Iraq: The Assassination of Journalists and War Correspondents. Suppressing the Truth

By Dirk Adriaensens

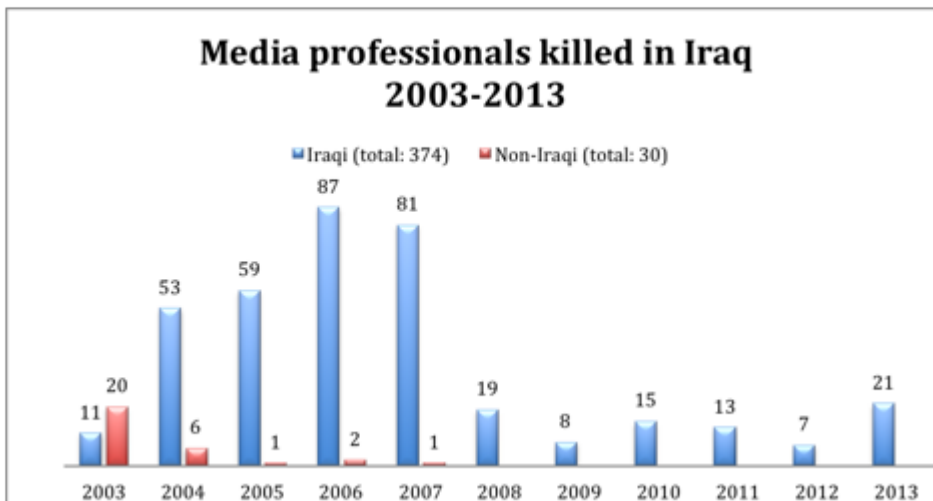Region: Middle East & North Africa
Theme: Media Disinformation

We condemn the repeated attacks on journalists in Iraq and we urge the competent authorities to carry out independent and impartial investigations in order to shed light on the circumstances and identify those responsible.

On January 7, 2015, the Xinhua press Agence reported that 14 journalists were killed in Iraq in 2014, citing the Iraqi Journalists' Syndicate:

"A total of 14 journalists were killed in the violence-ridden Iraq last year, an Iraqi journalists' body said on Tuesday.

The latest body count brings the death toll of journalists in the Middle East country to 406 since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003.

"Some media organizations and houses of journalists were not safe from some abuses, whether by security forces or by unidentified parties," said a report made by the Iraqi Journalists' Syndicate.

According to the report, more than 23 offenses had been registered against the journalists during the year, ranging from assassination attempts, detaining, beating and raids on their headquarters and houses to prevent them from reporting.

Such killings and other offenses came despite some positive indicators in general, like growing openness shown by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's new Iraqi government toward the freedom of the journalistic work, including his decision to drop all pending government

lawsuits against journalists and media outlets.

The prevailing atmosphere of democracy, which greatly enhanced the freedom of expression, in addition to the official and popular support to the journalists, were not enough to prevent the series of violence against the journalists, making the journalistic work in Iraq fraught with risks, the report added."

The Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ) lists only 6 of these victims in its database. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) lists only 4 killed media profesionals.

Question: Why do these organizations not contact their partners of the Journalists' syndicate? Year after year after year both CPJ and RSF persevere in their evil course of downgrading the number of assassinated colleagues. Read: [2013: Another year of slaughter in Iraq claims the lives of at least 21 media professionals](#).

Here are 13 reported cases of assassinated media professionals in 2014:

[Muhanad al-Akidi](#), 13 October 2014 *(not reported by CPJ, not reported by RSF)*

Iraqi Kurdish journalist working for the Sada news agency, was killed Monday at the Al-Ghazlani camp in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. Islamic State (IS) militants on Monday evening executed an Iraqi-Kurdish journalist in north-west Iraq.

Muhannad Akidi was shot in the head and killed by IS militants in Alghazlani camp, south of Mosul, a representative of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) said in a statement.

Akidi was kidnapped two months ago by IS in Mosul. He worked as a reporter for a local news agency and presented programs on domestic television.

Medical staff in Mosul on Monday night were said to be preparing his body to be returned to his family, according to the Abu Dhabi based Erem News.

[Raed Al-Azzawi,](#) 10 October 2014.

Islamic State militants killed al-Azzawi, a cameraman for the local Sama Salaheddin channel, six weeks after he was kidnapped, according to [the station](#), [news reports](#), and the [Iraqi Journalists Syndicate](#). Al-Azzawi was killed with his brother and two other residents of Samra village, near Tikrit, the reports said. There were conflicting reports on how he was killed. Family members said he was shot, according to [Al-Jazeera](#), but other [news reports](#) cited an anonymous security source saying the victims were beheaded.

The journalist was kidnapped by Islamic State militants in early September 2014, the director of the station, Marwan Naji Jabara, told CPJ. There were conflicting reports on the exact date of his kidnapping.

