

Risk Journalism - Daniel Pearl's Safety Memo

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Background and Introduction

- In late 2001, when other big media correspondents were clamouring to go to Afghanistan to cover President Bush's initial front in the War on Terror, Pearl declined, saying,
 - **“It’s too dangerous. I just got married, my wife is pregnant. I’m just not going to do it.”**
 - How, then, did this prudent and cautious reporter come to place himself in circumstances that led to his cold-blooded murder?
 - Pearl decided to cover the War on Terror from Islamabad, Pakistan, away from the fighting in Afghanistan, but plagued by its own dangers from local assassins and kidnappers

Pearl's safety Memo

- Titled, “Memo on Protection of Journalists.”
- Among the major safety issues addressed in the memo were:
Checking in (editors to keep track of reporters who go into hazardous situations. Incidence of kidnapping. Phone contacts.)
- **Guidance** (discourage reporters from covering stories unless there is clear interest by their organisations),
- **Money** (war correspondents must carry substantial amount of money in order to operate, and in order not to become stranded),
- **Training** (security training that would include basic first aid, armaments, human psychology, driving on how to maneuver out of hostile situations, what to wear to avoid becoming a target, how to stay safe during demonstrations, how to avoid mines, and similar training}

Pearl's safety Memo (cont'd)

- Although Pearl's memo was never adopted, even if it were issued to all reporters in **Afghanistan and Iraq**, it would probably be inadequate to protect them. (Foerstel 2006:116)
- **Why Afghanistan and Iraq?** – the systematic targeting of journalists begins with the 'War on Terrorism' (invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003). These two periods and places have great impact on journalism and its practitioners.

Broader Issues & questions in post-terror context

- The war on terrorism therefore signifies

POST TERROR ATTACK ON JOURNALISTS

as depicted by:

- The horrific visual representation of the death of Daniel Pearl, the *Wall Street Journal* reporter kidnapped and then murdered in Pakistan in March 2002 encapsulates **'the extreme danger for reporters working in conflict zones'**.
- Thereafter, *Newsweek* labelled the abduction and murder **"the first international acts of terrorism against the United States since September 11"**

Broader Issues (II)

- Iraq as “the most dangerous place in the world for journalists.” (CPJ)
- 43 journalists killed in action and another 19 media support workers killed since March 2003.
- In 2014, 66 journalists were reportedly murdered, bringing to 720 the number of journalists killed in connection with their work in the past 10 years. (Reporters Without Borders, 2014)
- If reporters are killed on this scale in these environments, indications of absence or inadequate checking in by editors, provision of guidance, resources and training as addressed in Pearl’s memo seems evident.

Broader Issues & questions in post-terror context (III)

- Given this alarming figure, could it be said that the issues raised in Pearl's safety tips were not addressed by media organisations of the victim journalists?
- In 2014, beheadings of US and Iraqi journalists (such as James Foley, Steven Sotloff) testified to the scale of the violence that can be used against unwanted witnesses. Rarely have reporters been murdered with such a barbaric, sense of propaganda, shocking the entire world. (RWB, 2014)

Obligations for journalists and employers

- In the light of all these issues and questions, it can therefore be suggested that:
- The onus for protecting journalists lies on the media organisations in guaranteeing safety and protection in the form of : Checking in, guidance, money and training. Then,
- Conforming to these rules are likely to offer war correspondents increased safety by being prudent and cautious.

Summary of cases of risks vs. lack of safety/ prudence

- **Daniel Pearl** in 2002 (apparent absence of safety framework from the *Journal*, and lack of cautious reporting)
- **James Foley**, in August 2014 the first American journalist to be publicly beheaded (44-day captivity in Libya in 2011). Captured in 2012 in Syria and publicly beheaded in 2014 (**lack of prudent reporting**)
- **Steven Sotloff** in September 2014, as 15 men jumped out of three cars and took Sotloff and his fixer Yosef Abobaker captive (**lack of institutional support**)
- **Zakariyyah Isah, Enenche Akogwu and Adeola Akinremi** (**lack of institutional protection**)

Journalist James

Foley kneeling
next to a man
dressed in black
(prior to his
execution)

In the video posted on
YouTube.



Look of horror: A Nigerian soldier is made to kneel in front of three men after he was captured by Boko Haram

Like master, like servant: Nigerian terror group Boko Haram releases first beheading video since pledging allegiance to ISIS



DEATH THREAT BY BOKO HARAM GROUP

- **The death threat was issued after Journalist Adeola Akinremi (in Nigeria) wrote a piece titled, ‘Why Boko Haram don’t deserve our amnesty’. The editor wrote it after his return from Adamawa State to investigate killings by the insurgents and the plight of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).**
- **“You have been joining our enemies. You are made yourself their mouth [sic] but we will get you insha Allah. This is a holy mission for Allah, **so stop writing against us.** You’re going too Michika calling yourself a brave journalist, but you’re a coward. **We will get you.** Its your government that talks of amnesty, we are not looking for amnesty. Allah is with us. You’re now **a walking dead** and a prey to the Lions of Islam from the **bullet of a passing car or a nearby rooftop.**” (*Daily Post*, 2015).**
- **WHAT FORM OF PROTECTION HAS AKINREMI RECEIVED?**

Journalists' Trauma

- Consequent to the death threat, Akinremi now keeps a low profile and has scaled down his writing on issues relating to Boko Haram as he and his family fear a potential attack. He states:
- “I don’t know what can happen anytime, anywhere. I have requested a police report on the update of their investigation. But I have not heard anything yet.” (CPJ, 2015).

Conclusion

- Given the broader context, the alarming figures and incidents of risk to journalists, it is indicated that Pearl's safety tips **have been inadequate** in protecting journalists, especially as journalists have now become **targets of terror groups**.
- The specific cases of journalists' deaths are suggestive of what McNair (2014) termed: '**reckless bravery**', as in the case of Foley, and lack of prudent and caution for Pearl.
- In addition, **lack of organisational /institutional protection** like the cases of the Nigerian journalists.

Recommendations

- Strict rule of embedding of journalists with their country's military.
- Anonymity of reporters' bylines (Akinremi)
- Safety training for journalists.
- 'Hidden offices' for reporters as was in the case of TELL in Nigeria during its 'guerilla warfare' (Charlie Ebdó)
- High- tech surveillance and protection of media offices