



**A Life on the Line:
The *Christian Science Monitor* and the Kidnapping of Jill Carroll
Teaching Note**

Case Summary

The quest to tell stories has long propelled journalists into threatening environments. In many cases, reporters have managed to navigate dangerous situations by asserting their status as impartial observers whose imprisonment or death would benefit no one, and perhaps lose an insurgency or other group an outlet for publicizing their cause. That unique position has, however, been increasingly undermined in recent years—not least with the kidnapping and murder in 2002 of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl while on assignment in Pakistan, and the kidnappings and killings in Iraq of some 36 journalists in the three years following America's invasion in 2003.

This case focuses on the Boston-based *Christian Science Monitor* newspaper after one of its freelancers was kidnapped in Baghdad in early 2006. Jill Carroll, a 27-year-old reporter, was ambushed along with her Iraqi interpreter as she left the offices of a local politician in Baghdad. The interpreter was killed, while a previously unknown militant group whisked Carroll away, apparently still alive.

The case traces the *Monitor* in the fraught days and months following Carroll's capture as it considers strategies for securing her release. A host of considerations and variables complicates this delicate task, including unclear information about who is holding Carroll, uncertainty as to how best to characterize her publicly in order to maximize the chances of her safe return, competing advice from the FBI and CIA, and last but not least, confusion as to whether she is even alive. Students step into the role of *Monitor* staff who must decide what course of action to take, aware that each decision could, quite literally, mean the difference between life and death.

Teaching Objectives

This case highlights the risks that media outlets face when operating in dangerous parts of the world. Use the case as a vehicle for discussing the responsibilities news organizations have towards journalists who work for them, and the obligations that journalists themselves bear when they agree to take on dangerous work. Also use the case as a platform for debating crisis management within media organizations, changing attitudes towards journalistic claims to immunity, hazards training for journalists, and the status of freelancers in journalism.

A central question lies at the heart of the case: What is the role and responsibility of news organizations towards their employees? A related issue is the use of stringers and freelancers, particularly in war zones. Conflict reporting gives young or relatively inexperienced journalists like Carroll a chance to make a name for themselves. As a result, they are often prepared to take risks that more seasoned or established journalists would not. Should news organizations provide training and protection for anyone whose work they use? Are media outlets that use copy from stringers and reporters who willingly take such risks helping them out, or are they immorally exploiting their professional, and sometimes reckless, ambition?

How should journalists prepare for dangerous assignments, and to what extent are they responsible for their own readiness? Hostile environment courses offer some training, but many journalists, including Carroll, never take one. Should such courses be required? Students should suggest and discuss the skills that they think should be in a conflict reporter's toolkit, as well as the pros and cons of asking for or accepting armed protection.

Finally, discussion should turn to crisis preparedness and crisis management within journalistic organizations. Should newsrooms have well-articulated emergency plans? Is it necessary, and if so, to what extent? Should journalists themselves oversee crisis response—as they did at the *Christian Science Monitor* after Carroll was kidnapped—or should the task be delegated to outside professionals experienced in such matters?

Class Plan

Use this case in a course about reporting from conflict zones, crisis management, freelancing, or US coverage of foreign news.

Pre-class. Help students prepare for class by assigning the following question:

- 1) What issues/lessons do you think this case is intended to illuminate?

We found it useful to engage students ahead of class by asking them to post brief responses (no more than 250 words) in an online forum. Writing short comments challenges students to distill their thoughts and express them succinctly. The posts also highlight talking points ahead of the class, and identify specific students to call upon during the discussion.

In-class questions. The online posts are a useful starting point for preliminary discussion, after which the instructor could pose any of the following questions to promote an 80-90 minute discussion. Consider dividing class discussion into topical segments, as below, or rearrange questions to follow a more chronological path. The choice of questions will be determined by what the instructor would like the students to learn from the class discussion. In general, choosing to discuss three or four questions in some depth is preferable to trying to cover them all.

