First Casualty*, which traces a history of media reporting of wars and conflicts, Phillip Knightley warns that it could be getting worse:²

‘The sad truth is that in the new millennium, government propaganda prepares its citizens for war so skilfully that it is quite likely that they do not want the truthful, objective and balanced reporting that good war correspondents once did their best to provide.’

Soon after he wrote these words, the Iraq war in 2003 proved his point, as the American and British communications control system successfully designed an embedding arrangement that gave the media ‘access’ to the action while ensuring that they remained closely supervised by the military.

The presence of 600 embedded journalists allowed the military to maximise the imagery and drama of battlefield conditions while providing minimal insight into the issues. Information was carefully filtered, massaged and drip-fed to journalists. There was a limit to fact and context, lies were part of the package, and setbacks were glossed over. The military carefully planned what range of topics could be discussed with reporters and spun information so that it had the appearance of reality as it appeared to come from troops on the ground.³

The only alternative to this carefully orchestrated vision of the conflict provided by military spin doctors came from up to 2,000 independent or ‘unilateral’ journalists spread out over the territory of Iraq looking for stories that might provide insight into the reality of war. But some of them paid a heavy price.

Ethics, safety and solidarity in journalism

Going into the war zone requires journalists to make from the outset a clear ethical choice about how they intend to do their work.

There are risks attached to every choice, but choosing to maintain independence and work outside the protective arm of the military carries with it more risks, which is why journalists and the media who send them on mission, should prepare themselves more diligently for the task.

Regrettably, many journalists head to war ill-prepared for the challenge. Many have little or no hostile environment training and very often they are unaware of the conditions they can expect. Many are ignorant of their legal rights and responsibilities.

Few know that the United Nations Security Council passed an historic resolution in 2006 calling for an end to impunity in the killing of journalists or that in 2012 all of the major UN agencies agreed a comprehensive 'Action Plan on the Safety of Journalists'.⁴ These are required readings for journalists covering conflict: they spell out the rights of journalists and the obligations of states to provide media with protection where it is possible.

But few journalists are aware that international law governing armed conflict recognises that reporters play a special role in times of war. The Geneva Conventions, for instance, offer special protections to journalists and media staff. All combatants, whether engaged in all-out shooting wars, civil strife or low-level territorial disputes, should be reminded of it.

The link between safety and ethics may not be immediately obvious, but the same ambitions and economic factors that pressure inexperienced and poorly prepared freelance journalists to enter battle zones also pressure journalists to present the news as they think that their paymasters most want to hear it.

The news becomes what sells best, and certainly at the start of a conflict, accounts of the horrors of war and pictures of dead soldiers (at least from 'our' side) are not what many senior television executives prefer to be putting out.

An antidote to this ignorance is the book 'Crimes of War: What the Public Should Know', edited by Roy Gutman and David Rieff. This book evolved from the collaboration of journalists, lawyers and scholars dedicated to raising public awareness of the laws of war and their application to situations of conflict and to promote understanding of international humanitarian law among journalists, policymakers, and the public.⁵

It contains useful information for any frontline reporter including advice not to go into a war zone with a weapon. Fox News Channel's Geraldo Rivera controversially carried a gun along with his camera while reporting from Afghanistan, but the action prompted outrage among other journalists and news organisations, including the *New York Times*, which in 2007 banned their reporters from carrying a gun because it undermined their neutrality.

Journalists should also know that although they always run the risk of being captured and shot as spies, international humanitarian law says that accredited journalists travelling under the protection of an army are to be regarded as part of the accompanying civilian entourage.

If captured by opposing forces they must be treated as prisoners of war. Those who threaten or execute journalists on the battlefield should be brought to trial to face punishment that is sanctioned by international law.

That's the theory at least. The problem is that the days of the war correspondent in full uniform are as much a distant memory as the set-piece armed struggles of traditional

warfare. Journalism has become as much a guerrilla activity as the style of conflict that disturbs the peace of Ukraine, Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

But some principles of good ethical behaviour are essential no matter the nature of the conflict and how it is fought. For instance, journalists covering a conflict rely on the support of local people – translators, drivers, fixers – and all journalists should ensure that they are treated with respect and provided with protective equipment, decent work contracts and insurance in case of accident or injury.

