

Dangerous Assignments

covering the global press freedom struggle

Spring | Summer 2003

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Covering the Iraq War



Kidnappings in Colombia

Cannibalizing the Press in Haiti

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On the cover: A U.S. Marine stands with photographers while they work during a sandstorm in the Kuwaiti desert south of Iraq on February 3.

Photo: AP/Laura Rauch

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History in the Making

In the six months since the last issue of *Dangerous Assignments*, much has happened here at the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). Before the Iraq War, and during the war itself, we fought for the right of journalists to cover the conflict as freely and safely as possible. As most readers now know, it was a bleak period for journalists—14 lost their lives bringing us news from the front, and two more remained missing at press time. At CPJ, we feel the loss acutely. They were our colleagues and our friends, and we dedicate this issue of *Dangerous Assignments* to them.

The coverage of this war was unprecedented, and to give you a flavor of that, in this issue we hear from Rob Collier of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, who was based in Baghdad; CNN's Alex Quade, who was embedded with the U.S. Air Force; and CBS's Mike Kirsch, who reported from the region independently. And while the world's attention was focused on Iraq, attacks against journalists were carried out across the globe. The December 2002 murder attempt against Michèle Montas, widow of slain Haitian radio correspondent Jean Léopold Dominique, was a reminder of how dangerous that island nation remains for the media. We talk to Montas and look at the toll that pro-government militias have taken on Haiti's press corps. In Colombia, the kidnappings of a *Los Angeles Times* reporter and photographer sent shock waves through the foreign press community there. And in Kashmir, the hope of a resolution to a long-running battle over the territory has put journalists in an even more precarious situation.

One bright spot is Mozambique, where six men were tried and convicted in January of killing investigative reporter Carlos Cardoso. They were each sentenced to lengthy prison terms, and while some questions remain about the mastermind behind the November 2000 murder, the verdict was a landmark in the country, setting an example for the region and, hopefully, for the world. ■

—Susan Ellingwood



AP/Dusan Vranic

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AP/Daniel Morel

Haiti in Crisis, page 16



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West Bank

On April 19, Associated Press Television News cameraman Nazih Darwazeh (on the left in the top photo with his colleagues) was covering clashes in the West Bank between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian demonstrators who were throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails at the troops. Some Palestinians were also firing guns, according to press reports. Darwazeh was filming an Israeli tank stranded in a nearby alleyway when a group of Palestinian youth began running down the alley from the tank.

According to two Reuters cameramen who were with Darwazeh, an Israeli soldier took a position near the tank and fired a single shot at the journalists from a distance of about 11 to 22 yards (10 to 20 meters). The shot shattered Darwazeh's camera, entering his head above the eye. He was killed instantly, and his body was evacuated shortly after by medical workers (pictured surrounding Darwazeh in the bottom photo).

Darwazeh and his colleagues, who were clearly identified as journalists, yelled in both English and Hebrew before the shooting that they were members of the media. A spokeswoman for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) defended the troops, saying that the stranded tank was under attack. Despite eyewitness accounts and video footage, the IDF says it is unclear who fired the shot that killed Darwazeh. ■

—Amanda Watson-Boles



AP/Jaffar Ishayeh



AP/Jaffar Ishayeh

A look at recent red-letter cases from the CPJ files...

November

7 Free-lancer Liu Di (below, left) disappears after expressing fears of being arrested for posting articles online criticizing the Chinese government. Officials say she is under investigation but have not revealed her whereabouts.



Boxun.com



CPJ/Elisabeth Witchel

23 Grigory Pasko (below), a Russian military journalist who was convicted of treason and imprisoned in 2001, is granted parole and freed.



AP/ITAR-TASS

10 CPJ board member Terry Anderson urges Tunisian authorities to free Internet journalist Zouhair Yahyaoui, jailed since June 2002, and editor Hamadi Jebali (below), imprisoned since 1991.



Reuters/Mohamed Hammi

26 Nigerian Islamic authorities issue a fatwa urging Muslims to kill journalist Isiola Daniel (above, right), who had written that the Prophet Mohammed probably would have chosen a wife from among the women competing at the Miss World pageant.

February

5 CPJ delivers a petition with more than 600 names calling for the release of imprisoned journalist Fesshaye “Joshua” Yohannes (below), a recipient of CPJ’s 2002 International Press Freedom Award, to the Eritrean ambassador in Washington, D.C.



CPJ

12-13 Bolivians angered by a new income tax (below) fill the streets of the capital, La Paz, in protest, leading to two days of rioting that kill 25 and injure more than 100, including four journalists.



AP/Aizar Raldes

December

9 The Liberian government releases journalist Hassan Bility after holding him incommunicado since June 2002 for reporting on a rebel group.

January

21 Pakistani journalist Fazal Wahab is killed, becoming the first journalist murdered in 2003 for his work. He had published several articles criticizing local religious leaders and Islamic militants and had received regular threats as a result.

16 Russian Interior Ministry forces (below) in the southern republic of Chechnya, beat, kick, and briefly detain 40-year-old Chechen journalist Zamid Ayubov, who was writing a story about the soldiers.



AP/Musa Sadulayev

March

1 A bomb destroys the car (below) of Nino Pavic, an influential independent newspaper publisher in Croatia. Some of his journalists had recently received threats for a series of articles on mafia groups.



Jitaranji list

6 CPJ sends a letter to U.S. defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld (below) urging the U.S. military to respect journalists' rights and safety during the war in Iraq.



Reuters/Mannie Garcia

11 After spending four months in jail on criminal libel charges, prominent Sierra Leonean journalist Paul Kamara is freed.

12 Serbian prime minister Zoran Djindjic is assassinated. In response, the government imposes worrisome media restrictions that remained in effect until April 22.

18 With world attention focused on the war in Iraq, Cuban authorities (below) launch a vicious crackdown on the independent press, jailing 28 journalists, who were later given prison sentences ranging from 14 to 27 years.



AP/José Coitía

18 Gunmen in Colombia shoot and kill Radio Meridiano-70 host Luis Eduardo Alfonso Parada less than a year after the station's owner, Efraín Varela Noriega, was killed in June 2002.

20 The corpse of Romanian journalist Iosif Costinas, who was working on a book about organized crime when he disappeared in June 2002, is discovered in a forest in western Romania.

26 Togo bars the entire foreign press corps from working in the country, reportedly because President Gnassingbé Eyadema (below) was offended that foreign reporters declined to cover a government-sponsored seminar on elections in Africa. In May, CPJ named Togo one of the World's Worst Places to be a Journalist.



Reuters/Eric Galliard

April

21 Attackers set fire to the car of Vietnamese journalist Hoang Thien Nga, who had received threatening phone calls only days before for writing exposés on Dai Hung, a lawyer with alleged ties to both the criminal underworld and high-ranking government officials. ■

—Amanda Watson-Boles

The Following Journalists Died Covering the Iraq War

Paul Moran, Free-lancer
March 22, 2003



AP/News Ltd.

