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Reporters Without Borders

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Middle East/North Africa - Syria

Iraq/Syria

Timeline of violations against freedom of information in Iraq and Syria

10 March 2015

10.03.2015 - Two Iraqi photographers injured in Salahuddin province

Journalists with various media survived an Islamic State ambush while accompanying a delegation of tribal chiefs and government officials on 5 March in Samarra, a city in Salahuddin province that is 80 km north of Baghdad.

But two Iraqi photographers have sustained gunshot injuries while covering the offensive that the army launched against Islamic State in Salahuddin province on 4 March.

The Iraqi Journalists' Syndicate identified them as **Ali Al Fahdawi**, a photographer with *Iraqi Media Network* (which supports the Shiite-led government) and **Haider Al-Awadi**, a cameraman with the satellite TV station *Al-Masar*.

Fahdawi was injured in Mkeshifah (to the north of Samarra) while Awadi was injured near Tikrit, the provincial capital. His injuries were described as serious. Both were transferred to a hospital in Baghdad.

In a press release, the Iraqi Journalists' Syndicate urged reporters at the front line to be "more prudent" and asked the armed forces to "do their duty well and make the maximum effort to protect journalists."

19.02.2015 - Cyber attacks on two independent news sites

Two Syrian news websites were the victims of cyber-attacks last week that rendered them inaccessible for several hours. The targets were Syriahr.com, the site of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, on 11 February, and the online newspaper Orient News on 12 February.

The hackers posted a black screen on the Syriahr.com home page accusing its staff of being British intelligence agents. Those who hacked into the Orient News site identified themselves as Islamic State militants and left a message threatening its journalists.

As well as keeping the state media under close control, the Syrian government uses a cyber-army that floods social networks with messages in support of President Bashar Al-Assad. Operated by government militias and intelligence services (mukhabarat), this cyber-army also monitors and harasses online journalists.

[Syria is ranked 177th out of 180 countries in the 2015 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.](#)

[Read: News control - powerful weapon of war](#)

19.12.2014 - Premier drops previous administration's cases against media

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi [announced](#) yesterday that judicial proceedings initiated against news media and journalists under the previous administration are to be dropped, thereby signalling a break with the media policies of his predecessor, Nouri Al-Maliki.

The announcement is good news for freedom of expression and information in Iraq. Abadi also called on the media to practice [responsible journalism](#).

When Maliki was prime minister, many government officials and politicians brought [abusive](#) proceedings against journalists and media to prevent them doing their job properly. Several journalists were prosecuted for reporting cases of abuse of authority and government corruption.

10.12.2014 - Missile kills three Syrian TV journalists in Deraa province

Reporters **Youssef Mahmoud El-Dous** and **Rami Adel Al-Asmi** and cameraman **Salem Abdul-Rahman Khalil** were [killed](#) by a missile while covering fighting between government forces and rebels in the southern province of Deraa on 8 December. *Orient TV* journalists were approaching a battle zone in the village of Sheikh Miskeen when a missile hit their vehicle. Two died on the spot and the third died after being taken to hospital.

10.12.2014 - Iraqi cameraman injured by gunfire in Salaheddin province

Al-Ashraq TV cameraman **Ahmed Hatem**, 21, sustained serious gunshot injuries to the chest while covering clashes between Iraqi government forces and Islamic State fighters in the village of Ishaqi, in Salahuddin province, on 27 November. Hatem, who was travelling with government forces, was rushed to a hospital in Samara and then to a Baghdad hospital for urgent treatment.

28.11.2014 - IS blocks mobile phones in Mosul

Islamic State members [announced](#) on their own Mosul-based radio station on 26 November that mobile phone networks have been blocked in the city. The aim is to stop the circulation of information about the Jihadi group's positions in Mosul that could be of use to the international coalition that is fighting IS. The blocking naturally increased chaos in the city. Some regional [media](#) reported that the decision was taken for security reasons because of the temporary [presence](#) of Islamic State's self-proclaimed caliph in Mosul.

