

# Seminar 3

## Case Studies from Journalists

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## Seminar Three: Overview

This seminar is intended to put into practice what the students have learned in the previous two seminars. You are given two scenarios to share with them in small chunks. Each chunk gives the students additional information. The purpose is for them to learn how to think through risk assessments in a real-life situation. These scenarios come from veteran journalists Amanda Mustard and David Rohde. They are based on reporting experiences each journalist had.

In your version, you will be given questions to discuss at each break in the scenario.

## Instructor Advance Reading

In addition to the reading below, please read the student reading materials. Each discussion question offers background reading to help you guide the discussion.

- “[The rules of conflict reporting are changing](#)” by Janine di Giovanni  
The Syrian conflict is making new norms in the world of conflict reporting. Struggles finding access and trading safety for story leads are just two of the ways that this form of reporting is evolving.
- “[Freelancer](#)” [Business Tips](#) – Ann Curry interview with David Rohde

Bio of Amanda Mustard

<http://www.amandamustard.com/blog>

Amanda Mustard is an independent photojournalist based in Bangkok, Thailand. Raised on a Christmas tree farm in Pennsylvania, she left a promising future as a marimbist to move to the Middle East to become a visual journalist. Mustard is a member of the Makeshift Magazine editorial board, an independent quarterly magazine about grassroots creativity and invention around the world. She is a founding member of the Koan Collective and a Frontline Freelance Register board member. She has received combat medical training through RISC (Reporters Instructed in Saving Colleagues). Mustard is an advocate for the protection and sustainability of the freelance community and gender equality in the media industry. Mustard has contributed work to clients and publications such as Associated Press, *New York Times*, *Monocle*, *TIME*, *National Geographic*, Al Jazeera, Airbnb, BuzzFeed, Mashable, Chrysler, *Telegraph*, *VICE*, Mondelēz International, and the *Christian Science Monitor*, among others. She is a contributor for Redux Pictures and can be found on the Wonderful Machine roster.

From: <http://www.amandamustard.com/>

Published Photos: <http://www.amandamustard.com/commissions>

Bio of David Rohde

David Rohde is the online news editor at *The New Yorker*; previously he was national security investigations editor at Reuters. He started his career as a production assistant at ABC World

News Tonight in 1990 and moved to the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1993. He moved to the *Christian Science Monitor*, where he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1996 for reporting on the Srebrenica massacre. From 2002 until 2005, he was based in India for *The New York Times*. In 2009 he shared a Pulitzer for the Times' coverage of Pakistan and Afghanistan. His most recent book is *Beyond War: Reimagining America's Role and Ambitions in a New Middle East*. In 2012, Rohde was named one of the International Press Institute's World Press Freedom Heroes. He also was awarded a 2016 James W. Foley Freedom Award.

### Student Advance Reading

- [“Why the Best War Reporter in a Generation Had to Suddenly Stop”](#) by Mark Warren
- [“In harm's way: Why war correspondents take risks and how they cope”](#) by Anthony Feinstein
- [“Five Hostages”](#) by Lawrence Wright
- [“How to Cover a Protest”](#) by Amanda Mustard
- [“Held by the Taliban: A Times' Reporter's Account”](#) by David Rohde
- [“In My Bag, Egypt Edition”](#) by Amanda Mustard
- [“Young Photojournalist Amanda Mustard on Life in Cairo”](#) by Elyssa Goodman

### Instructor Notes

Beneath each question to be posed to students, there are notes and bullet points intended to help instructors focus on the information, controversy and/or issues that students should learn and debate.

### Scenario One: Amanda Mustard

Instructor should give the background of the reporter who wrote this scenario and explain that both scenarios are real experiences that the reporters providing them went through. Distribute Handout 1 and give the students time to read it. Tell them for this scenario, they are playing a Western female freelance photographer.