Moran, 39, a free-lance cameraman on assignment for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, was killed in an apparent suicide bombing when a man detonated a car at a checkpoint in northeastern Iraq.

Terry Lloyd, *ITV News*
March 22 or 23



AP/David Jones

Lloyd, 50, a veteran correspondent with Britain's *ITV News*, disappeared after coming under fire while driving to the southern Iraqi city of Basra on March 22, 2003. The following day, the

British television network ITN, which produces *ITV News*, confirmed his death.

Gaby Rado, Channel 4 News
March 29 or 30



AP/Channel 4 News

Rado, 48, a correspondent with Britain's Channel 4 News, was found dead outside his hotel in northern Iraq on March 30, 2003. Some speculated that he accidentally fell off the roof of the hotel.

Britain's ITN, which produces Channel 4 News, said there "appears to be no direct connection with any military action."

Kaveh Golestan, Free-lancer
April 2, 2003



AP/Hasan Sarbakshian

Golestan, 52, an Iranian free-lance cameraman on assignment for the BBC, was killed in northern Iraq after stepping on a land mine when he exited his car near the town of Kifri.

Michael Kelly, *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The Washington Post*
April 3, 2003



AP/Atlantic Monthly

Kelly, 46, editor-at-large of the Boston-based *Atlantic Monthly* and a columnist with the daily *Washington Post*, was killed while traveling with the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division just south of the Baghdad airport. The driver of

the humvee that Kelly was traveling in ran off the road while trying to evade Iraqi gunfire. The driver, Staff Sgt. Wilbert Davis, was also killed.

David Bloom, NBC News
April 6, 2003



AP/NBC News

Bloom, 39, a correspondent with the U.S. television network NBC, died of a pulmonary embolism. He had been covering the war as an embedded journalist with the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division.

Christian Liebig, *Focus*
April 7, 2003



Reuters/Focus

Liebig, 35, a reporter for the German weekly magazine *Focus*, died in an Iraqi missile attack while embedded with the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division south of Baghdad.

Julio Anguita Parrado, *El Mundo*
April 7, 2003



AP/Javi Martinez

Parrado, 32, a correspondent for the Spanish daily *El Mundo*, died in an Iraqi missile attack while embedded with the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division south of Baghdad.

Parrado, who died with *Focus* magazine's Christian Liebig, was the second *El Mundo* correspondent killed in conflict in almost two years.

Tareq Ayyoub, Al-Jazeera
April 8, 2003



AP/via Al-Jazeera

Ayyoub, 35, a Jordanian journalist with the Qatar-based satellite network Al-Jazeera, was killed when a U.S. missile struck the station's Baghdad headquarters. The station's editor-in-chief, Ibrahim Hilal, said that the U.S. military knew the office's location, and that witnesses saw the plane fly over the building twice before the attack began.

José Couso, Telecinco
April 8, 2003



AP/ EFE, Telecinco

Couso, 37, a cameraman for the Spanish television station Telecinco, died after a U.S. tank fired a shell at Baghdad's Palestine Hotel, where most journalists in the city were based. He was hit in his jaw and right leg and died in a hospital while undergoing surgery.

Taras Protsyuk, Reuters
April 8, 2003



AP/Pawel Koczynski, Reuters

Protsyuk, 35, a Reuters cameraman from Ukraine, died after a U.S. tank fired a shell at Baghdad's Palestine Hotel, where most journalists in the city were based. The shell, which also killed José Couso, hit the hotel balcony where several journalists were monitoring a battle occurring by the Tigris River, which is near the hotel.

Mario Podestá, Free-lancer
April 14, 2003



America TV

Podestá, 52, a veteran free-lance Argentine war correspondent on assignment for the Argentine television station America TV, was killed in a car accident on the highway between Amman, Jordan, and Baghdad. Eduardo Cura, the station's news director, said that a tire explosion in the car in which Podestá was traveling caused the accident.

Veronica Cabrera, America TV
April 15, 2003



America TV

Cabrera, 28, a camerawoman with Argentina's America TV, died in a Baghdad hospital from injuries she sustained in an April 14 car accident on the highway between Amman, Jordan, and the Iraqi capital.

Eduardo Cura, America TV's news director, said that a tire explosion in the car in which Cabrera was traveling caused the accident, which also killed Mario Podestá.

Elizabeth Neuffer, *The Boston Globe*
May 9, 2003



AP/The Boston Globe

Neuffer, 46, a veteran foreign correspondent for *The Boston Globe*, was killed in a car accident "when the car in which she was a passenger apparently struck a guardrail near the town of Samarra, about halfway between Tikrit and Baghdad," *The Globe* reported. Her translator, Waleed Khalifa Hassan Al-Dulami, also died.



AP/Steven Senne

Above: A March 27 news conference at the Coalition Media Center in Doha, Qatar
Opposite: A pre-war issue of *Iraq Daily*, an Iraqi English-language paper

Covering the Iraq War

In terms of sheer numbers, the war in Iraq was perhaps the best-covered conflict in history. Six hundred journalists were embedded with coalition forces; several hundred independent, or “unilateral,” reporters roamed Iraq and surrounding countries; and about 150 journalists stayed in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, to tell the story of the bombing campaign and the last days of Saddam Hussein’s regime. *Dangerous Assignments* asked three journalists—one in Baghdad, one embedded, and one independent—to bring us face to face with their vastly differing experiences covering this war.

AP/Brennan Linsley



Why I'm Still Alive

By Robert Collier

Robert Collier is a reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle who covers international news.

Waiting in Baghdad's Palestine Hotel for American missiles and bombs to come raining down on the city was an act of extreme faith in American military technology. Aim accurately, please.

But the foreign journalists who were hunkered down in Baghdad during the war were also gambling that the Iraqi government would play by the book and refrain from kidnapping or killing us during the regime's final days.

Would the Iraqi government, which kidnapped dozens of journalists in the 1991 war and held them temporarily during and after the war, repeat the same tactic?

We believed that the regime would not, mainly because it was hoping that international coverage of civilian suffering would help spur the anti-war movement in the United States and Europe. That gamble turned out to be more or less correct. The 150 to 250 foreign journalists in Baghdad during the war were allowed to work and report until the very end.

The regime imprisoned and expelled several reporters who did not have journalist visas and harassed several others. Our movements were restricted, and generally we were allowed to work only in bus caravans organized by the Information Ministry. And although newspaper writers were not censored, TV reporters had to show the Information Ministry's "minders" their footage before transmitting it, presumably to prevent the exchange of militarily useful information. But—except during the heaviest missile attacks, when fireballs were erupting only a few hundred meters away—we were never prohibited from leaving the hotel, and many of us could move through significant portions of the city.

When it came to covering the civilian casualties of the war, there was nothing improper or unprofessional about our work—the bloodshed was real, sickening, and all too frequent. Although it was rarely possible to completely discount U.S. claims that the explosions that killed and maimed innocent Baghdad residents were

Journalists take cover as they come under fire from Iraqi troops in northern Iraq on April 4.

