



REPORTING FROM IRAQ REMAINS DANGEROUS JOB

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Last week's explosion of a roadside bomb that injured an ABC reporter and cameraman, and the recent kidnapping of an American freelance reporter highlight the dangers journalists face in Iraq.

While reporting from any war zone is dangerous, reporting from Iraq has become one of the toughest assignments.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 61 journalists have been killed on duty since the United States invaded Iraq in March 2003.

On Jan. 29, Bob Woodruff, a co-anchor of ABC's World News Tonight, and his cameraman Doug Vogt were badly wounded by a roadside explosion. The incident occurred three weeks after freelance reporter Jill Carroll was kidnapped by an Iraqi insurgent group demanding that the United States release all female Iraqi prisoners.

Basics of reporting from a war zone

Depending upon the news outlet, journalists in Iraq face different reporting conditions.

Those employed by major news organizations are typically protected by guards and sometimes ride in armored vehicles.

By contrast, freelance journalists must often fend for themselves.

Many reporters for major news organizations reside in Baghdad's larger high-rise hotels, protected by cement barriers and armed guards. However, even those reporters aren't completely safe; a 2005 suicide bomb attack on the Palestine hotel wounded three journalists.

Reporters for The New York Times, for example, live in a well-protected compound in Baghdad. The newspaper rents a satellite dish on the building's roof to access to the Internet and file stories by e-mail.

Reporters also take portable satellite equipment known as RBGAN's when moving throughout Iraq. During those travels, the paper employs drivers and guards for protection.

Given that many local Iraqis work within the compound as cooks, guards and house staff, reporters have to constantly look out for the possibility of insurgents infiltrating their numbers.

"It is something we worry about, and watch for," said Robert Worth, a Times reporter who has covered Iraq since 2004.

Freelance journalists, who must fund their reporting with their own money until they can sell stories to various news outlets, often live in cheaper hotels without security.

“This is a very, very dangerous place to work as a freelancer. You're vulnerable to all the people around you,” said Worth.

“Whereas if you work for a big group, you're surrounded by people who have more to gain from protecting you than from selling you out. This, of course, is not to say we have any kind of guarantee. It just helps our odds.”

Working safely

Most journalists agree that working in Iraq is far more dangerous than when the war started in 2003, due to the rise in insurgent activity.

“Iraq became terrifyingly dangerous almost overnight last spring [2004]. ... It wasn't safe for foreigners to walk the streets, and car bombs became an almost daily occurrence,” now kidnapped journalist Jill Carroll wrote in a 2004 *American Journalism Review* article.

Those preparing to report from Iraq often attend classes run by private security firms to prepare for operating in a hostile environment.

Many journalists wear bullet-proof body armor, but the cost is over \$2,000 -- too expensive for many freelancers.

Another common security measure is the use of a “chase car” that follows the reporter's own vehicle with armed guards ready to react should the journalist come under attack.

Trying to get the real story

But wearing armor and traveling with armed guards make it hard to observe ordinary Iraqi society, and reporters must constantly balance the urge to find and tell interesting stories with their own safety.

The rising danger often prevents direct reporting from scenes of developing news.

“I grew increasingly reliant, as did most news organizations, on sending our Iraqi translators and special correspondents out into the field,” Jackie Spinner, a *Washington Post* reporter recently returned from Iraq, told the *NewsHour*.

“If a car bomb went off in a neighborhood that was far too dangerous, not only for me as an American but for my Iraqi translator to be seen with an American, I simply let the Iraqi translator go and do the reporting for myself and come back and tell me what he saw.”

However the reporters working in Iraq agree that the story is too important not to cover.

“We have over 135,000 troops in Iraq still who are there every day, who go back out there every day and do it all again. And I think it's important to tell their story. I think it's important to tell the story of the Iraqi people,” said Martha Raddatz of ABC News on the *NewsHour*, explaining why she traveled to Iraq nine times.

--by *David Botti for NewsHour Extra*

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