Assess the Monitor's response from January 7 to February 22, 2006

- a) On a scale of 1-5 (low to high), assess the *Monitor's* response through to February 22. Tally the results on the board.
- b) Call on class members who ranked the paper at the furthest ends of the scale. Why do you think the newspaper did either so well, or so poorly? What criteria did you use in casting your vote?
- c) How would you characterize the *Monitor's* approach? For example: proactive, reactive creative, risky, thorough. Should it have planned in advance what to do, especially given previous kidnappings in Iraq, or was the response as robust as could be expected given the fluid nature of the situation?
- d) The *Monitor* is torn between two opposing strategies: remain low key about the kidnapping, as NBC did during the 2004 abduction of a news crew in Iraq, or aggressively publicize Carroll's fate, as the *Guardian* newspaper urges. What are the pros and cons of each strategy?
- e) What do you think about the internal organization of the *Monitor's* response? For example:
 - i) How effective was Iverson's leadership?
 - ii) How would you assess "Team Jill" in terms of both concept and composition? To what extent was it a good idea to recruit *Monitor* staff for the task, or should they have solicited the involvement of more "neutral" outsiders, such as the newspaper's publisher or a third party with greater experience in dealing with such events?
- f) How well did the *Monitor* deal with external parties: Jill's family, US government agencies, foreign government agencies, the US media (such as CNN and the *Wall Street Journal*), foreign media (such as Al Jazeera and Kuwait TV), the Committee to Protect Journalists, human rights groups, the *Guardian* and other private contacts.

g) Should the *Monitor* have sent a senior member of staff to Iraq to handle the situation? What would have been the advantages and disadvantages of doing so?

h) To what extent did the *Monitor* owe its readers information about Carroll and its efforts?

i) Ingwerson is concerned that adopting certain strategies, such as a news blackout, could prompt charges of press favoritism towards its own. Do you think that the *Monitor* would have handled coverage of Carroll's abduction differently if she had not been a journalist? If yes, do you think that difference was justifiable given the stakes involved?

j) Should media outlets adhere to government policy on paying ransom money for kidnapped employees, or should they be able to use their own discretion? Similarly, should media outlets formulate and adhere to a jointly conceived set of rules and policies that address situations such as kidnappings and ransoms, or should each organization deal with the individual situation as it sees fit?

k) The *Monitor* is aware that the way it depicts Carroll to the outside world could have a crucial impact on her fate and wants to portray her sympathetically. What are acceptable strategies for doing so? How much license should a news organization, committed to telling the truth, have to massage image and information in such a situation?

l) Three days after her kidnapping, the paper secretly promotes Carroll from stringer to full time correspondent. Do you agree with its move?

Responsibility

m) To what extent was the *Monitor* to blame for the situation it faced? For example, should it have insisted that Carroll have more security? Should it have allowed its reporters to operate in such a dangerous environment?

n) Could the paper have been better prepared, especially given the fact that another of its freelancers had been kidnapped and killed in Iraq? What would "preparedness" have meant? List on board. For example, compile a list of known family members for an emergency; provide hostile environment training; insist on chase cars; don't use freelancers in combat or danger zones.

o) Did Carroll bear any personal responsibility for her abduction? For example, had she adequately prepared herself for reporting in the area? Did she take unreasonable risks? What could she have done differently?

p) Does the US or Iraqi government share in the blame for Carroll's kidnapping?

q) Did the Monitor have a different responsibility towards Carroll than to its full time correspondents? In general, does the nature and extent of responsibility that media outlets have for their contributors vary according to whether they are freelancers or staff?

Run the Public Service Announcements?

r) Should the Monitor run the PSAs? What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing so? List on the board, and vote.

s) Should the Monitor be considering any other options at this time?

Wrap Up and Reflections

t) Summarize the Epilogue.

u) Are you surprised that Carroll was released unharmed?

v) What, if anything, do you think swung the balance in favor of the eventual outcome: the Monitor's strategy? Carroll herself? Luck? Other factors?

Suggested Readings

Christina Asquith, "Kidnapped in Baghdad: Journalist Jill Carroll didn't follow the usual safety precautions. A Christian Science Monitor Freelancer tries to figure out why," *American Prospect*, March 7, 2006.