### Handout 1: Egyptian Presidential Election

*It is 2012. A large gathering for the announcement of Egypt's first presidential election is expected in Tahrir Square. The announcement is planned to be around 10 a.m. during daylight hours, and tens of thousands are expected to gather in anticipation of the historic announcement, which is sure to be chaotic and emotional. You will be covering this “on spec” as a freelancer, i.e. not on assignment.*

*The nature of large crowds and protests in Egypt carries a very high risk for theft of equipment and physical harm for both genders. Unlike traditional conflict situations where there are “sides,” one of which you may be able to trust in terms of your safety, this is not that type of situation. In Egypt, crowds can be mixed with people of many different motives, and there is no*

*reliable group or side that you can trust with your physical wellbeing or equipment. Constant vigilance and awareness of your surroundings is critical while covering protests or clashes in Cairo, especially for women.*

*Nearly every woman has experienced sexual harassment or assault, mostly in everyday environments. In public gatherings, organized sexual assault and “mob rapes” have been used by anonymous groups of men as a direct tool to deter women, regardless of ethnicity or role, from being present in large political gatherings. Organized mob rapes primarily happen after dusk in Tahrir Square and the surrounding alleys, although harassment and assault are a possibility at all hours. It is not probable that witnesses will help in the case of a serious incident nor will the Egyptian authorities or legal system. In many cases, male onlookers join in.*

*Although covering such protests as a woman can be exhausting and distracting from the actual reporting work at hand, there are behavioral patterns and physical preparations that make the sexual violence less likely. As a male, there are also collegial measures that can be taken to ensure the safety of female colleagues.*

### **Discussion Questions for Handout 1**

**1. What would be your preparations for this assignment, knowing the background of similar gatherings at Tahrir Square? What would you wear?**

**For women:**

- Baggy gender-less T shirt (not button down)
- Men’s jeans (although some women preferred tighter jeans that are harder to grip and pull rather than ones that hide your form)
- Belt with the buckle flipped inside out, which is harder to remove
- Beanie to cover head and hair
- Smaller-sized sports bra to flatten chest
- Some women wear a one-piece swimsuit under clothes because it is hard to remove.

**For men and women:**

- In more dense, high-risk situations (including this scenario) I instead wore a plate-less level IIA armored vest under my shirt. A stab vest could serve the same purpose and be less sweaty
- Camera-bag was a waist pack worn sling-style across my chest/back for easy access but hard to steal from
- Sturdy shoes or beats, easy to run in

For women, the less feminine you look and the more you can blend into a crowd of men, the better. Although it’s acceptable to not wear a head cover as a woman in Egypt, not wearing something to cover your hair in a crowd can cause you to stick out and become easier to notice and/or track.

## **2. Would you take a defensive weapon?**

**Mustard's response:** Many people might suggest a defensive weapon of some sort, pepper spray or a stun gun. I had pepper spray in my bag (although not easily accessible and probably not much use) as well as a small stun gun that looked like a cell phone. But I chose to not carry the stun gun around as it requires close contact with someone to use, and in that situation it could be taken and used against you. The loud sound was probably the most useful thing about it, but I chose not to use it.

### [Handout 2: Egyptian Presidential Election, cont.](#)

*Although the announcement was meant to be around 10 a.m., the pre-announcement speaking lasted for hours, while tens of thousands of people sat, stood and milled around Tahrir Square. You are working your way around the gathering, shooting photos. The delay in the announcement meant there was a lot more time for people to notice you or watch you. You are with a group of four other photographers – one female and three male. You all agree to check in, have a “base” and keep an eye on each other. You won't shoot side by side but will try to keep each other within relatively close proximity, at least within sight.*