Saddam's regime imprisoned and expelled several journalists who didn't have proper visas.

caused by Iraqi anti-aircraft fire or had been set off deliberately to draw world sympathy, the circumstantial evidence pointed overwhelmingly toward U.S. culpability.

But if this was propaganda warfare and we were being tasked as foot soldiers, it was surprising that the Iraqi Information Ministry turned out to be so incompetent. Information Minister Mohammed Al-Sayyaf will go down in history as one of the worst spokesmen of any country during wartime. His constant claims of dramatic Iraqi victories over American troops became more and more laughable with each passing day. And his head-in-the-sand refusal to allow reporters to deviate from daily group schedules—even for such “positive” stories as examining dud U.S. missiles that fell over the city—was a bad PR strategy by any standard.

Perhaps the biggest shock for many reporters, myself included, was that we encountered almost no personal hostility on the streets from average Iraqis. Even in situations in

which we had to interview victims’ relatives immediately after blasts, we felt no danger.

I’ll never forget covering the aftermath of one particularly gruesome explosion on March 29 in an outdoor market in a poor Shiite area of western Baghdad. After dark, several other journalists and I followed the crowds of mourners to the neighborhood’s mosque. Chaos reigned, with wailing and jostling people hovering over coffins laid out on the floor. Despite such extreme grief and anger, the mourners spoke to me calmly and politely, even though my American nationality was displayed clearly on the government press card hung around my neck. They denounced President Bush vividly, but they treated me as an honored guest.

This is not the way it is supposed to be, I kept telling myself, with a mixture of embarrassment and relief. ■

Was I Manipulated?

By Alex Quade

My CNN team was embedded with the U.S. Air Force during the war in Iraq. We lived with and covered the airmen at a base “near the Iraqi border.” Under Air Force and host-nation restrictions, we were not allowed to reveal the base’s name and location or to show host-nation aircraft or personnel. Now that we are no longer embedded, we can disclose that we were at Kuwait’s Al-Jaber Air Base.

Air Force public affairs officers supervised our crew 24 hours a day,

Alex Quade is a field producer/reporter with CNN based in Europe. She has covered conflicts in Kuwait, Macedonia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

A television correspondent reports outside Baghdad’s Palestine Hotel on April 16.

AP/Hussein Malla



until week two of the war, when they grew tired of monitoring our round-the-clock live shots from the flight line. Early in the war, they had looked through our videocamera's viewfinder regularly to ensure we were not taping Kuwaiti aircraft, buildings, or personnel.

Although some television crews embedded with ground forces used "lipstick," or small remote, cameras, we were never allowed to use them in a plane's cockpit, even though U.S. Defense Department embedding guidelines "highly encouraged" their use. The Air Force took days, even weeks, to grant permission for our crew to go along on sorties, but some permissions never came through. We sought to accompany the airmen being dropped into just liberated Iraqi airstrips, and while we managed to get on a few missions, often by the time permission was approved, the story was no longer news.

It's hard to say whether our experience was typical. We heard that journalists embedded with the other



AP/Hussein Malla

On April 10, journalists wait to travel into Iraq at Jordan's al-Karama border crossing.

services had much better access than we had. Certainly, coverage of aircrews could have been as compelling as that of the ground forces. For us, however, it was clear that the Air Force was going through a teething process with the embed system. In theory, embedded journalists should live and work among the troops, as part of the unit, and accompany them on missions. But the Air Force is more accustomed to media who visit bases on organized, one-day tours.

The public affairs officers were interested in getting out a message of clean and clinical statistics: the daily number of sorties, precision-guided munitions used, and leaflets dropped. Doing in-depth coverage was not their priority for us.

While we felt "managed," we were also given unbelievable access. We did live shots from the tarmac and interviewed pilots as they climbed into the cockpit to go on bombing missions and when they returned. For the first time in history, viewers heard about missions on live television before pilots debriefed with their commanders—even before the Pentagon brass knew what targets had been hit, what the pilots had encountered, and whether they had been shot at.

Three embedded journalists wait for the all-clear signal during a March 24 Scud missile attack on Kuwait.



AP/Chuck Liddy

We tried to cover our embed assignment as objectively as we could. Our complaint: There were great stories—great television—that went untold, and, as a result, the Air Force did not benefit from the opportunities to record history that the embed system could have provided. Our coverage was good, but it could have been much better.

As embedded journalists, were we manipulated by the military? I can only speak for my crew embedded with the Air Force: Manipulated is too strong a word. Managed, monitored, supervised, baby-sat, and needlessly restricted? Perhaps. But manipulated? No. ■

Why I Wasn't Embedded

By Mike Kirsch

Mike Kirsch

is a correspondent with WFOR/CBS 4 TV in Miami. He has also covered Afghanistan, Central America, Bosnia, and Kosovo.

We came face to face with heavily armed Iraqi soldiers alongside the road. My initial thought was, “We’re dead.”

It was the first day of the war. Cameraman Rudy Marshall and I had sneaked into Iraq from Kuwait the night before as non-embedded journalists. We were speeding north in a rented four-wheel-drive vehicle, traveling on what British soldiers had mistakenly told us was a secured stretch of highway. The sickening reality was that we were deep inside enemy territory, heading directly into the Iraqi army stronghold of Basra in southern Iraq.

That’s when I saw them up ahead, about 250 mustached and bearded Iraqi soldiers in dark green uniforms. They were gripping assault rifles and

rocket-propelled grenade launchers, hunkered down in trenches on both sides of the road defending the entrance to the city. It was too late to stop or turn around. My heart sank. I thought about my wife, Almira, back home in Miami, six months pregnant with our first child, a girl we’d call Emma. Almira had asked me several times to cover the war from Kuwait City and not risk going into Iraq.

Being shot, killed, and dumped on the side of the road would now be my grotesque punishment. Filled with overwhelming guilt for driving us into an ambush, I glanced at Rudy sitting next to me in the passenger seat, who only days earlier had received a happy phone call from his oldest daughter informing him he was going to be a grandfather for the first time.

In the frozen terror of the moment, neither Rudy nor I had the professional wherewithal to pick up one of our video cameras and start recording. The failure to perform



The cloud of a bomb dropped on April 3 by coalition forces in northern Iraq swells in front of Kurdish fighters (right) and journalists (left).



AP/Peter Dejong

under stress undoubtedly saved our lives. In addition, the fact that we were in a lone, civilian vehicle, as opposed to a convoy of U.S. or British military vehicles, definitely lowered our threat level in the soldiers' eyes and bought us some time. It was also helpful that we had removed our Kuwaiti license plates before crossing into Iraq. But surely, I worried, the Iraqis would notice the U.S. Marine-style, sand-colored combat helmets and flak jackets we were wearing, not to mention the strips of tape we had stuck all over



AP/Dusan Vranic

A U.S. Marine searches a journalist at a security check-point outside the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad on April 16.

the vehicle in the V-shape that symbolized “friendly” and was standard on all coalition vehicles.