It is not clear why Islamic State militants kidnapped and killed al-Azzawi. Jabara told CPJ that al-Azzawi was accused of helping the Iraqi Air Force target Islamic State positions, an allegation Jabara denied. Islamist militant groups including the Islamic State have[previously accused](#) journalists of spying as an excuse or rationale for abducting them, according to [CPJ research](#).

CPJ has documented numerous cases of Iraqi insurgents targeting journalists who have any contact with government officials, including the security forces. Jabara told CPJ that the channel's support of the Iraqi armed forces leads to constant threats by insurgents, including the Islamic State group. After insurgents took control of Tikrit in June 2014, Sama Salaheddin's office was raided and its equipment looted, Jabara told CPJ.

Al-Azzawi had also previously worked in the media center for the governor of Salaheddin province, according to news reports, and he may have been targeted for that reason as well. Insurgents have previously targeted individuals working for the government as press officers, according to [CPJ research](#).

It is also possible al-Azzawi was kidnapped after criticizing the group. Jabara told CPJ that some citizens in Samra were upset with Islamic State's control over their village, especially as it drew [bombing](#) from the Iraqi military. According to Jabara, al-Azzawi told his friends that the militants, including one of his relatives who is a senior leader in the group, should leave Samra to stop the bombing.

[Safaa al-Khaiyatt](#), 08 September 2014 *(not reported by CPJ, not reported by RSF)*

An Iraqi journalist and two policemen were killed in two attacks in Iraq's northern Nineveh and Kirkuk provinces on Wednesday, local police source said.

The policemen were killed and two others wounded in a bomb explosion near their patrol in the town of al-Zab, about 200 km north of Baghdad, the source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity.

In Nineveh province, unidentified gunmen with their silenced guns shot dead Safaa al-Khaiyatt, a religious programs presenter in the local television Mowselya, as he was leaving his house in the provincial capital city of Mosul, some 400 km north of Baghdad, a local police source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity.

Khaiyatt was heading to his work at a television station when the gunmen attacked him, he said.

The middle-aged journalist was the father of five girls and one boy.

[Riyadh al-Sarray](#), 07 September 2014 *(not reported by CPJ, not reported by RSF)*

The incident came a day after gunmen in Baghdad killed Riyadh al-Sarray, presenter of political and religious programs in the state-run television Iraqia.

[Leyla Yildizhan (Deniz Firat),](#) 08 August 2014

Yildizhan, a Kurdish journalist who also goes by Deniz Firat, was killed when shrapnel from a mortar shell hit her in the chest, according to [news reports](#). Yildizhan was covering the clashes in the Mukhmur district between Kurdish forces and insurgents with the Islamic State, an Al-Qaeda splinter group formerly known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham, the Firat News Agency [said](#).

Firat, who was from the Kurdish city of Van in eastern Turkey, was embedded with Kurdish forces, according to Rahman Gharib, general coordinator for the local press freedom group Metro Center to Defend Journalists, and news [reports](#). She was reporting for the [Firat](#) News

Agency, an outlet based outside Turkey pro-Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) station. She also reported for other several pro-Kurdish TV stations, including Sterk TV, Med NUÇE, and Ronahi TV.

Firat's body was sent back to her hometown in Çaldıran district of Van in Turkey for her funeral, according to news reports.

Khalid Ali Hamada, 15 June 2014

Hamada, cameraman for Al-Ahad TV, was killed in an attack in northern Diyala province, the Iraqi Journalists Syndicate and Iraqi news outlets reported. Moataz Jamil, a correspondent for the station, was also injured in the attack. Al-Ahad TV is affiliated with the Shia militant group League of the Righteous, according to Phillip Smyth, a researcher at the University of Maryland who focuses on Shia Islamist groups.

The station reported that Hamada was killed as the crew reported on military operations in Diyala province between what it called the "Islamic Resistance" and "terrorists." CNN reported that Iraqi security forces, backed by Shia militias, clashed with suspected ISIS gunmen in Diyala that day.

The deadly attack came amid escalating clashes between the Iraqi government and its allies against an insurgency spearheaded by Islamic State, an Al-Qaeda splinter group formerly known as Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS).

There were conflicting reports on how Hamada was killed, with some outlets reporting the journalists were hit by a mortar shell while others said gunmen drove up to them and opened fire with automatic weapons.

Al-Ahad TV did not provide details on the attack or an update on the health status of Jamil, the wounded journalist. The station did not immediately respond to CPJ's e-mailed request for more information.

It was not clear who was responsible for the attack or whether the journalists were targeted specifically. Some Twitter accounts claiming to support ISIS rejoiced at the news of the attack, declaring the "lions of Islamic State" were responsible. CPJ was unable to verify the claims.