*During this time, someone throws a cup of boiling water at you. You don't know who did it or why, but you keep moving swiftly and don't return to that area. Later, a man pretends to trip and falls into you, his hands directly grabbing at your chest. His hands hit the thick, flat flak jacket and he is confused; he becomes embarrassed and goes back into the crowd. Otherwise the crowd seems mostly cordial and excited. You smile and act friendly so you don't appear to be a threat. When the announcement is finally made, celebratory chaos erupts. You dodge elbows while taking photos, but you get groped. You try to see who it was among the dancing and screaming crowd. You try to shuffle your way to the edge of the crowd. Throughout the effort, you continue to be groped, indiscriminate hands grabbing at your body. Finally, you make your way to a raised platform where you meet up with your colleagues. The female colleague also is being assaulted and a male colleague is trying to guard her.*

## **Discussion Questions for Handout 2**

**1. What were some of the tactics used to help remain unnoticed in the crowd? Did the reporter react appropriately to the groping? Should she have fought back?**

**Mustard's response:** It is extremely important to always keep moving and always have one eye on an exit plan. I cannot emphasize enough how vigilant and aware you must be of your surroundings, every pocket of space in the crowd, every hand around you, every person that might be following you. It is distracting from your work, but one moment of not paying attention can have a very high consequence. When your eyes are looking through your camera, you are missing what is happening around you outside of that frame. It's a vulnerable moment for a predator to act. Most of the time I would have a trusted activist friend who would be at the protests anyway come as my 'bodyguard' to guard the immediate vicinity around my body so I

could focus more on shooting. This was essential to minimizing the risk of physical assault.

**Mustard's response, follow-up:** I assume that because of the delay of the announcement and the extra hours I spent being made more familiar to the crowd, it gave predators the time to position themselves and plan to assault me and other women at the inevitable moment of celebratory disorder. I don't think I could have done much differently to avoid what happened, other than take into account the added risk that the delay caused.

### [Handout 3: Egyptian Presidential Election, conclusion](#)

*The group of three journalists acknowledges the need to get out immediately and push quickly to an opening in the crowd until they can get to an exit street. They quickly disperse and you rush home, deciding the risk is not worth the likelihood of physical harm. To ensure a safe trip home, you move quickly as if in a maze – not a direct route – to get to your home a few blocks away. The winding loops through the streets ensure that you aren't being followed before you enter your front door.*

### **Discussion Questions for Handout 3**

**1. Was the “buddy” system set up with colleagues enough of a plan? And how important was it that there be male reporters in the group? Could the female journalists have grouped together effectively?**

Mustard's response: Having support from male colleagues is critical. I never covered a protest or clash by myself; it was simply a known precaution that journalists took in Cairo to always work in pairs and have a plan to touch base with a small group. Male colleagues should always keep an eye on their female colleagues if this arrangement is agreed upon. While this is obviously not mandatory, it is the moral and ethical responsibility we should share in keeping our colleagues and ourselves safe working in Egypt. Lastly, if the risk is too high or something doesn't feel right, then don't cover the event. Despite professional and sometimes collegial pressure to take risks to get the story, you have nothing to prove to anyone (especially if a publication is not willing to put in place measures to properly protect you). No photo is worth being raped or dying for. Best to be honest about the risks to yourself, editors and colleagues. Do your research, and trust your instincts. Err on the side of caution.

**Mustard's response, follow-up:** If you are on assignment, encourage your publication to have a risk assessment, check-in plan and full protocol in place in case something happens. Being freelance can make these things difficult to secure, but with industry tools and movements such as the ACOS Alliance, there are easy ways to show editors what the best practices are to keep journalists safe.

## Scenario Two: David Rohde

Instructor should give the background of the reporter who wrote this scenario. Distribute Handout 1 and give the students time to read it. Tell them for this scenario they are playing a Western male reporter for a large news organization.

