



# Remembering to forget: Covering terror at the Taj

By [Sara Sidner](#), CNN  
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CNN's Sara Sidner shown reporting from Mumbai one year ago outside the Taj Hotel.

**(CNN)** -- My phone and Blackberry were dead. I plugged them in and got ready for bed. I was dead tired after working on a month's worth of business stories for a special I can't even remember now. It was 10 p.m. I wanted to go to bed early for once.

It was a huge mistake, one I haven't repeated since.

### STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Sidner recalls learning about the attacks
- Sidner arrived in Mumbai from New Delhi and witnessed an explosion
- Journalists struggled to report amid confusion and violence

My eyes popped open at 2 a.m. Out of sheer habit I reached for my Blackberry. It was alive. My heart raced. I hadn't heard it buzzing or my phone ringing. Like I said I was dead tired. The last message flashed "Please call bureau NOW!!!!." The one before that said, "Are you watching this?" I fumbled with my phone. The flurry of messages kept coming. Scrolling down to the first one that night it said something about a gang shooting in Mumbai outside the Taj Hotel and not to worry. I was hundreds of kilometers away in New Delhi and there was a crew in Mumbai. But the messages became more and more urgent. Something was terribly wrong. I called in.

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Suddenly, I was packing in the dark (because the power had gone out in Delhi, again). Three hours later I was on a flight heading for, Maximum City, Mumbai's apt nickname. By then I knew something about what had happened. The reports were that gunmen had stormed several places in Mumbai. The phrase Terrorist Attack was on TV screens. My thoughts raced.



Video: Hero of the Taj

My photographer Rajesh Mishra and I landed in [Mumbai](#) and headed straight to the beautiful but by then badly damaged Taj Mahal Palace and Tower. A high-ranking local police official had told us the siege was all over now. I had no idea that was more of a prediction than a statement of fact.



Video: Memories of Mumbai

When we got to the scene it was quiet. The official must have been right, I thought. Gathering information on the phone outside the hotel I tried to understand what had just happened to this vibrant city. Normally it takes at least an hour to travel from the airport to the hotel. But we were at our destination in less than 30 minutes. Mumbai was a ghost town. For anyone who knows this city, it was impossible to conceive, but it was true.



Video: Mumbai survivor struggles

My Blackberry buzzed; it was time to go live. The first two live shots were quiet: A normal debrief with the anchors, talking through what had happened, as far as we knew it then. I finished and looked down at my Blackberry again. I was about to send a message to the company. BOOM. The sound exploded in my ears. My body reacted on its own, lurching down and twisting toward the sound. I didn't think, I was on automatic pilot. My first instinct was to talk down the microphone, which I was still tethered to and which was still connected with CNN. I said something like, "you might want to put me on the air NOW."



Timeline: India terror attacks

My sense of the story had been shattered by a deafening explosion inside the Taj. Clearly it was not over. The day became progressively more intense. It turned out there were still hostages inside. There were still gunmen inside. And it was nowhere near over.

Outside there were a flurry of stunned reporters struggling with

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cables and notepads, cameras and phones trying to get the information back ASAP. We all stood in a row like sitting ducks. There were no barriers, no police tape, and nothing to stop anyone from getting too close. There was an abundance of confusion. Authorities from one police agency or another would report that it was over but their credibility was damaged when explosions would erupt repeatedly, followed by gunfire.

The hours flashed by. I barely left my post for the next 48 hours. I certainly did not have time or the ability to sleep. The blasts and bullets kept flying from Thursday night through early Saturday morning. There were people inside, in the middle of an enduring nightmare. Some had already lost their lives. The Taj Mahal Palace and Tower Hotel was alive with the sounds and sights of terror. At around 7:30 in the morning on Saturday the adrenaline was still pumping as I watched the windows on the ground floor of the hotel burst into flames. Police began running. I saw a body being pulled out of one of the windows. The way it was being handled I was sure it had to be one of the gunmen that police and security forces were so desperately trying to catch or kill. For the first time, many of us could sense the end was near.

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In a little more than an hour it was. The Taj was left with the scars of war, dozens of families were now left with nothing but memories of those killed, and stunned survivors were trying to make it home.

I have never liked anniversaries very much -- even pleasant ones. The occasions have always felt forced. I feel the same way today. I don't want to be forced to remember those terrible days because there is not a chance that I could ever forget.

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