Rudy and I just stared forward, avoiding eye contact. My eyes darted left and right for quick glimpses of their reactions. Soldiers tugged on one another's shirt sleeves, pointing at us. Some of them raised their hands indicating that we should

stop, but I just kept driving. Any hesitation or sign of panic would have been like dumping a bucket of bloody chum into a frenzy of sharks.

We made it through. Rudy asked, “What do we do now?” We had two options. We could drive into Basra and be captured for sure, or we could drive back through the same gauntlet of Iraqi soldiers and try to hightail it back to the nearest British forces. “We have to go back,” I said. Rudy remained silent. It was a suicide mission either way.

When I was sure we were far enough past the Iraqi soldiers that they could not see us turn around, I hung a slow U-turn, telling Rudy to keep his head down. As we approached their positions, I noticed one soldier running to a pickup truck that had an anti-aircraft gun mounted in the bed. I floored it, accelerating to more than 100 miles per hour. Soldiers were running and jumping into their trenches. Then I heard the first snapping cracks of machine gun fire over the top of our vehicle.

The car began to wobble under such high speed, and I fought to keep it under control, my head resting just above the steering wheel. Then I saw the tracers flying over the top of our vehicle. These illuminated bullets, I knew from previous experience in war zones, were blasting at us from that anti-aircraft gun in the pickup. I thought about the six full cans of gasoline racked on the rear of the car. I closed my eyes, hoping the rounds would not strike the gas. I imagined us blowing up and rolling, end over end, to our deaths.

And then it was over. We had made it through again. My heart was racing. I couldn't believe it. “We made it?” Rudy asked, looking around wildly. “We made it,” I said, shaking my head, still unable to swallow. This was only the first of many near death experiences to fol-

AP/Elizabeth Malby, *The Baltimore Sun*



low for Rudy and me as free-bird, non-embedded journalists covering the war in Iraq.

The next day, we learned that British television journalist Terry Lloyd of the ITN network had been killed on the same highway less than an hour after we were there. Terry had told me a week before his death that as non-embeds, we would be in positions to cover the war on a much

Journalists record the delivery of aid by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society in the southern Iraqi city of Safwan on March 26.



broader scale than embedded journalists. Terry was right, although he paid the ultimate price to provide that coverage.

Indeed, Rudy and I were lucky to survive as non-embeds, but what a journey we had, entering Iraq from Kuwait the night before the war, moving north to witness the battles for Umm Qasr and Basra, as well as the fall of Nasariyah and Baghdad.

Many embedded colleagues I talked to after the fighting marveled at how much we, as non-embeds, saw and reported. Before the war,

Any hesitation would have been like dumping a bucket of bloody chum into a frenzy of sharks.

many of them had teased us, smirking that we would be the empty-handed bastard children among journalists. But now they wished they had had the same freedom we had to buzz around from one British or American military unit to the next, or to stop at our leisure to interview Iraqi civilians in liberated villages along the way. Many of these embeds felt nailed down to one unit and, as a result, felt that their reporting was limited. In the end, embeds had more protection than non-embeds. But non-embeds, at least this one, had more fun—and a much richer tour of the war in Iraq. I'd do it the same way again. ■

Cannibalizing the Press

For Haiti's infamous pro-government militias, no news is good news.

By Trenton Daniel

Esdras Mondelus, the 31-year-old director and owner of a provincial radio station in impoverished Haiti, is anxious to pay off the loan he used to buy a US\$4,500 generator for his office. But no loan, no matter its size, can buy this journalist what he wants most—a little peace and security. On the evening of November 25, 2002, Mondelus lost his electrical unit, a backup, and other equipment when a group of unidentified assailants set fire to part of his station, Radio Etincelle, or Radio Spark.

And what brought on the attack? Mondelus says that after his news outlet broadcast coverage of large-scale opposition demonstrations, the notorious and feared Popular Organization for the Development of Raboteau, a pro-government group otherwise known as the “Cannibal Army,” violently targeted the station.

The Cannibal Army is not the only such group in Haiti, a small Caribbean nation of 8.3 million people. With cryptic yet memorable names like Clean Sweep, Dominican Wasp, the People's Power Youth Organization, and Little Church Community, these militia forces—also called “popular organizations” and mostly comprised of young, unemployed

men—mob the streets to foment fear and unrest against real and perceived political adversaries alike. They often erect flaming tire barricades and hurl stones at motorists and pedestrians.

It is not uncommon for journalists working at privately owned radio stations to find themselves in harm's way, often accused of “working for the opposition” or of serving “foreign interests.” And by the spring of 2003, the violence against the media continued unabated, with little hope of stopping.

Although the attackers did not burn Radio Etincelle to ashes last

November, the perpetrators have settled for the next best thing: Mondelus, three of his reporters, and three radio correspondents haven't picked up their tape recorders since the fire. Instead, all but one have fled the country—only Mondelus remains there today.

For these popular organizations, no news, quite literally, is good news.

In 1986, Haiti overcame 29 years of a dictatorial dynasty when a grassroots movement helped topple the corrupt and violent regime of François “Papa Doc” Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude “Baby Doc.” A



Haitian journalist Rony Mathieu (center), of Magik Stereo Radio, after being attacked by pro-government supporters in January

Trenton Daniel, a former Haiti-based journalist, writes for The Miami Herald.

leader of that movement, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was elected president in 1990, only to be ousted seven months later by a military junta. In 1994, a U.S.-led invasion restored Aristide, and Washington celebrated the move as a foreign-policy success. But today, with Aristide president again, Haiti is a largely disappointing democratic experiment: Political assassinations are common, corruption is rife, and the economy continues to plunge. And the media, while more open than under Duvalier rule, face a menacing climate.

Anonymous telephone calls telling talk-show hosts and their opposition politician guests to watch what they say are common, and some journalists are kidnapped, either to threaten them or extort money. One radio announcer was abducted by a group of masked assailants last July. (He was later found tied and blindfolded, but alive, on the side of a road.)

Roosevelt Benjamin, news director for the privately owned radio station Signal FM, believes that most threats against the media can be traced to the popular groups. “They always threaten us because of the news that we broadcast, news that is unfavorable to the government,” he says. “Everyday here in the country, journalists are facing threats from the popular organizations.”

In addition to risks from these groups, journalists face violence at all levels of society. Since 2000, two radio broadcasters have been killed for their work. One of them, Jean Léopold Dominique, wielded a wide reach across the country with his caustic editorials, which spared virtually no one. On April 3, 2000, when Dominique was about to enter his station, Radio Haïti-Inter, just before his morning broadcast, the

Speaking Up

Michèle Montas, news director of Radio Haïti-Inter and widow of Haitian journalist Jean Léopold Dominique, who was assassinated in the spring of 2000 by unknown assailants, has been repeatedly targeted for pursuing her husband's killers and for her station's independent news coverage. In December 2002, armed gunmen attacked Montas' home, killing a bodyguard in what she says was an attempt on her life. The threats continued, and she was forced to close her station in February. Radio Haïti-Inter remained off the air at press time.