### Handout 1: Afghanistan

*It is 2001. Three months after the 9/11 attacks, you have been sent by your news organization to Afghanistan to cover the American effort to topple the Taliban. After flying to Russia and then Tajikistan by commercial jet, you board a Northern Alliance helicopter for the final leg, arriving in an area just north of Kabul controlled by anti-Taliban forces known as the Northern Alliance. After several weeks of waiting, a commander of the anti-Taliban forces tells you that his troops will finally launch an offensive the following morning to break through Taliban lines.*

*In an effort to reassure you, the commander offers to allow you, a photographer and your Afghan translator to ride inside an armored personnel carrier with his Northern Alliance troops. The armored vehicle appears to be about 30 years old. Other groups of soldiers are moving forward on foot. The area is littered with mines.*

*Competition for the story is intense. Fifty journalists from the United States and around the world are in the same area also covering the attempt to drive the Taliban from Kabul. Other journalists are positioned with other Northern Alliance troops nearby. The commander says you must decide if you and your colleagues will stay behind, get in the armored personnel carrier or advance with his soldiers on foot.*

### **Discussion Questions for Handout 1**

- 1. How important is it for reporters to be inside the attack itself? Isn't it simpler to stay behind and see the outcome of the fighting? What factors would you take into account in making the decision?**
- 2. Six weeks after the 2001 attacks, Americans are eager for news about whether the Taliban can be defeated. Your editor says to be safe but you also know competition for the story is great. How should editors convey and actually act on their responsibility for your safety to ensure you believe that that is the first consideration?**

### Handout 2: Afghanistan, cont.

*You, the photographer and translator get into the armored personnel carrier. The vehicle lurches forward. After 60 seconds, the vehicle suddenly stops, opens its rear doors and all of the Northern Alliance soldiers jump out. You decide that you, the photographer and the Afghan translator should get out as well. Standing behind the vehicle, you hear bullets zipping through the air and see the anti-Taliban fighters begin to run forward. Your photographer dashes ahead*



*with the fighters. You and your translator join them but after advancing 50 feet your translator shouts for you to stop. The translator says that rushing forward any farther is too dangerous. Your photographer rushes ahead with the Afghan soldiers. You must decide whether to stay with the translator or rush forward with your photographer.*

## **Discussion Questions for Handout 2**

### **1. From all of your readings on safety tips and risk assessments, what are the factors to consider in making this decision?**

Rohde's response: I stayed with the translator while the photographer went forward. I felt that I had more of an obligation to stay with the local journalist than to stay with the photographer, who I hoped would be protected by the Northern Alliance soldiers. It was the right decision to make ethically, but I missed a major story as a result. Photographer Tyler Hicks rushed forward; because he was so close to the Afghan fighters, Hicks was able to take a series of award-winning photographs that showed the Northern Alliance soldiers capture a Taliban fighter and execute him.

Here is a link to the photographs from [Pictures of the Year International](#).

Here is the text story that accompanied the photographs:

- [“A Nation Challenged: The Front Lines; Executions and Looting as Alliance Nears Kabul”](#) by David Rohde

### **2. Is there a different calculation for a photographer or videographer compared with a reporter?**

Rohde's response: Yes, photographers often have to be closer to the action than the reporters. I often feel that photographers are pressured too much and take too many risks.

### **3. But does that mean the photographer made the right decision? Did the reporter have any responsibility to try to dissuade the photographer? Would your answer change if he had been injured or killed?**

**Rohde's response:** At the time, the photographs seemed like an amazing story. Looking back many years later, I don't think the photographs changed the nature of the war. If Tyler had been wounded or killed, it would have not been worth the risk. I believe we took too large a risk.

## [Handout 3: Afghanistan, cont.](#)

*You, your photographer and translator have entered Kabul with victorious anti-Taliban forces. Crowds of young Afghan men and boys enthusiastically welcome the anti-Taliban fighters and the dozens of foreign journalists mixed in with them. Your translator tells you that you can visit a local park where the bodies of dead Taliban fighters have been found, a house where Arab militants lived, or an abandoned office of the Taliban Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice – religious police who arrested women who did not wear veils in public. Your translator asks you where you want to go.*

### Discussion Questions for Handout 3

**1. Pick a student to support each of the four choices – why would that be the best location to get a good story? And how would you assess the risks in each location? What would you do in each location to try to ensure your safety?**

- Use the safety checklists provided in Seminar 2 to prompt students.