And one of the cardinal principles of journalists – protection of sources – becomes ever more important when lives are at risk. Journalists have obligations to the people they report about. They must not reveal the identity of their sources if they are at risk. People will not tell journalists important news if they fear they will be revealed.

When courts and public authorities ask journalists to hand over material that will reveal a source of information, the ethical reporter will instinctively demur and, if necessary checking with the source first, protect that source even at cost to themselves.

But in times of war, when journalists are witness to unspeakable acts of inhumanity, this principle can come under intense pressure. Most journalists find it impossible to turn a blind eye to the horrors of war and there are occasions when journalists find their conscience impels them to cooperate with the authorities.

For instance, a few journalists who reported on the Bosnian war in the 1990s such as Ed Vulliamy of *The Guardian*, testified at The Hague before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and helped convict some of the leaders who committed acts of inhumanity and crimes of war during that conflict.

Although some journalists warned that they were setting a very unfortunate precedent, Vulliamy and others are unapologetic. They say that bringing to justice war criminals is a cause in which journalists, like other citizens, have a duty to join if only in defence of the civilised values that allow democracy and free journalism to function.

Others disagree. A good example is Jonathan Randal of the *Washington Post* who famously refused to answer a subpoena⁶ in 2002 ordering him to appear before the ICTY. Randal, who had covered the war, fought the subpoena with the backing of his paper, and won. This action, which was supported by press freedom groups around the world, established some limited legal protection for war correspondents against being forced to give testimony.

Cases like this that highlight why journalists and news media need to establish guidelines and internal rules that help protect their sources. Reporters may benefit from a clause in their contracts or their agreements that clearly state their duties and obligations in this area.

But written assurances in a contract will not resolve ethical dilemmas that crop up in the course of a journalist's work. Sometimes in the midst of inhumanity and injustice journalists are forced to choose whether or not to intervene to help the victims of violence. They have to choose carefully because even when they have the best of intentions, journalists may not be as helpful as they think.

In 'The Race Beat', an excellent book about media coverage in the United States of the struggle for civil rights, there's an anecdote about Flip Schulke, a distinguished freelance photographer who put down his camera and rushed to help a young woman demonstrator who was being beaten up by police. Afterward Dr Martin Luther King reprimanded him, telling him he was much more valuable as a photographer than a participant.⁷

His rebuke is a reminder that journalists have to remember their primary role is to record events, expose malpractice, and circulate facts and information. They are not participants in conflict and they need to consider carefully when the suffering of others, just like calls to patriotic duty, pulls them away from doing their job professionally.

Sometimes, the simplest way of keeping journalists safe is for media staff on all sides of a conflict to join together. Journalists are notoriously individualistic in their approach, but industry solidarity can reduce risks in reporting conflicts.

There was one conflict in modern times where journalists were largely spared from being killed, although they were often in danger. The Northern Ireland conflict raged for more than 30 years of so-called 'Troubles' involving terrorist groups in a political and religious conflict which claimed more than 3,000 lives. Remarkably, only one journalist was killed – *Sunday World* reporter Martin O'Hagan who was shot dead apparently by 'loyalist' paramilitaries in September 2001. One reason for this was the role played in the conflict by the National Union of Journalists, a union that represents journalists in both Britain and Ireland.

'For 30 years there was an unwritten rule in Northern Ireland that journalists were not shot', notes Michael Foley, former media correspondent of the *Irish Times* and now a journalism lecturer.

'Journalists in Northern Ireland were always members of a union that offered solidarity and a bridge across the sectarian divide, regardless of the editorial stance of their publications,' he says. 'They stood together, loyalists and nationalists, in their opposition to censorship. They carried the same press card [...] Even when working for highly sectarian outlets, journalists were able to demonstrate a professional detachment that allowed the media to be viewed as something between a necessary evil and a trusted conduit.'

Journalists in Ireland and the UK asserted their independence from governments that sometimes expect the media to act as state propagandists. When the UK government banned radio and television journalists from broadcasting the voices of Sinn Féin leaders and certain other political activists between 1988 and 1994, there were repeated protests

by the union. The ban was eventually lifted after the nationalist paramilitary group the IRA declared a ceasefire.

Propaganda and how it is framed

When it comes to information warfare countries like the United States, China and Russia are world leaders. In 2008 the American government launched a three-year 300 Million US Dollars mass propaganda programme to produce undercover news stories, entertainment programmes and public service advertisements for Iraqi media in an effort to 'engage and inspire' the local population to support United States policy.