In March 2003, Montas talked with Dangerous Assignments' deputy editor, Amanda Watson-Boles, about the risks that journalists in Haiti face from pro-government militias known as “popular organizations,” and why she continues to fight to bring her husband's murderers to justice.

Amanda Watson-Boles: Tell me about the role that popular organizations currently play in threatening journalists and press freedom in Haiti.

Michèle Montas: Well, I think their role has become more important recently, particularly because of the atmosphere of impunity in Haiti. The impunity in Jean's case, he being the most well-known journalist in Haiti, has emboldened those groups to threaten journalists and to make journalists targets.

And I would say not only journalists. Any group that is vocal. There have been some human rights advocates who have been threatened and are now in danger—people who have been vocal in defending and speaking out against the way the members of those popular organizations are acting.

I think the fact that we have had more and more attacks on human rights activists, on the press, and on students by those groups is essentially related to the impunity situation. Impunity is the crux of the matter.

AWB: The government has accused the Haitian media of being biased and of publishing slanderous coverage. Do you think Haitian journalists are balanced in their reporting?

MM: I don't think you can generalize on this. A number of journalists are credible journalists doing their jobs, trying to be objective. However, a number of other journalists have taken sides. They have been for the opposition, or they have at times not worked on the side of truth and objectivity. However, being a journalist who has opted for the opposition does not make you a legitimate target. I think it is mind-boggling that the

government has said so candidly that journalist Brignolle Lindor [who was hacked to death by machete-wielding members of a popular organization in December 2001] was not killed as a journalist but as a member of the opposition. It is as if they are saying, “It’s OK to kill him because he’s a member of the opposition.”

But they couldn’t say this about Jean Dominique, because Radio Haïti has been a credible voice for 30 years now. And you cannot say that Radio Haïti has taken sides against the government. We have at times criticized the government, but simply by doing our job as reporters. Can you say that Radio Haïti is doing something else besides practicing journalism? You cannot say so.

AWB: Do you think the government has a tendency to characterize criticism as slander?

MM: Yes. However, I have to say that slander does exist and is used quite a bit. Libel is something that too many Haitian journalists are not careful about.

AWB: And that probably causes problems for journalists who are careful.

MM: Exactly. Because it supports the government’s arguments when they say that journalists are actively playing the role of the opposition. Some journalists are opposition. They are being used by opposition groups against the government.

But in the case of Radio Haïti, I think it’s very difficult for them to come to that conclusion.

AWB: How did the attempt on your life in December 2002 and the death of one of your bodyguards affect your resolve to continue independent reporting in Haiti and to continue seeking justice in your husband’s case?

MM: It has forced me to think a little more carefully about the dangers incurred by my own journalists. What happened in December proved to me



AP/Daniel Morel

Michèle Montas at her Radio Haïti-Inter office in Port-au-Prince in April 2002. Montas was forced to close her station in February 2003 after numerous threats. A framed photo of her murdered husband is in the background.

that they would stop at nothing. The people who were instrumental in my husband's assassination are ready to strike again. They will not stop until they actually silence Radio Haïti, and it has forced me to make the decision to temporarily stop broadcasting. But it didn't change my resolve. I am still determined to get justice in my husband's case, because I happen to think there can be no freedom of expression in Haiti if that case is not solved.

AWB: President Jean-Bertrand Aristide has visited you to assure you of his commitment to bringing your husband's murderers to justice. Based on your conversations with him, how confident are you in his ability to resolve the case and create a safer climate for journalists in Haiti?

MM: I'm not that confident. However, I hope he is fully aware of the importance of Jean Dominique's case. He has to make choices, and all those choices determine whether he will be able to stay in power. It's that important. For the first time in many months, the Organization of American States has penned its commitment to resolving the political situation in Haiti, the security conditions, and to solving two major civil cases: Jean Dominique and Brignolle Lindor, the two journalists who have been killed in Haiti in the last three years.

Can you say that Radio Haïti is doing something else besides practicing journalism? You cannot say so.

AWB: You've said that in the wake of your husband's death, media owners and journalists of all stripes came together to condemn the murder and seek justice in the case. Do you think that the same unity has endured recently as attacks on the press have intensified?

MM: Yes. Definitely. Media owners have been together on this. Journalists have been together on this. I think they all realize that it's a question of survival. In the case of Radio Haïti, we have lost lives, but in their cases it can happen too. I think they are all aware that we have to stick together on this.

Jean was not just a journalist. He was a symbol of what the struggle for democracy is all about in Haiti. Jean was a product of 30 years of fighting dictatorships and military regimes, and of fighting for press freedom. More than freedom of the press, Jean represented all the democratic ideals. So what was struck was a symbol. And as long as impunity on that symbol remains, I think it's not just a question of Haiti, it's a question of free speech everywhere. ■

69-year-old journalist was shot and killed, along with a security guard, by an unidentified assassin.

In March 2003, the government prosecutor issued an indictment charging six largely unknown men for the murder. The long-overdue legal action, however, drew criticism from advocacy groups and Dominique's widow because it failed to name the murder's masterminds—reinforcing an already ingrained tradition of impunity in the country. (See interview on page 17.)

Although it is unlikely that popular organizations were involved in Dominique's death, they certainly threatened him before his murder. In October 1999, a group supporting Dany Toussaint—a powerful senator from the ruling Fanmi Lavalas party who has been linked to Dominique's killing—demonstrated in front of Radio Haïti-Inter to protest one of the journalist's many scathing editorials.

The organizations, which are widely reported to receive financial support from the Aristide administration, are not as visibly ruthless as the Tonton Macoutes, the private militia of "Papa Doc," which openly terrorized the population and muzzled the press during his family's rule from 1957 to 1986. In fact, when the popular organizations emerged in the mid-1980s, the groups aimed to quash Duvalier rule, serving as advocates for community needs under the family's harsh regime. But they have evolved into something more sinister, journalists say.

"After the coup in 1991, they [were] ... fighting for democracy and the return of Aristide," says Marvel Dandin, news director of the private Radio Kiskeya, which is based in the capital, Port-au-Prince. But after Aristide returned to power, they morphed into groups that aggressively pressure

the president's opponents. Now, Dandin contends, "They are instruments, the tools of power of the government that help repression. ... They are like a militia now."

Guyler Delva, secretary-general of the Association of Haitian Journalists and a newspaper reporter, has documented 61 cases since 2000—the majority of them in 2002—in which media workers were harassed or threatened. Seventeen of them were roughed up by police, three by opposition supporters, two by students, and five by unknown assailants. Members of ruling party-affiliated populist groups and government authorities, such as mayors, harassed 34 journalists, Delva says.

