

2 Iraqi Journalists Killed as U.S. Forces Clash With Militias



Ali Abbas/European Pressphoto Agency

Two Iraqi journalists working for Reuters were killed in Baghdad on Thursday. Their van, above, was hit near the scene of a firefight.

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BAGHDAD, July 12 — Clashes in a southeastern neighborhood here between the American military and Shiite militias on Thursday left at least 16 people dead, including two Reuters journalists who had driven to the area to cover the turbulence, according to an official at the Interior Ministry.

The two Reuters staff members, both of them Iraqis, were killed when troops on an American helicopter shot into the area where the two had just gotten out of their car, said witnesses who spoke to an Agence France-Presse photographer who arrived at the scene shortly after their bodies were taken away.

The Reuters employees were Namir Noor-Eldeen, 22, a photographer, and Saeed Chmagh, 40, a driver.

“When we reached the spot where Namir was killed, the people told us that two journalists had been killed in an air attack an hour earlier,” said Ahmad Sahib, the Agence France-Presse photographer, who had been traveling in a car several blocks behind Mr. Noor-Eldeen but was delayed by the chaos in the area. He said he was in touch with Mr. Noor-Eldeen by cellphone until his colleague was killed.

“They had arrived, got out of the car and started taking pictures, and people gathered,” Mr. Sahib said. “It looked like the American helicopters were firing against any gathering in the area, because when I got out of my car and started taking pictures, people gathered and an American helicopter fired a few rounds, but they hit the houses nearby and we ran for cover.”

The American military said in a statement late Thursday that 11 people had been killed: nine insurgents and two civilians. According to the statement, American troops were conducting a raid when they were hit by small-arms fire and rocket-propelled grenades. The American troops called in reinforcements and attack helicopters. In the ensuing fight, the statement said, the two Reuters employees and nine insurgents were killed.

“There is no question that coalition forces were clearly engaged in combat operations against a hostile force,” said Lt. Col. Scott Bleichwehl, a spokesman for the multinational forces in Baghdad.

The military command offered condolences to the families of the civilians who were killed during the combat action, the statement said.

Officials at the Interior Ministry and at a Baghdad bank drastically revised their account of a large robbery at the Dar Es Salaam bank on Wednesday, saying that there had been confusion about how much of the stolen money was Iraqi dinars and how much was United States dollars. The robbers made off with 282 million Iraqi dinars, equal to about \$225,000, and \$366,000 American dollars; on Wednesday the police reported that \$282 million had been stolen.

In Baghdad, violence racked the southern neighborhood of Saydiya, where the police picked up 17 of the 28 bodies found in the capital on Thursday. The neighborhood has become a battleground over the past several months, with Sunni Arab extremists controlling many of its streets and killing people who refuse to help them.

Shiite Mahdi Army militiamen allied with the anti-American cleric [Muktada al-Sadr](#) have been attacking the area as well, residents said. They described sometimes arriving home after work and being unable to approach their front doors because of gunfights in the streets.

A suicide bomber attacked a wedding in Tal Afar, a town 30 miles north of Mosul, killing four people and wounding six, said Brig. Gen. Mohamed al-Wakaa of the Mosul police. The groom was an Iraqi policeman. A car bomb targeting a police patrol in central Mosul killed one policeman and wounded eight, General Wakaa said.

And in central [Iraq](#), gunmen opened fire on a police checkpoint on the road near Samarra, killing four policemen and two Iraqi soldiers.

In Diwaniya in southern Iraq, American helicopters fired on six men burying a roadside bomb, killing five of them, said Maj. Marc Young, a spokesman for the Multinational Force-Iraq. A hospital worker in the city said the five men were connected to the movement allied with Mr. Sadr. Later in the day, Mr. Sadr's supporters walked through the streets mourning the death of their colleagues, chanting anti-American slogans and promising revenge, said witnesses who watched the procession.

An American soldier was killed Thursday east of Baghdad while involved in combat operations, the military said in a statement.

The two journalists who were killed Thursday had been gathering information for a report on weightlifting early in the day, and then they heard that something was happening in the Ameen neighborhood and drove there to learn more about it, according to a Reuters official.

According to a Reuters report after the incident, some people at the scene said that American troops fired into the area from a helicopter, and a police report stated that the American attack killed the two journalists and nine other people.

Mr. Noor-Eldeen, who was not married, was originally from Mosul and first worked for Reuters there, moving on to Baghdad after receiving threats. Mr. Chmagh had worked for Reuters since before the United States-led invasion in 2003 and had four children. He also supported his sister's family after her husband was killed by insurgents.

"Noor-Eldeen and Chmagh's outstanding contribution to reporting on the unfolding events in Iraq has been vital," said the chief executive of Reuters, Tom Glocer, in a statement.

"They stand alongside other colleagues in Reuters who have died doing a job that they believe in," he added. Six Reuters employees have been killed in Iraq since the invasion.

The Office of the [United Nations](#) High Commissioner for Refugees made an urgent plea on Thursday for money to help it increase aid for Iraqi refugees, whose numbers continue to rise. Nearly two million Iraqis are displaced within the country and nearly two million more have left, fleeing primarily to neighboring countries. About 2,000 Iraqis a day flee their homes, according to the United Nations appeal.

Qais Mizher and Ahmad Fadama contributed reporting from Baghdad, and Iraqi employees of The New York Times from Diwaniya, Mosul, Tikrit, Samarra and Diyala.