In the war of ideas, the United States has over the years deployed regiments of communications specialists and private public relations contractors to support its objectives around the world. In Iraq, hundreds of millions of dollars were spent on the propaganda market to challenge groups like Al-Qaeda, whose own media operations include sophisticated web sites and professionally produced videos.

The US information campaign includes public service broadcasts and advertising that praises improvements in government services, supports the Iraqi military and encourages Iraqis to report criminal activity.

After the invasion of Iraq, American private communications companies produced video pieces and passed them off as Iraqi productions on local television. 'They don't know that the originator of the content is the United States government. If they did, they would never run anything', one spokesman candidly told the *Washington Post*⁸. 'In the Middle East, they are so afraid they're going to be westernised [...] that you have to be careful when you're trying to provide information to the population.'

Similarly, *Russia Today* – now rebranded as RT – receives around 300 Million US Dollars from the Government of Vladimir Putin to spin the story of Crimea, the Ukraine conflict and Russian foreign interventions in Syria as well as to challenge what it claims is western media bias.

The propaganda and influence of the network has made other countries on the fringes of the former Soviet Union, such as in the Baltic states of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, ever more nervous about Russian policy and it has also encouraged the United States to increase the budgets allocated for their own propaganda services. But the overt bias of the station has led some of its own journalists to open rebellion.⁹

In China, where a propaganda department is a central pillar of Communist Party apparatus, the government has invested millions in developing its flagship international media – *China Daily* and *CCTV* – with foreign language capacity to tell the story of conflicts over territorial disputes in East Asia from a distinctly Beijing perspective.

In the internet era, the power of the world-wide web has been exploited to strengthen the reach of states with a message of propaganda. China has mobilised thousands of bloggers and social media activists, and are particularly adept in using the new communications culture to drown out dissident voices and to promote state propaganda.

But all combatants, whether state or non-state actors, and particularly terrorist groups, such as IS or Daesh, have become skilful in the dark arts of using sophisticated communications technologies to inspire their supporters and intimidate their enemies.

In this new context, journalists covering conflicts face a tougher task to avoid rumour, misinformation and speculation than a few years ago, when the main obstacle to clarity was often the bias and distortion in the press statements of military and political spin doctors.

In the digital age when there is infinite time to fill, a lack of reliable information and a public appetite for information there is an ever-present threat of a 'rush to publish' and instant push-button recirculation of information.

Facts need to be checked, images need to be verified and that takes time. Journalists should not follow the online herd; only publish what we know to be true. In today's digital environment, rumour and speculation circulate freely and knowing what is real and how to verify information is essential. This is particularly important in emergency coverage where rumour and falsehood can add to tension and uncertainty.

But help is at hand. Craig Silverman, Editor of *Regret the Error* at the Poynter Institute, has collaborated with the European Journalism Centre to produce a useful 'Verification Handbook'¹⁰.

On all sides, then, reporting conflict is inevitably carried out in the shadow of vested interests, bias and prejudice. These influence how journalists tell the story and how media present the message.

Journalists have to build trust and credibility and that means they need to ensure that their work is not stained by undue attachment to reporting only on one side in times of conflict.

They need to understand that the frame in which media present the story – them and us – is often shaped by a cultural bias from one group against another which has been developed over years and decades.

Often this bias is reinforced by myth-making and may include images or beliefs which glorify physical violence as part of a noble national tradition.

This framework can undermine and destroy the capacity for quality journalism. It leads to:

- **Hate speech and xenophobia** in which groups from different national, ethnic, linguistic, religious or cultural backgrounds openly encourage intense hatred about others. This leads to a scapegoat mentality – looking for others to blame for your own problems and crises – which can deteriorate into forms of incitement to violence to eliminate the blamed group.
- **Institutional forms of discrimination** in the state apparatus – particularly the police and security forces – which may be underpinned by laws and traditional behaviour. Harm may be permitted or ignored leading to unequal treatment based on race, gender or religion. People living in poverty may be forced to live in separate, ghettoised communities. This in turn increases resentment.

All of this leads to corruption in public affairs and a fearful environment in which violence can erupt. It is a feeding ground for opportunistic and unscrupulous politics. Journalists have to be sensitive and careful in their reporting to avoid making matters worse.