According to Delva, even though no journalists have been murdered for their work since 2001, overall the situation has become more dangerous because of an increasingly unstable political climate. The report also lists the names of 22 journalists who went into exile shortly after December 17, 2001, when about two dozen unidentified gunmen stormed the National Palace in an apparent coup attempt. The incident prompted pro-government militias to burn down opposition-party offices and accost journalists working for private radio stations.

"It's been aggravated. It's worse," says Delva, who filed a complaint last year against the leader of the People's Power Youth Organization, René Civil, after the politician made violent threats against Delva at a nationally broadcast news conference. Equally menacing, Figaro Désir, of the Clean Sweep group, called Delva "a traitor serving the white foreigner" and threatened to have him "necklaced," or killed by placing a flaming tire around his neck and

torching it. Désir later retracted his threats, saying his earlier remarks had been misinterpreted.

But some popular organizations' actions are not open to misinterpretation. On December 3, 2001,

machete-wielding members of a group known as "Asleep in the Woods" (because its members are said to hide in the forest), hacked to death Brignolle Lindor, news director of Radio Echo 2000, while he was en



Haitian demonstrators protest in February 2003 to demand justice in the case of murdered journalist Jean Léopold Dominique.

AP/Daniel Morel

route to one of his other jobs as a customs official near Petit-Goâve, a provincial town west of Port-au-Prince. Lindor's name had reportedly appeared on a ruling-party list of opposition supporters who should be specifically targeted by a zero-tolerance crime policy that Aristide had launched earlier in the year implying that police can summarily punish common criminals caught "red-handed." A government official responded by saying that Lindor was killed not because he was a journalist, but because he was an opposition partisan, which, many observers say, insinuated that such violence is acceptable.

In some cases, popular organizations have severed the news link between Port-au-Prince and provincial towns, almost creating an information vacuum. For example, in November 2002 in Gonaïves—where Haiti proclaimed its independence in 1804 as the world's first black republic and also home to the unrest that ended Duvalier rule in 1986—seven journalists went into hiding after receiving menacing telephone calls and verbal threats for covering anti-government protests. Haitians see those threats as a barometer of change in the country's political landscape, which underscores the importance of having a news operation based there.

For Radio Kiskeya news director Marvel Dandin, whose correspondent was among those run out of Gonaïves in November, "It's not the same," he laments. His reporter's departure has forced him to rely on second-hand information from an area resident, which isn't always reliable, he says.

Back at Radio Etincelle, Haitian officials fault station owner and director Esdras Mondelus and his



AP/Daniel Morel

These journalists were forced into hiding after being threatened by the Cannibal Army.

colleagues for the attack on the outlet, saying that their "unprofessional" work creates the impression that they are taking sides in a politically charged climate. Government spokesman Luc Especa contends that some journalists can't report objectively or impartially. "They need to learn something about ethics," he says. "They need to learn how to deal with the news in a polarized environment. ... Journalists shouldn't take sides."

As attacks against the press intensify in Haiti, the government continues to insist that journalists should take the blame. "As soon as [members of the opposition] use violent words to provoke the government," Especa argues, "you understand how things turn violent. It's not that [popular organizations] are prone to violence or attacking the other side."

Nonetheless, says Especa, officials are working to restore control

As attacks against the press intensify in Haiti, the government continues to insist that journalists are ultimately at fault.

Jonas Petit, deputy president of the ruling Fanmi Lavalas party, has an even harsher opinion of Haitian journalists: "They lie every day," he insists. But he calls accusations that his party bankrolls the popular organizations and violence against journalists "crazy," arguing that the administration is too poor for such expenditures.

over turbulent Gonaïves. However, the Cannibal Army's leader, Amiot "Cubain" Metayer, remains at large after escaping from prison in August 2002. None of this comforts Mondelus, who wants nothing more than stability in the town so he can work again. But, he adds, paying off the loan for his generator would be nice, too. ■

A New Beginning

It's taken almost three years, but Mozambique is finally starting to find justice in the murder case of a famous journalist.

By Phillip van Niekerk

Two-and-half years after Mozambique's best-known investigative reporter, Carlos Cardoso, was gunned down, his ghost still lingers in this southern African nation.

In April 2003, seven police officers were charged with aiding in the September 2002 escape of Anibal dos Santos Jr., one of those accused of killing Cardoso, from a maximum-security prison before the November 2002 trial began. Dos Santos, who was tried in absentia, was rearrested in

reappearance was a cover-up that could only have been engineered with the complicity of senior government authorities. The arrests of the police officers now open an intriguing route to discover which important officials were involved.

Even more critical is the ongoing investigation into the role of Nymphine Chissano, a son of President Joaquim Chissano, whom several defendants in the Cardoso trial had accused of ordering the assassination. Nymphine, who has denied

were sentenced to long periods in prison for the murder.

Just hours after the verdict was announced, wood carvers in the bustling street markets of Maputo began hawking near perfect representations of the judge, the defendants, and the trial lawyers, down to variations in skin color. And it's no wonder the nation was riveted by the trial.

Cardoso was a highly respected pioneer in the region, a journalist who set an example for all reporters by taking on the continent's rulers and holding them accountable for their actions. The landmark verdict has allowed Mozambique, whose journalists have lived for years in an environment of impunity and fear, to set an example for other nations in the region—that those who assassinate journalists will not get away with it. (CPJ records show that in 94 percent of cases worldwide during the last 10 years, killers have not been arrested or prosecuted for murdering journalists in reprisal for their work.)

Cardoso's murder trial also showed that high-level government officials can be forced to account for their actions—even if those officials are related to the president.

In 1975, hundreds of years of slavery and colonialism under Portuguese rule gave way to Mozam-

After Cardoso's death, few Mozambican journalists were prepared to carry the baton.

South Africa just seven hours before the verdict, which sentenced him to 28 years in prison, was announced.

This prevented him from testifying in open court about his knowledge of high-level officials who may have had a hand in Cardoso's murder and their criminal activities. Many Mozambicans suspect that the convenient manner of his escape and

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the allegations, was even forced to appear in court to testify.

The trial, which opened on November 18, 2002, almost exactly two years after Cardoso had been shot dead on a street in the capital, Maputo, gripped the imagination of Mozambique's 20 million citizens. The country came to a standstill on the morning of January 31, 2003, when radio and television stations broadcast the verdict from the maximum-security prison of Machava on the outskirts of Maputo. Six killers

bique's independence, followed by Marxist one-party rule and a brutal rebel insurgency backed by the then apartheid government in South Africa. Since 1992, the country has been at peace, nominally following a system of multiparty democracy, but economic reforms have spawned a new, often criminal, political and business elite—what Carlos Cardoso dedicated his life to covering.

In July 2001, a CPJ delegation visited Maputo and found that Cardoso's assassination had created a climate of fear among journalists. He had been exposing bank and real estate fraud, as well as drug trafficking. Cardoso was particularly exercised by a corrupt clique within the local elite that had found common cause with organized crime. No top-ranking state officials have been tied to what Cardoso called "the gangster



Investigative journalist Carlos Cardoso was gunned down on November 20, 2000.

faction" inside the ruling party, FRELIMO, which he supported staunchly until his death. But children of prominent politicians, including those of President Chissano and FRELIMO leader Armando Guebuza, have been accused of illegal pursuits by the local press.