25.11.2014 - IS releases 12 journalists

The Journalistic Freedoms Observatory (JFO) reports that 12 of the 14 journalists who were kidnapped a few weeks ago by IS were released on 21 November as a result of mediation by tribal leaders and other local figures. IS is now holding at least eight journalists hostage in Iraq and has been holding most of them since June.

20.11.2014 - IS kidnaps 14 media workers

According to [JFO](#), IS [kidnapped](#) another 14 reporters, cameramen and TV engineers and technicians – most employed by *Sama Mosul TV* – in Mosul (in Nineveh province) in late October and early November. This follows the [abduction by IS of nine journalists](#) more than a month ago, six of whom it is still holding and three it released.

JFO also reports that IS has issued a new list of names of 50 journalists and media workers who are personally threatened. This has obviously increased the already considerable alarm in media circles in Mosul.

07.11.2014 - Press freedom laureate Mazen Darwish still in prison

The trial of Syrian journalist and activist **Mazen Darwish**, winner of the 2012 Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Prize, has been postponed yet again. Darwish, who ran the Damascus-based Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression, was [arrested](#) along with assistants Hani Al-Zitani and Hussein Ghareer and 12 other activists and supporters when air force intelligence officers raided the centre on 16 February 2012. Darwish, Zitani and Ghareer are still detained in Damascus under article 8 of the 2012 anti-terrorism law on charges of "publishing information about terrorist acts."

28.10.2014 - IS uses British hostage for fake TV report

IS released a new video of **John Cantlie** – a British journalist held hostage since November 2012 –

on 27 October. It shows him doing a "[report](#)" from the Syrian town of Kobane, giving the Jihadi group's take on the state of its battle with Kurdish fighters supported by the US-led international coalition.

Reporters Without Borders voiced outrage at the video's release. "*Islamic State is exploiting Cantlie's profession in a cowardly fashion to feed its propaganda machine,*" secretary-general Christophe Deloire said.

23.10.2014 - Areas controlled by IS are news "black holes"

The [media landscape](#) in both Iraq and Syria is now desolate, with news media being closed, censored or self-censored and journalists being threatened, hunted down, arrested and sometimes murdered. Journalists are forced to cover events from a distance and indirectly in order to protect themselves. The result is partial and poor coverage of regions torn by fighting between Jihadi and government forces.

"*We condemn Islamic State's criminal and fanatical persecution of journalists,*" Reporters Without Borders programme director Lucie Morillon said. "*It has resulted in the disappearance of independent media coverage in the areas it controls, which are now information black holes.*"

16.10.2014 - Confusion about journalist's reported death in Mosul

Contradictory information has been circulating about **Mohanad Al-Aqidi**, an Iraqi journalist believed held by IS in Mosul. Several sources in Baghdad and Mosul told Reporters Without Borders and other NGOs and news media on 13 October that IS had executed him in Mosul's Al-Ghazlani camp, shooting him several times in the head. But the next day other sources insisted he was still alive and was still being held hostage.

11.10.2014 - IS publicly beheads Iraqi cameraman in Samara

IS publicly executed **Raad Mohamed Al-Azaoui**, a cameraman and photographer with *Sama Salah Aldeen TV*, together with his brother and two other civilians in Samara (55 km southeast of Tikrit in Salahuddin province) on 10 October. Aged 37 and the father of three children, Al-Azaoui had been under [threat of execution](#) for refusing to cooperate with IS ever since his abduction in Samara on 7 September.

18.09.2014 - British journalist forced to make statement in video

John Cantlie, a British journalist held hostage since November 2012, was [forced](#) to deliver a statement defending IS in a video released on 18 September. Entitled "Lend me your ears," it showed Cantlie dressed in orange, like Guantanamo Bay's detainees and like previously executed hostages, sitting alone at a table and addressing the camera. He said it was the first of what would be a series of similar videos.

11.09.2014 - Muslim leaders issue appeal at RWB's request

Reporters Without Borders announced on 11 September that the religious leaders of eight Muslim organizations have [signed](#) its appeal for condemnation of IS war crimes against journalists. Signed by Muslim leaders in Egypt, Qatar, Indonesia, France, Britain, United States and Canada, the statement condemns Islamic State's use of Islam as a cover for political and expansionist goals.