Ethical information and making the peace

Almost all societies have developed ways to resolve conflict without violence. In any conflict and particular among groups within a country or across borders the fighting will not come to an end without certain conditions being met.

The first imperative is the need for dialogue – warring factions must find a way to talk. Journalism can help by ensuring they are providing accurate and impartial news that is reliable and can be trusted by all sides.

Media can become the main channel of communication for all sides in a conflict. The less media can be used for broadcasting propaganda and the more it can become a mechanism for groups involved in conflict to speak to each other, the more it will contribute to creating a bridge for dialogue.

Journalism can play this role if they:

Respect rules of accuracy and fairness – by telling all sides of the story and in the process helping to educate each side in a conflict about the hurdles and obstacles that need to be overcome.

Provide inclusive story-telling and seek out voices from all sides. Exploring the social reality of the lives of others helps to provide a nuanced understanding that may pave the way to realistic ways of resolving conflict.

Avoid stereotypes that reinforce ignorance, prejudice and fear. Above all, the ethical journalist will humanise the conflict process – putting names to faces; talking to the victims of war on all sides; allowing people to grieve and express their anger; focusing on the human tragedy that is being endured by all the communities involved.

Ask hard questions and seek to explain the real meanings behind statements and claims of political leaders who may express outrageous and controversial opinions which are designed to generate intense hatred and hate speech.

Frame the conflict in a way that opens up new angles for reporting, and allows all sides to have their say. Good journalism will provide fresh insights and may even provide scope for negotiations. It's not the role of journalism to intervene on one side or another, but looking at the story from a different point of view may inspire new thinking and may help in the search for solutions.

Take care with words and pictures. This is important at the best of times, but in times of conflict and when lives are at stake, there is no room for intolerant language, loose words and use of images for their shock value alone. We must avoid the traps set by propagandists, check out information and remember that what we publish has impact and can be used for destructive purposes when it fuels fear and violence. The Ethical Journalism Network has developed a useful tool – a '5-point Test for Hate Speech' – that can help journalists and editors judge when words or images become toxic¹¹.

About the author:

Aidan White is the Director of the Ethical Journalism Network which he founded in 2013. For 24 years he was the General Secretary of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) based in Brussels. He is the author of 'To Tell You the TRUTH' (2008) on journalism and ethics. He is a founder of the International News Safety Institute (1983) and the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (1993). Aidan White is a former journalist and worked with The Guardian from 1980 until he joined the IFJ in 1987.

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² Knightley, Phillip (2000) *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Kosovo*, Prion Books, p.525.

³ History Channel (2004) *War Spin: Correspondent*, aired August 21.

⁴ UNESCO (2012) 'UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity', see <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/freedom-of-expression/safety-of-journalists/un-plan-of-action>.

⁵ Gutman, Roy, Rieff, David (1999) *Crimes of War: What the Public Should Know*, see www.crimesofwar.org.

⁶ Bernstein, Nina (2002) 'Should War Reporters Testify, Too? A Recent Court Decision Helps Clarify the Issue but Does Not End the Debate See', The New York Times, December 14, see <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/14/arts/should-war-reporters-testify-too-recent-court-decision-helps-clarify-issue-but.html>.

⁷ Roberts, Gene, Kilbanoff, Hank (2007) *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation*, Knopf, New York.

⁸ Washington Post, 3 October 2008.

⁹ O'Sullivan, John (2014) '*Russia Today is Putin's weapon of mass deception. Will it work in Britain?*', The Spectator, December 6, see <http://www.spectator.co.uk/2014/12/the-truth-about-russia-today-is-that-it-is-putins-mouthpiece>.

¹⁰ Silverman, Craig (2013) *Verification Handbook*, European Journalism Centre, see <http://ejc.net/projects/ongoing/verification-handbook>.

¹¹ Ethical Journalism Network, *5-point Test for Hate Speech*, see <http://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/en/contents/hate-speech-a-five-point-test-for-journalists>.

10. PROPAGANDA AND HOW JOURNALISTS CAN AVOID IT (CASE STUDY)

Dr. Yevhen Fedchenko

Objectivity has long been a core issue and major preoccupation for journalists covering war and armed conflicts. As a framework concept and formal standard, objectivity was practically nowhere to be found. Every war brought up the issue time and again, replenishing the pool of examples of objectivity being almost universally unattainable. We have stood witness to the concept gradually becoming a distant and largely pointless notion in the eyes of many experts.

