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Photographer killed in Iraq



Above: An image from a car bomb explosion earlier this year, shot by Namir Noor-Eldeen © Reuters.

A photojournalist has been killed in Baghdad during a reported helicopter attack by US forces.

Author: [Simon Bainbridge](#)

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Namir Noor-Eldeen, a 22-year-old Iraqi photographer working for Reuters, was killed alongside his driver, Saeed Chmagh, also employed by the London-based agency, which has now lost six employees since the 2003 allied invasion.

According to preliminary police reports, the two were killed alongside nine others in a 'random American bombardment' last Thursday (12 July).

Reuters says witnesses had seen Noor-Eldeen and the Chmagh, who also worked as a camera assistant, around the area where a US helicopter fired on a minivan.

Noor-Eldeen was one of the first to be trained by Reuters as part of the agency's strategy to employ photographers with better local knowledge and access to areas that had become too dangerous for Western photographers to work in. Reuters' then chief photographer in the region, Chris Helgren, instigated the plan, which involved setting up a new bureau.

Speaking to Colin Pantall for BJP, (22/29 December 2004), Helgren commented that Noor-Eldeen had been one of the star recruits from this initial recruitment stage, saying: 'In Mosul, he started from nothing and is now the pre-eminent photographer in Northern Iraq.'

'Once again we are left mourning colleagues who have met an untimely death while doing their job in Iraq,' commented Reuters chief executive Tom Glocer. 'Our sympathies and thoughts are with their families, friends and colleagues.'

- Chris Helgren of Reuters pays tribute to his fallen colleagues:

'In the world's most dangerous country, where the death toll is more of a statistic than tangible reality, it would be easy to shuffle off the memories of another two journalists. But this is more difficult given the body of work produced by photographer Namir Noor-Eldeen, who was killed along with long time friend and driver Saeed Chmagh.'

'When he first came to my attention, Namir was an energetic teenager in Mosul whose family was involved in photography and video. He took an interest in the trade and with training, and a few critiques, it quickly became obvious he was going to become one of the new stars in Iraqi photojournalism. He had an urgency that suited the front pages of the news business but also a tender eye that brought humanity via quiet moments to a vicious war. I remember one of a wounded Kurdish girl with her legs in bandages while wrapped in a faux fur coat, and a second of a boy picking up shards of broken plates in the family dining room after an ammunition dump blast rocked their house.

'Unfortunately, instead of the sight of UK photographers arriving en masse to a football match or entertainment event, Iraqis head off to work to document tragedy. There are few "good news" stories to be had in this war, and wars by definition are tales of violence. And to get there, drivers like Saeed Chmagh are indispensable. Saeed had a reputation of being fiercely loyal, and appeared fearless to me. If you ever needed to get quickly to a dangerous area, passing chicanes of barbed wire and boobytraps, Saeed was your man. But he also had a very quiet, loving side and spoke often of his kids. He leaves a wife and four children.

'The deaths of these two men will hit the small photographic community in Baghdad very hard. They are the latest in a far too long list of our colleagues, from several news agencies, who have fallen in this war. They will not be the last, but I would hope that they would be remembered as people and not numbers'.

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