11.09.2014 - IS persecution of journalists

The [chaos](#) in Iraq is taking an ever-greater toll on journalists. After [capturing](#) *Sama Salah Aldeen TV* cameraman **Raad Mohamed Al-Azaoui** along with around 20 other Iraqi nationals in Samara (in Salahuddin province) on 7 September, IS has threatened to execute him for refusing to work for them.

The fate of two journalists kidnapped in August – **Tarek Salah Shankali** and **Ahmed Khaled Al-Dlimi** (also known as **Bassem Ahmed Al Watani**) – meanwhile remains unknown. JFO, Reporters Without Borders partner organization in Iraq, has confirmed that IS publicly [threatened](#) nine journalists by name in Mosul and Salahuddin provinces.

02.09.2014 - IS beheads US journalist Steven Sotloff

A video showing US journalist **Steven Sotloff** being [beheaded](#) was posted online by IS on 2 September, exactly two weeks after it released a video showing fellow US journalist **James Foley** being [murdered](#) in the same barbaric manner. In the latest video, entitled "A second message to America," a masked man is seen condemning the US intervention in Syria and Iraq before decapitating Sotloff.

01.09.2014 - RWB urges US to move quickly to save Steven Sotloff

Reporters Without Borders has [appealed](#) to the United States to do everything possible to save **Steven Sotloff**, a US freelance journalist who has been held hostage by IS for more than a year in Syria and who was threatened with the same fate as **James Foley** in the IS video of Foley's beheading.

25.08.2014 - US journalist Peter Theo Curtis freed

The Jihadi group Al-Nosra released US freelance journalist and author **Peter Theo Curtis** on 24 August, nearly two years after abducting him when he went to Syria to do a report in October 2012. His abduction was kept secret until his release.

22.08.2014 - RWB creates James Foley tribute page

Reporters Without Borders created a special web page on 22 August for tributes to the late **James Foley**, to keep alive the spirit of this talented and courageous journalist. Available in French and English versions, the tribute page can be found at jamesfoley.rsf.org/fr and jamesfoley.rsf.org/en.

20.08.2014 - IS takes brutality towards hostages to extreme

IS released a video on 18 August showing a masked man dressed in black cutting the throat of US journalist **James Foley**, who was wearing the same kind of orange jumpsuit as a Guantanamo Bay detainee. Fellow US journalist and hostage **Steven Sotloff** was threatened with the same fate in the video. A veteran reporter, Foley, 40, was kidnapped near the town of Taftanaz, in northern Syria, on 22 November 2012.

11.08.2014 - Woman reporter killed in clashes between IS and Peshmerga

As the US began air strikes in support of Iraqi Kurdistan's attempts to resist the IS advance in northern Iraq, **Deniz Firat**, a Turkish journalist of Kurdish origin, was killed during clashes between Kurdish and IS forces in Makhmour refugee camp, 40 km southwest of Erbil, on 8 August. Firat was covering an IS attack on the camp when she was fatally injured in the chest by shrapnel from an exploding mortar shell. Her body was repatriated to Turkey the next day for burial in her home province of Van, in the east of the country.

Early June: ISIS launches offensive in north and west of Iraq

Already established in Anbar province since 2013, Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIS) launched an offensive in the north and west of Iraq with the support of other Sunni armed groups at the start of June. These Jihadi forces quickly seized the cities of Mosul and Tikrit and then extended their influence over many other parts of Iraq and eastern Syria.

In late June, ISIS changed its name to Islamic State and proclaimed an Islamic "caliphate" in the areas under its control. A US-led coalition of around 40 countries was created in August to contain the Jihadi advance.

Al-Ahad TV cameraman Khaled Ali Hamada was killed on 16 June in Diyala, northeast of Baghdad, becoming the first media fatality since the start of the Jihadi offensive in the north and west of Iraq at the beginning of the month.

The IS-led Jihadi forces quickly overran the headquarters of local TV stations, including *Al-Mosuliya TV* and *Sama Al-Mosul* in Mosul, and brought the news media in Nineveh, Anbar and Salahuddin provinces under their control. Beset by a political crisis, the Iraqi government meanwhile stepped up

its own [pressure](#) on the media.