At the onset of the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and during the War in Donbass that ensued we saw journalists – mostly from Russia – not only abandoning objectivity but deeply delving into propaganda. The Kremlin was putting the finishing touches to a complete transformation of journalism into an instrument for information warfare. Brian Whitmore, Senior Russia Analyst for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, called it a ‘war on information’, pointing it out as an example of a new type of state-driven propaganda on a direct collision course with objective conflict reporting.

Previous research carried out within the framework of the *Stopfake.org* project indicates that Russian media (both government-owned and quasi-private) took part in elaborating 18 propaganda frames to be put to use in the context of the War in Donbass¹. All were consistent with the official government talking points. Media became instrumental in spreading these pre-fabricated messages to a wide variety of audiences – domestically in Russia and in Ukraine, but also to a much broader international audience, mostly within the EU.

Christophe Deloire, Secretary General of Reporters Without Borders, commented that ‘According to Putin’s spokesmen, journalists who don’t toe the official Russian line are trapped in a one-sided vision of the world if not fully subservient to the US empire. They argue that the Kremlin’s violations of freedom of information are justified by the need to correct this ‘bias’ and to promote a vision inspired by the Russian people’s deepest feelings².

In the context of the Ukrainian crisis the key instruments of propaganda were:

- manipulating facts/mixing fact and fiction (all types of media – from TV to news agencies and blogs)³;
- manipulating headlines;
- intentionally misinterpreting events⁴;

- faking sources of information (including the use of newly-created fake websites and blogs);
- falsifying different journalist materials, such as videos, photos (e.g. using photos from other conflicts) and expert statements;
- forging official documents (originating from both the Ukrainian and foreign governments) and even faking books (by Henry Kissinger, Edward Lucas, Luke Harding);
- quoting anonymous sources (including non-existing material);
- when quoting foreign sources to enhance international legitimacy, misrepresenting their importance within the respective system of media (i.e. saying 'source: leading German newspaper' instead of marginal or low-profile blog that was actually used) or creating the impression of existing consensus in a specific country concerning an issue;
- staging complete events⁵;
- faking sound bites;
- using propaganda vocabulary, often invoking Cold War rhetoric;
- creating propaganda stories to reinforce the government talking points (e.g. fake reports alleging ethnic cleansings perpetrated by the Ukrainian Army in Donbass in order to provide the Russian Mission to the UN with bogus 'facts' purportedly justifying the summoning of a meeting of the UN Security Council in order condemn Ukraine).

As *Die Zeit* writes in a recent analysis 'persistent characterisation of the regime in Kyiv as fascist; the aggressive accusation that third parties were to blame for shooting down the MH17 passenger jet over eastern Ukraine; the ongoing false claim that Lisa, an ethnic German girl from Russia living in Germany, was raped by refugees, even when it had already been established that this was not true; the discrediting of critical journalists as US-controlled agents; and, finally, the dissemination of contradictory versions of the shelling of a United Nations aid convoy in Syria – all of these obfuscation attempts follow a pattern that can be traced back to the Soviet Union'.⁶

When confronted with questions of standards and ethics, journalists using propaganda 'frames' typically reply along the lines of 'We are just doing our job' or 'We just want to keep our job – it's nothing personal', sometimes even defending the propaganda approach to 'news' fabrication.

This official approach and the journalists affiliated with it are shifting the burden of fact-checking and verification from journalists to the audience.

The so-called 'patriotic journalism' – a form of journalism that eschews the traditional standards of conventional journalism in favour of overt support for a country's chosen narrative as a tool for legitimising propaganda – is yet another challenge.

In Ukraine, the issue has sparked a major debate among journalists who have begun to question professional and ethical standards. The government in Kyiv failed (for better

or worse) to create its own propaganda narrative. Journalists who practised 'patriotic journalism' were placed under scrutiny and the legitimacy and professionalism of their actions were questioned by their peers⁷.

The 'Euromaidan' and the ensuing clashes enhanced the diversity and pluralism of Ukrainian media.