### [Handout 4: Afghanistan, conclusion](#)

*You go to an abandoned house where Afghans say Arabs lived. When you enter the house itself, hundreds of pieces of paper are scattered across the floor. Your translator looks through the papers and tells you that some of them appear to be lists of recruits. Others appear to be grocery lists. On an upper floor, you find a manual to a Microsoft Flight Simulator program and what appear to be instructions on how to build bombs. Hundreds of pages litter the house. You must decide whether to collect the papers and bring them to your hotel or leave them.*

### Discussion Questions for Handout 4

**1. What are the reasons you should not collect the papers? What are the reasons you should collect the papers?**

Discuss the legal and ethical implications of removing objects from private homes, then broaden that discussion to how or if those implications change in the home of what appears to be an enemy combatant. Does it matter that the house appeared to have been abandoned?

**Rohde's response:** At that point, looting was occurring in part of the city and no new government was in place. Fearing that the documents would be stolen and no one would know what they said, I collected the papers and temporarily brought them to my hotel room for translation and examination. That night, I wrote the following story:

- [“A Nation Challenged: Kabul; In Two Abandoned Kabul Houses, Some Hints of Al-Qaeda Presence”](#) by David Rohde

Over the next several days, I collected several thousands more pages of documents from several other abandoned houses where foreign militants once lived. When U.S. officials arrived in Kabul, they complained that the documents contained valuable information that might prevent another terrorist attack on the United States. They asked that the documents be handed over to the U.S. embassy.

**2. What are the reasons you should hand the papers over to the U.S. government? What are the reasons you should not give them to the U.S. government officials?**

**Rohde's response:** I did not want it to appear that I was collecting information on behalf of the U.S. government and found a middle-ground solution. I photocopied the several thousand pages of documents, returned them to the houses where they were found, told officials the documents were back in the houses and brought the copies of the documents back to the United States.

Combining the papers from Kabul with papers found by a colleague in abandoned Taliban houses in northern Afghanistan, we wrote this story:

- [“A Nation Challenged: Qaeda’s Grocery Lists and Manuals of Killing”](#) by David Rohde and C.J. Chivers

### Instructor Notes

**Read this final comment from Rohde, which should prompt a discussion on weighing risks and when a potentially dangerous assignment is worth doing – and when it is not.**

#### **Final comment from David Rohde:**

I was detained twice in my career while reporting overseas. In 1995, I was jailed by Bosnian Serb police for 10 days after I was arrested at the site of a mass grave where Bosnian Serb forces executed Bosnian Muslim prisoners.

In 2008, a Taliban commander kidnapped me and two Afghan colleagues after inviting us to an interview outside Kabul for a book I was writing about the post-2001 effort in Afghanistan. The commander, who had been interviewed twice previously by European journalists but had not abducted them, took us to the tribal areas of Pakistan and held us captive there for seven months. The Taliban kidnapping ended my career as a foreign correspondent. On a personal level, I decided I had put my wife, family and editors through enough. I now work as an investigative editor and reporter in New York for Reuters.

I urge young journalists to weight two things before taking a risk in the field: the importance of the story you can potentially get versus the danger you will face. Honestly ask yourself what is the best possible story that you might get. And then honestly ask yourself whether the risk is so high that you are being reckless.

In hindsight, taking a risk to help expose the mass execution of 8,000 men and boys around the town of Srebrenica in Bosnia in 1995 was worth it. Going to an interview with a Taliban commander in 2008 was a mistake that put my family, friends and editors through hell. I will always regret it.

### Bonus Viewing

If there is time, the embedded link provides a one-hour speech by Kathy Gannon of the Associated Press, who was seriously injured while covering Afghanistan, [accepting the James W. Foley Medill Medal for Courage in Journalism](#). You also could show just a few parts of the speech.