The murder trial gripped the imagination of Mozambique's citizens.

After Cardoso's death, few Mozambican journalists were prepared to carry the baton. According to his friend and longtime collaborator Fernando Lima, Cardoso was killed because he was the only true investigative reporter in a country wracked by decades of civil war, corruption, and organized crime. In fact, Cardoso's murder left the Mozambican press with no leader, while fear continued to spread in local newsrooms.

CPJ also found disturbing questions about the shoddy nature of the murder investigation, as well as a widespread sense that the legal system could never deliver justice. Eight months after CPJ's inquiry, in January 2003, Judge Augusto Paulino answered the cynics. The ruling, which took four hours to render, was as eagerly awaited as a state of the nation address. He sentenced local businessman and loan shark Ayob Abdul Satar, former banker Vincente Ramaya, Carlitos Rachide Cassamo, and Manuel Fernandes to 23 years and six months each. Another suspect, Momade "Nini" Satar, got 24 years.

But the most closely followed aspect of the trial was the involve-

ment of Nymphine Chissano. Forced to testify, Nymphine came to court to proclaim his innocence. One of the most significant parts of Paulino's judgment was his finding that there is enough evidence to conclude that the president's son and others may have been involved in planning the

murder, and that the plot could have been hatched at a house of one of Nymphine's close associates.

Judge Paulino ignored political pressure and death threats to deal a stunning blow against organized crime and the culture of impunity in Mozambique.

The severest test of Mozambique's legal system lies ahead. How will the government handle the trials involving bank fraud exposed by Cardoso before his death, or the investigation into the role of Nymphine Chissano and other politicians in the murder? No matter the outcome, to most Mozambicans, a critical moment was already reached when the president's son had his day in court and was called to account.

But for Mozambique's press corps, the trial, verdict, and arrests of the police officers have gone a long way toward ending the culture of impunity there. Many journalists are now seizing the opportunity to continue the important work that was brutally scuttled when Cardoso was murdered. Now, say Cardoso's colleagues, his life's work will not have been in vain. ■

Part of the Story

For Kashmiri journalists, reporting is difficult when caught between separatists and the government.

By Andy McCord

After decades of strife, there is finally a slim chance for peace in Kashmir, but that's not necessarily a good thing for the press. In fact, it may have killed Parvaz Mohammed Sultan.

At 5:30 p.m. on January 31, 2003, two men entered Sultan's office at the independent newswire service News and Feature Alliance in Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir State. They had a brief conversation with the 36-year-old editor and then shot him in the head. Sultan was rushed to the hospital, but doctors declared him dead within minutes of his arrival.

Journalists working in the Kashmir Valley, which has a large Muslim majority and is claimed by both India and Pakistan, have long been vulnerable to attacks by various parties to the conflict. They have been caught in cross fire and have received death threats from separatist militants backed by Pakistan, as well as from counter-militants backed by India. Recent political changes, which, paradoxically, offer some hope of a resolution to the 56-year-old custody battle over the

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territory, have only heightened the dangers for reporters, especially Kashmiri ones.

Why? Because, say observers, both sides in the conflict—the Indian government and pro-Pakistan militants—have much to lose if peace breaks out. For India, resolving the conflict means making concessions it isn't ready to make, while militants aren't ready to give up their decades-long jihad, even if the local Kashmiri government is poised for peace negotiations. In this long-running conflict, war has become a business of sorts, and with journal-

ists reporting on politics, the media are in everyone's way.

"The most difficult period is when the situation starts getting better," says Muzamil Jaleel, a Kashmiri Muslim who has covered the region for 10 years. "The separatists think we have one responsibility, and the government thinks we have another."

Sultan's colleagues say that although they know of no specific threats against the journalist, wire services such as the News and Feature Alliance are under constant pressure to carry statements issued by competing political and militant



A photographer runs for cover from border security soldiers during a demonstration in Srinagar, India.

AP/Rafiq Maqbool

groups. In the months before his death, Sultan's news service had carried reports on fighting within a principal militant group between factions that favor and those that oppose dialogue with India. "Whenever a journalist is killed, it remains a mystery," says Jaleel, who is also a correspondent for the New Delhi daily *Indian Express*.

Mystery surrounds much of the violence in Kashmir, where estimates of the dead since late 1989—when mass demonstrations against India sparked state repression, which in turn escalated the armed insurgency against India—range from 25,000 to 75,000 people. According to CPJ research, nearly a dozen journalists were killed during that same time period.

The Indian government, which has criticized moves toward peace in the region, has also lashed out at Kashmiri journalists recently. In India's capital, New Delhi, Iftikhar Gilani sits on a parched lawn near Lodi Gardens discussing his newfound freedom. Having spent seven months in prison, Gilani isn't used to the sunlight. "One can't know how important this individual freedom is," he says. In India, "a peon can be prosecuted if he tells a reporter that his boss takes two lumps of sugar in his tea," adds Gilani, a well-respected Kashmiri journalist for the *Kashmir Times* and a stringer for several liberal Pakistani newspapers and Deutsche Radio. On June 9, 2002, income tax investigators raided his home and later charged him with violating the colonial-era Official Secrets Act. His offense? He had downloaded from the Internet publicly available information about the Indian army.

Gilani suspects other motives behind his arrest, however. The same day he was detained, his father-in-law, Syed Ali Shah Gilani, an important fundamentalist Kashmiri Muslim politician, was arrested

in Kashmir. The elder Gilani was charged with receiving Pakistani money and passing it on to armed militants. He remains in custody.

Initial press reports lumped the journalist together with his father-in-law and sought to brand Gilani as a spy. Fortunately, the press corps in New Delhi took up his case. "I was a journalist, and so my case was highlighted," says Gilani. But that doesn't mean he didn't suffer. According to Gilani, for two months guards and fellow prisoners at Tihar Jail, an enormous prison in the capital, beat him. He says he was accused of "raping Mother India." And on one occasion, a prisoner forced Gilani to clean a toilet with his shirt and then wear it.

Throughout the summer and fall, the Delhi Union of Journalists and press freedom groups, including CPJ, worked on Gilani's case. His defense lawyers sought access to a memo from the army's Department of Military Intelligence that reportedly

comes to Kashmir, and many Kashmiri journalists often feel isolated from their colleagues in other parts of India. Jaleel also notes that Pakistani journalists have not paid much attention to the pressures their Kashmiri counterparts endure from Pakistan-backed militants. As for Kashmiri journalists themselves, Jaleel says, "There is no journalists' union in Srinagar, because nobody wants to be known as president of the union."