Another element of the debate on journalism and war was the emergence of new actors covering conflicts – activists, bloggers, and citizens who create huge volumes of user-generated content (UGC). For example, a lot of content relating to both the War in Donbass and MH17 investigation was generated by the Bellingcat collective – not a journalistic but rather an open-source intelligence (OSINT) platform. Their findings were widely used by professional journalists. On the one hand, Bellingcat produced significant volumes of content that was previously unavailable, broadening and diversifying the scope of reporting. On the other hand, we witnessed greater competition for the attention of audiences. With high speed data transfer and abundant and easily available information, fact-checking and verification have become even more complex.

Most new content producers automatically attempt to label themselves as 'journalists', generating a lot of controversy in the process. Even if bloggers or activists do have unparalleled access to information and produce content that is genuinely unique, they cannot be automatically labelled as journalists who subscribe and adhere to the standards and ethical codes of the profession. An example of this is the controversy surrounding the Ukrainian website 'Myrotvorets' (*Peacekeeper*), which published hacked e-mails originating from the self-proclaimed 'Donetsk People's Republic' and containing personal information about many Ukrainian and foreign journalists. According to Anna Nemtsova, the Moscow-based correspondent of Newsweek, 'what Myrotvorets has done in recent days is to distribute the leaked e-mails while lambasting journalists for 'cooperating with terrorists' simply on account of having received press accreditations on the enemy side of the front line'.⁸

What can be done to avoid propaganda while covering war?

Objectivity vs. transparency

Objectivity is a cornerstone of journalism. However, in recent years the principle has repeatedly come under attack. Media experts no longer consistently expect journalists to be objective and neutral on the issues they cover. Instead, they are asked to be transparent about their aims and professional methods. Geneva Overholser, former Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California, wrote that 'With objectivity no longer the byword, transparency and accountability become ever more important – transparency of intent and also of procedure'.

Fact-checking/Verification

Another reason why journalists are not able to avoid the traps of propaganda in times of war is a lacking commitment to fact-checking or willingness to do it properly. Craig Silverman, one of the authors of the 'Verification Handbook', says that many news websites apply little or no basic verification to the claims they pass on. They are only linking existing media reports, which have already cited other media. A badly researched report, without proper fact-checking and verification, can be shared and reach thousands of readers in a short space of time. If the rumour is repeated often enough, it can become true on account of repetition alone.¹⁰

Journalists can use a wide range of instruments for information verification – both traditional and recently-developed digital apps and tools that are available on the 'Verification Handbook' website in different languages¹¹. StopFake.org also has a special section (Tools) dedicated to fact-checking and verification tools¹².

Standards and values

Journalists should reflect more on their standards, values and practices, recognising the fluidity of these categories and being more adaptive to a rapidly changing environment while striving to uphold the core standards of their profession.

Improving skills

Journalists engaged in war reporting should also strive to continually upgrade both their professional and personal skills. Ukrainian journalists who *en masse* did not have previous experience of covering war and armed conflicts appeared ill-prepared for the type of journalism required. The main challenges stemmed from being poorly prepared for work in a hostile environment, lacking basic survival tactics and the use of protective gear, liaising with the military, handling sensitive information, and reporting the stories people who have experienced trauma, such as wounded individuals, relatives of people who had lost their life and internally displaced persons.

Understanding how propaganda works

In order to be able to safeguard against the many traps of propaganda, journalists need education on the mechanisms for its fabrication and dissemination and on the methods for its deployment depending on the audience as a means of raising awareness of propaganda-related problems. Better educating journalists in this area will make them less susceptible to the traps and pitfalls of propaganda.

About the author:

Yevhen Fedchenko has almost 20 years of experience with media industry; contributed comments, among others to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, BBC, NPR, Public Radio International, CBC and Radio Canada International. He is Co-founder of the fact-checking website StopFake.org which concentrates on revealing Russian media propaganda. Since 2008 head of the PhD programme in mass communication at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (NaUKMA). Since 2005 Director of the Kyiv-Mohyla School of Journalism. 2003-2005 Assistant Professor at Kyiv-Mohyla School of Journalism and at the political science department. He studied at NaUKMA and the National Academy of Sciences in Kyiv (M.A. in political science and Ph.D. in international relations).

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³ Stopfake.org (2016) 'Fake: Ukrainian Military Shell OSCE Monitors', September 13, see <http://www.stopfake.org/en/fake-ukrainian-military-shell-osce-monitors>.