SYNOPSIS: This article, written by another *Christian Science Monitor* freelancer while Carroll was still in captivity, provides an insider's perspective on the newspaper's operations in Iraq and a window into some of the considerations and concerns that Carroll faced, which may have contributed to her kidnapping. Describing Carroll's relationship with the *Monitor* as 'don't ask, don't offer,' for example, Asquith notes that *Monitor* Editor Richard Bergheim says that Carroll chose not to use a chase car. But she observes that the *Monitor* paid a set amount per story and that adding security would have trebled the costs. "I feared the editors might reject my story as too expensive," Asquith writes. "So I never asked for it; they never offered."

<http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?articleId=11258>

Byron Calame, "Outside Contributors: In the Times, but Not of the Times," *The New York Times*, August 14, 2005.

SYNOPSIS: In this article, then-*New York Times* Public Editor Byron Calame focuses on one challenge resulting from the paper's growing reliance on a "growing and far-flung army of freelancers": monitoring and maintaining the paper's reporting standards. While Calame can find no specific numbers on the number of freelancers used by the *Times*, he notes that shrinking budgets and scaled-back staff means that the use of freelancers has almost certainly increased — and with it, the potential problems of using outside help.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/14/opinion/14publiceditor.html>

Tony Dokoupil, "Lifting the Veil on Jill Carroll: Has the Media learned from its Mistakes in Iraq?" *Radar*, March 12, 2007.

SYNOPSIS: This article casts a critical eye over Carroll's story, which the author regards as "indicative of a broken news business where media companies — under ever-growing pressure to cut costs — shave the salaries and benefits of freelancers grateful for work and too conscious of competition to protest." It also scrutinizes the *Monitor's* response and the benefits that accrued to Carroll after her release.

http://www.radaronline.com/features/2007/03/jill_carroll_1.php

Anthony Feinstein, "The Psychological Hazards of War Journalism," *Nieman Reports*, Summer 2004.

SYNOPSIS: In this article in Harvard's *Nieman Reports*, psychiatrist Anthony Feinstein highlights an aspect of war journalism that has garnered increasing, if belated, attention in recent years: the psychological distress that some reporters face after experiencing or witnessing lifethreatening events. Feinstein's piece not only highlights the problems of post traumatic stress disorder and depression, which can follow the kind of reporting into which Carroll threw herself, but addresses the issue of organizational responsibility in his admonition that "responsibility rests with news organizations to decide what should be done about it."

<http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=100835>

See also: Anthony Feinstein, *Dangerous Lives: War and the Men and Women Who Report It* (Toronto: Thomas Allen), 2003, which offers a fuller analysis of his findings, including the fact that more than one in four frontline journalists with a 15+-year career are likely to have experienced PTSD, compared to just 5 percent in the general population. They are also more likely to abuse alcohol and have a hard time maintaining intimate relationships.

Neil Hickey, "Bodyguards and the Press," *Columbia Journalism Review*, Jan/Feb 2004, Vol. 42, Issue 5.

SYNOPSIS: Do "hired guns make journalists safer—or less safe?" asks *CJR*'s Neil Hickey in this article, which provides context and basis for class discussion related to Carroll's decision not to use a chase car, and the broader issue of personal security in dangerous areas like Iraq.

<http://www.allbusiness.com/information/publishing-industries/732480-1.html>

Other Resources

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma

The center offers a wealth of resources for journalists who cover violence, including Tip Sheets, such as "Self Care for Journalists;" publications such as "Tragedies and Journalists," a 40page field guide "dedicated to helping journalists and the victims they cover;" and an overview of "best practices in trauma reporting."

www.dartcenter.org

The Committee to Protect Journalists

The Committee provides a range of information and resources related to journalistic safety and reporting in dangerous areas, including a journalist's safety guide for hazardous reporting situations, special reports on specific countries, and regional analyses.

<http://www.cpj.org>

Jill Carroll, "Foreign News Coverage: The U.S. Media's Undervalued Asset," *Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy*, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2007.

SYNOPSIS: Carroll wrote this paper following her release, when she was a fellow at Harvard's Shorenstein Center. In it, she argues that although "media companies are cutting back on the numbers of foreign bureaus and correspondents... they are making a financial miscalculation and missing an opportunity to capitalize on an asset that they appear to undervalue."

http://www.hks.harvard.edu/presspol/publications/papers/working_papers/2007_01_carroll.pdf