

Iraq: the forgotten victims

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Reuters' bureau chief in Iraq Dean Yates has said that his staff felt they had lost both their "little brother" and "elder brother" following the deaths last week of photographer Namir Noor-Eldeen and his driver Saeed Chmagh.

The two men, aged 22 and 40 respectively, were killed last Thursday in eastern Baghdad during a period of clashes between US forces and militants in the area.

On Monday, Reuters called for the US military to conduct a "full and objective" investigation into the killings after emerging evidence cast doubt over whether there was fighting at the time.

Up to August 2005, Reuters had lost four journalists in the current Iraq conflict – all apparently to US fire.

On Saturday, it was discovered that a Reuters translator had also been killed last week by an unknown gunman.

Also on Saturday, The New York Times confirmed that one of its Iraqi journalists had been killed – Khalid Hassan.

Noor-Eldeen came from a family of journalists: both his father and elder brother were in the industry.



Credit: Reuters/Namir Noor-Eldeen

This photograph, taken by Namir Noor-Eldeen, shows how journalists are risking their lives to cover the Iraq conflict

The war shifted him from his studies in Mosul, where he joined Reuters in 2004. He fought for his right to report events there despite growing violence, and was punched in 2005 by a US military patrol member trying to prevent him from photographing an incident.

Yates said: "Without a doubt, Namir was one of the most popular guys in the office here. He was young, enthusiastic and incredibly keen to show his senior colleagues that he was a great photographer.

"He had a real sparkling personality; he was always smiling and he was like our little brother. Namir was one of the youngest members of the team, and that made it harder to come to terms with our loss.

"One thing everyone has mentioned time and time again is how unselfish he was, how willing he was to help others and he would be the first to put up his hand for an assignment.

I'll always remember his spirit of youth; he had a streak of mischievousness and a great sense of humour."

Chmagh was a father of four who joined Reuters Baghdad before the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Yates said: "He had a very calm and reassuring air about him. He was relaxed and had an easy smile.

"The photographers and cameramen will all tell you he made them feel safe because he just had this way about him.

"Like Namir, he was a very social person. We held a memorial ceremony for them last night which was attended by journalists from other media in Baghdad, and they said they had lost their elder brother and little brother.

"We are very cautious about sending people out to cover street clashes, because the situation is so fluid and you don't know who's fighting who.

It's fair to say over the years we have tightened up our requirements and rules.

"But even when these things are adhered to, there are going to be times and circumstances in Iraq when the unthinkable will happen."



Credit: Reuters/Ali Jasim

Iraqi journalists offer prayers for fellow journalists killed in Iraq during a ceremony held in Baghdad in June

? The New York Times in Baghdad confirmed on Saturday that a "valued" member of its news staff, Khalid Hassan, had been killed on his way to work.

Hassan, 23, was killed in the Seiydia neighbourhood. The circumstances of his death are still unclear.

New York Times executive editor Bill Keller said: "Hassan was part of a large, sometimes unsung community of Iraqi newsgatherers, translators and support staff, who take enormous risks every day to help us comprehend their country's struggle and torment.

"Without them, Americans' understanding of what is happening on the ground in Iraq would be much, much poorer. To The New York Times, Khalid was family and his death is heartbreaking."

New York Times foreign editor Susan Chira added: "Khalid was a dedicated member of our Baghdad bureau and Times family. Like all of our staff, he shouldered enormous risks with great courage.

"He was a computer whiz who delighted in practical jokes, but was also the sole supporter of a large, extended family.

"His sense of mischief, as well as his devotion to his job and his family, touched everyone who knew him. His death diminishes us all."