⁴ Stopfake.org (2016) 'Russian media claim Poland will build wall to keep out Ukrainian migrants', September 1, see <http://www.stopfake.org/en/russian-media-claim-poland-will-build-wall-to-keep-out-ukrainian-migrants>.

⁵ Stopfake.org (2016) 'Fake: Separatist buried alive in Ukraine', June 23, see <http://www.stopfake.org/en/fake-separatist-buried-alive-in-ukraine>.

⁶ Bittner, Jochen, Ginzler, Arndt, Hock Alexej (2016) 'Cheerful Propaganda and Hate on Command', Die Zeit, September 30, see <http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2016-09/russia-propaganda-eastern-ukraine-separatists-e-mails/komplettansicht>.

⁷ more about this can be found here: Miller, Christopher (2016) 'In Ukraine, Attacks On Journalists Chill Media Landscape', Radio Free Europe, August 16, see <http://www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-attacks-on-journalists-media-landscape-press-freedom/27923284.html>.

⁸ Nemtsova, Anna (2016) 'Malicious Leaks Make Journalists Targets in Ukraine', The Daily Beast, August 8, see <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/08/08/malicious-leaks-make-journalists-targets-in-ukraine.html>.

⁹ Overholser, Geneva (2004) 'The Inadequacy of Objectivity as a Touchstone', Nieman Reports (Winter), see <http://niemanreports.org/articles/the-inadequacy-of-objectivity-as-a-touchstone>.

¹⁰ Silverman, Craig (2015) 'Lies, Damn Lies and Viral Content', Tow Center for Digital Journalism, Columbia University, February, see <http://towcenter.org/research/lies-damn-lies-and-viral-content>.

¹¹ Silverman, Craig (2013) Verification Handbook, European Journalism Centre, see <http://ejc.net/projects/ongoing/verification-handbook>.

¹² Stopfake.org, 'Tools', see <http://www.stopfake.org/en/category/tools>.

11. CONCLUSIONS

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Constant ceasefire violations in Ukraine, the multiparty civil war in Syria, the IS threat and mounting dangers of terrorism demonstrate the importance of crisis reporting. War reporters who work in these areas of conflict perform an important job, which enables us to receive information about developments on the ground that affect and inform European policymaking and have a direct bearing on the security of European citizens. War reporters face many challenges and threats while reporting from conflict zones. In this book, experienced war reporters, foreign correspondents and NGO experts share their thoughts and insights into war reporting and its meaning in a professional sense. Their testimonials and reports provide valuable guidelines to have in mind both during preparation and in the field.

The internet has substantially changed foreign and war reporting. Fact-checking has become easier and getting in touch with editors and building networks on the spot is no longer the complex task it used to be owing to smartphones and fast data transfer. Different social media platforms enable journalists to bring conflicts to a truly global audience. Daily videos from the front lines and conflict zones are easily available on YouTube. Other social media channels, e.g. Twitter, which provide journalists with information about otherwise poorly accessible areas, have also been put to use. At the same time, these technological developments pose a challenge to war reporters. They step up competition, making reporting much easier for non-professionals. Hence, the greater danger of operations and journalists becoming less risk averse, with time pressures also influencing the quality of reporting.

In order to avoid getting into life-threatening situations, war reporters should always take the necessary precautions to ensure their safety. This means not only avoiding unnecessary risk, but listening to one's instincts. Thus, if journalists do not feel ready to go into a conflict zone, they should not be pressured into doing so. On the ground, taking safety precautions and having a reliable network of contacts also enhances security.

Another conclusion points to war reporters finding it increasingly difficult to maintain the professional and ethical standards of journalism. Finding the truth is difficult as journalists can be easily manipulated by the different sides in a conflict. The use of propaganda and information manipulation are inherent in wars and conflicts. The more aggravated the war conditions, the more controversial the information journalists come across. Increased levels of propaganda make objective reporting much more difficult. It thus becomes even more important for journalists to use reliable information and apply a rigorous standard when seeking to establish the truthfulness of the information received from various sources. In particular, with the advent of new technologies and the internet disseminating false information has become much easier, despite new fact-checking instruments becoming available in parallel.