State elections last fall brought in an opposition coalition promising good governance and a wide-ranging dialogue about the future of Jammu and Kashmir. Ironically, though the new political balance in Indian-held areas of Kashmir could ease tensions, the prospect of change has journalists worried. In Sultan's murder, suspicions center on pro-Pakistan Muslim militants. In the Gilani case, Gilani himself speculates that his arrest may have occurred to pressure his father-in-law. But whatever

War has become a business of sorts, and with journalists reporting on politics, the media are in everyone's way.

discredited the Home Ministry's assertion that Gilani's documents were matters of national security. That evidence was finally introduced in court in early December 2002. A month later, the spying charges were withdrawn, and the journalist was released on January 13, 2003.

For journalists covering Kashmir, political institutions that may one day provide protection for the press are extremely weak. While Indian press associations came to Gilani's rescue, they haven't supported their Kashmiri colleagues in all cases. Powerful, New Delhi-based media organizations can be extremely nationalistic, especially when it

the reason, India managed to remove Gilani, an important non-militant Kashmiri, from the debate on Kashmir's future during the crucial period in the run-up to the elections.

To Gilani, Jaleel, and other Kashmiri journalists, there is no bigger story than the fate of their disputed homeland. "As Kashmiri Muslim journalists, we are part of the society, and in a way we are part of the story," says Jaleel. But for the moment, neither pro-Pakistan militants nor the Indian government wants such news reported freely. And until that changes, Kashmiri journalists will be caught in the middle of a developing—but deadly and dangerous—peace. ■

Thinking Twice

The kidnapping of two journalists in Colombia made some foreign correspondents nervous, but it hasn't kept the international press from reporting on the war there.

By Michael Easterbrook

As bloody as Colombia's 40-year-old civil conflict has become, foreign correspondents covering it have always found comfort in the fact that the violence rarely touched them. Barring the occasional brief detention at a guerrilla roadblock, they've roamed freely throughout Colombia's vast, unprotected countryside for years, reporting stories that would have surely resulted in death threats or worse had local reporters penned them. In Colombia last year, 27 journalists were threatened with death, and three were killed in the line of duty. None of them were members of the foreign press.

Yet for many foreign correspondents working in Colombia, the feeling that they were immune to the mayhem crumbled earlier this year when leftist rebels kidnapped two journalists in the eastern department of Arauca who were on assignment for the *Los Angeles Times*. Even though British reporter Ruth Morris and American photographer Scott Dalton were later freed unharmed, the specter of abduction has prompted some correspondents to change the way they cover the conflict, which pits leftist rebels against rival paramilitary combatants and the government.

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AP/Juan Herrera

Journalists in Bogotá, Colombia, at a protest calling for the release of photographer Scott Dalton and reporter Ruth Morris

"I think all foreign correspondents are more careful now," says T. Christian Miller, who covers Colombia and other Latin American countries for the *Los Angeles Times*. "They think twice about where they're going and why they're going there."

Morris and Dalton, both in their mid-30s, had been living and working as journalists for years in Colombia before traveling to Arauca, an oil-rich region on the Venezuelan border swarming with both rebels and right-wing paramilitary fighters. The two journalists had ventured there to

report on rising violence in the area and how the government's battle against the armed groups was affecting civilians.

Early on the afternoon of January 21, they were traveling along a rural highway to interview victims of a wave of bombings blamed on the leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) when their taxi driver ran into a roadblock manned by about 10 combatants from the FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN), the smaller of the country's two main guerrilla groups. The

rebel armies are waging separate insurgencies against the government but have recently begun fighting side by side in Arauca to confront the growing government military presence in the strategic region. One of the rebels insisted on taking the journalists to see his commander.

Armed with AK-47s, two rebels climbed into the taxi and directed the driver to a spot 30 minutes down the road, where a commander known as “Gumfoot,” from the ELN’s Eastern War Front, and another leader known as “Geronimo,” from the FARC’s 45th Front, began a tug-of-war for the captives. Gumfoot prevailed, but only after promising Geronimo that if the ELN decided to release the captives, it would hand them over to the FARC first, says Morris.

On their first night in captivity, a 35-year-old female combatant from the ELN promised to take good care of the journalists and said they were lucky the FARC hadn’t taken them. “They might have killed you,” the woman told Dalton, before warning that they would be shot if they tried to escape. During the following days, they changed camps frequently, moving higher and higher into the mountains. Meals consisted of a starch-heavy mix of yucca, plantains, rice, corn tortillas, and, on one occasion, stew from an armadillo the rebels had shot and butchered. After 11 days, the journalists were released in the mountains to a Red Cross delegate and flown to their homes in Colombia’s capital, Bogotá.

Concerns that the journalists’ abductions marked a new strategy in the guerrilla war were quickly eased after it was learned that the kidnappings had apparently been a spur-of-the-moment decision by the militiaman at the roadblock, who had mistakenly concluded that the journalists might be valuable for the rebels, known for kidnapping hundreds of people in recent years to bankroll their wars. An ELN leader



Scott Dalton

A rebel from Colombia’s National Liberation Army (ELN), who kidnapped two journalists from the *Los Angeles Times*

told Morris that after seeing how much press attention the abductions garnered, the rebels were forced to keep them longer than they had wanted to ensure that their release was handled safely.

However, new anxieties did surface over the behavior of the FARC commander Geronimo. In an effort to force the government to release jailed FARC fighters, the 16,000-strong rebel army is already holding hostage three American contract workers, 47 police officers and soldiers, and some 20

that American journalists in particular are running a much bigger risk with the FARC than they did last year,” adds Wilson, who believes that Washington’s increasingly aggressive role in helping the Colombian government fight the rebels has heightened the risk for all Americans in the country.

Even though most correspondents say the abductions will not prevent them from traveling to hot zones like Arauca, some say they will spend more time talking to local authorities to determine what the rebels are up to before entering those areas. Other foreign journalists say they will do everything they can to avoid running into FARC fighters while reporting in zones where they’re known to be active.

“Previously, I’d go out to FARC-controlled areas looking to interview them,” says the *L.A. Times*’ Miller. “My policy right now is that even if I had an offer to meet with a FARC leader, I wouldn’t do it, not until it’s clear in my mind what their intentions are for international journalists.”

After visiting their families, Morris and Dalton returned to Colombia and were soon back at work. In an e-mail message sent in March from Jerusalem, where she was on a short-

Local Colombian journalists are most at risk: Last year, 27 were threatened with death, and three were killed because of their work.

politicians, including former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt. News that the FARC had tried to kidnap Morris and Dalton stoked fears that it might be trying to strengthen its bargaining position by grabbing international journalists.

“The FARC wanted [Morris and Dalton], and that signals something very frightening,” says Scott Wilson, a Colombia-based correspondent for *The Washington Post*. “Everything taken together, I think it suggests

term assignment, Morris wrote that, other than making an effort to alert guerrilla groups before traveling to regions they control, her abduction will probably have little effect on the way she reports in Colombia.

Asked how it would change the way he works, Dalton ponders the question for a moment before deciding. “It might make me think twice before going to a dangerous area to do an assignment,” he says. “But I’ll still do it.” ■



Illustration: Constantin Ciosu