Kamran Najm Ibrahim, June 2014. *(not reported by CPJ, not reported by RSF)*

Iraq has consistently been among the most dangerous countries for journalists, who are victims of threats and violence from security forces and armed groups. However, the security situation has deteriorated considerably since ISIS began a major offensive in June. Cameraman Khalid Ali of Al-Ahad TV and freelance photographer Kamran Najm Ibrahim both lost their lives in June while covering the fighting between pro-government forces and militants in Diyala province and Kirkuk.

Hammam Mohammed, 09 April 2014 *(not reported by CPJ, not reported by RSF)*

Photographer of Altaghyir satellite TV channel, Hammam Mohammed was killed due to the fall of an army cannon shell on his home in downtown Ramadi city capital of Anbar province. Source:

[Mohamed Baidawi](#), 24 March 2014. *(not reported by CPJ)*

Reporters Without Borders is dismayed to learn that **Mohamed Baidawi**, Radio *Free Iraq*'s Baghdad bureau chief, was shot dead in Baghdad on 22 March, while Radio *Babel* journalist **Raji Hamadallah** was badly injured in a shooting attack yesterday in Babil province.

Baidawi [was trying to enter](#) the high security "Green Zone" where the Radio Free Iraq's office is located when he got into an argument at a checkpoint with a member of the presidential guard, who hit him several times and finally shot him in the head.

This well-known journalist's murder has shocked Iraqi media workers. The presidential guardsman has been arrested and an investigation is under way to determination the circumstances of the shooting. Reporters Without Borders offers its condolences to the victim's family and colleagues.

Hamadallah was [badly injured in a targeted shooting](#) yesterday outside his home in Qada Jalba, in Babil province, 90 km south of Baghdad. Unidentified gunmen shot him several times before fleeing.

"We condemn the repeated attacks on journalists in Iraq and we urge the competent authorities to carry out independent and impartial investigations in order to shed light on the circumstances and identify those responsible," said Lucie Morillon, head of research and advocacy at Reporters Without Borders.

[Muthanna Abdel Hussein,](#) 10 March 2014

Abdel Hussein, a cameraman for the state-run Al-Iraqiya TV station, was killed in a suicide bombing at a police checkpoint in Iraq's Babil province, according to [news reports](#). The explosion killed dozens of Iraqis, including Khaled Abdel Thamer, another cameraman for the station.

The blast destroyed dozens of cars waiting to pass through the checkpoint, trapping some victims in their burning vehicles. It is unclear if the journalists were driving a vehicle or how near they were to the checkpoint at the time of the explosion. There were conflicting reports on the number of casualties, but a [Reuters report](#) citing police and medical sources said that as many as 45 people were killed and 157 injured. Abdel Hussein's mother told Reuters that she identified her son by his socks and shoes.

The Iraq Journalists Syndicate [reported](#) that Abdel Hussein and Abdel Thamer were covering preparations for next month's parliamentary elections. The elections would be the first since American forces left the country in 2011 and would be held despite a significant spike in violence across the country.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but Iraqi officials said they believed Al-Qaeda was responsible. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki ordered the formation of a committee to investigate the explosion, according to [news reports](#).

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Firas Mohammed Attiyah, 20 January 2014 (Not reported by RSF)

Attiyah, a correspondent with the pro-government news station Fallujah TV, was killed when a bomb exploded at the side of the road in the city of Khalidiya, according to news reports. At the time of the attack, the journalist was accompanying a government patrol that was headed to a ceremony for the reopening of a police station, according to the local Journalistic Freedoms Observatory and other press freedom groups.

The bomb also injured Anbar TV correspondent Muayad Ibrahim, the Iraqi Journalists Syndicate said.

Attiyah had been reporting on clashes between the Iraqi army and the Al-Qaeda affiliated Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) in Anbar province, according to news reports. In late December, Sunni militants–some linked to ISIS–launched an offensive against security forces in Anbar province, taking at least partial control of both major cities in the province, Ramadi and Fallujah.

Fallujah TV, which was founded in part to counter Al-Qaeda's influence in the city, posted on Facebook a picture of the journalist's body draped in an Iraqi flag.

Mohammed Ramadan al-Hadidi, 12 Januari 2014 *(not reported by CPJ, not reported by RSF)*

Gunmen shot and killed a local television presenter outside his home in Mosul.

Mohammed Ramadan al-Hadidi, who hosted a show on herbal medicine on Nineveh al-Ghad TV, was shot by unidentified gunmen as he left his house in the western part of the city.

A local journalist told CNN that the journalists union received a text message Sunday threatening to target journalists in Nineveh province. The message was signed by al Qaeda-linked groups in the province.

In another incident Sunday, an Iraqi journalist was wounded along with a driver when a

bomb attached to the car they were in detonated south of Mosul. The journalist works for the city's Mosuliya TV channel.

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