The challenges that a war reporter has to face can be managed with the right preparation. Preparation is key to successful war reporting. On the one hand, it means acquiring the right equipment, insurance policies, vaccines, etc. in advance. On the other hand, it means doing thorough research. War reporters need to know the ins and outs of a conflict. This includes the area, the actors in the conflict and knowledge of the social background in the country. Being knowledgeable about the people you meet and the customs to observe in communication with them should also be part of a journalist's prior research. Meeting a warlord and a witness require different preparation on account of the different underlying interactions. Being well-prepared also entails having a sound grasp of military strategy, weaponry and the kind of harm a weapon can inflict, such knowledge being essential for fact-checking and security precautions.

Respecting professional and ethical standards of reporting is becoming increasingly challenging in times of financial constraints and rising competition among journalists. New technologies offer an additional advantage – especially to younger journalists – if used with proper caution. The recommendations and experiences narrated in this book can be a starting point for the preparation of journalistic missions and help to ensure a high standard of conflict reporting.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WAR REPORTERS

During the conference 'The truth dies first – journalists in conflict zones' organised by the Media Program South East Europe of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung on 12/13 February 2015 in Sofia the participants formulated the following recommendations:¹

Preparation

Gathering information: Conducting research on the region as a first step. Stories by other journalists who have returned from the war zone are an important source of information for preparation. Good knowledge of the terrain and basics of the local language are of vital importance. War reporters should be aware of all dangers before going to the hotspot, including all types of weapons and their effect.

First aid kit: Learning the basics of first aid can save the life of reporters working under threatening conditions. Protective gear, masks, a bullet-proof vest, water filtering systems and medicines should also be considered. Being aware of organisations that offer security training such as the German Federal Armed Forces is of great importance. Media outlets should cooperate with each other in order to provide journalists with the necessary equipment.

Providing insurance: War reporters should consider insurance that includes emergency medical care and kidnapping. An organisation offering this service for freelancers is 'Reporters Without Borders'.

Technical equipment: Organisation of accommodation, transport and technical facilities, which will be used on the spot, should be prepared in advance.

Setting goals: Research in the field will be more efficient if correspondents have a detailed grasp of the topics they will report on and the type of information they need to find out. In addition, a stringer – a local person living in the country and having diverse contacts – should be hired in order to help journalists to achieve their goals.

Psychological assistance: Mental preparation is vital to ensuring that an individual is ready to go to a war zone. Reporters need to be aware that they will probably be affected by traumatic experiences that may have a lifelong impact.

Setting-up contacts: Contacting NGOs, the embassy of the home country and the professional community can help to build a network of reliable partners and a personal community.

Digital security: Ensuring that communication devices are protected is a precondition for personal safety and security. E-mails for example must be encrypted. In some cases, it is even necessary not to carry communication devices such as smartphones. If reporters

use one, they should be sure to be logged off from all social media accounts in critical situations. Only by doing this, they can protect their profiles on the social web and further contact details.

Team work: Guidelines for coordination with all the parties journalists are working with – stringers, fixers, and editors-in-chief – should be specified in advance.

Fieldwork

Trusted parties: After getting in touch with other journalists, the military and selected locals, reporters have to determine the parties they feel comfortable working with. If it is avoidable at all, reporters should beware of embedded journalism. Being accompanied by a native speaker at all times – a party the journalist can rely on who, ideally, comes from a country not involved in the conflict – is a must. Reporters should always inform such trusted parties about their current location and where they intend to do next.

Transparency & safety: Journalists have to decide to whom and how to disclose their project. They have to determine when they will go undercover and in which way they will legitimate themselves as a reporter. Tactics is also an important issue: how to collect information when you are observed by the security agencies.

Ethical aspects

Explanation of the context: Reporters should describe their working process and context, especially, when they are interviewing only one part of the conflict. In this case, they should explicitly mention it in their coverage.

Different points of view: War reporters need to gather as many points of view as possible and always look for different voices in any situation.

Respect to the interviewees: Journalists should show respect to people they are going to interview and ask them if they would like to be filmed or recorded. It is important to ensure that the material is going to be used in an appropriate way and that the journalists have control over it. War reporters should not pay money for information and be sure that they will not endanger the life of other people through their activities.

Personal commitment: The decision to report and to be in a conflict zone is an ethical aspect itself. Exchange with colleagues can ensure journalists that they are on the right professional path.

¹ Spahr, Christian, Zlateva, Manuela (2015) 'Recommendations for war reporters', see <http://www.kas.de/medien-europa/en/publications/42070>.



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