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Middle East/North Africa - Iraq

Communal tension

Iraq's Kurdish media victims of political crisis

17 July 2014

News media and journalists are being hit hard by the chaos reigning in Iraq and the mounting tension between Kurds who are demanding Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki's resignation and Maliki, who accuses Iraqi Kurdistan of serving as a rear base for terrorism.

One of the highest-profile cases has been an attack on the headquarters of [Al-Taakhi](#), an Arabic-language daily based in Karrada (Bagdad), that supports the PDK, one of Kurdistan's two ruling parties, and is run by Masoud Barzani, Kurdistan's president.

Unidentified gunmen stormed it on 15 July, threatened the journalists present with reprisals if they did not stop working, and left with cars, mobile phones, broadcast equipment, around 15 computers, files and 8 million Iraqi dinars (about 5,000 euros) in cash.

Al-Taakhi editor **Badirkhan Sandi** said the assailants arrived in police cars and [wore the uniforms](#) of the Iraqi security forces. He announced the next day that he was temporarily suspending operations in order to ensure the safety of all of his employees.

"The Iraqi media, especially Kurdish media, are caught between the terrorist groups threatening the country and the current government, which is taking advantage of the chaos to settle scores with the media that criticize it," said Reporters Without Borders assistant research director Virginie Dangles. *"At this time of political and security turmoil, it is vital that the authorities guarantee the safety of journalists, so that the media are able to operate with complete freedom."*

Journalists' associations and organizations that defend the right to information have been unanimous in their condemnation of the attack on *Al-Taakhi*. The national journalists' union said: "Since three years, attacks of this kind are not the subject of any investigation and those responsible continue to go unpunished."

The prosecutor's office nonetheless insisted that the interior ministry had ordered an [investigation](#) to determine the exact circumstances of the attack.

As the climate continues to worsen, official bodies have also stepped up verbal attacks on the Kurdish media.

At a meeting with journalists on 14 July, the Media and Communications Commission mentioned the possibility of [closing](#) news outlets that were liable to "incite sectarian violence" or support "terrorist" groups affiliated to ISIS. Most of these media had [Kurdish funding](#), the CMC added.

Created in 2003, the CMS is supposed to regulate the Iraqi media but in practice it gets its orders from the prime minister, who appoints the person in charge of the [commission](#).

The attacks on Kurdish and other Iraqi media have been growing steadily in scale since the start of the unprecedented offensive being led by the Jihadi group ISIS. *Al-Hurra Iraq TV* reporter **Maitham Al-Shibani** and cameraman **Maitham Al-Khafaji** were [injured](#) while covering clashes between government forces and ISIS fighters at Jurf Al Sakhar (in Babel province), 60 km southwest of Baghdad, on 13 July. Both were hospitalized.
