

Israel's military censorship and war reporting in Lebanon

The IDF's "military censorship guidelines"

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In managing media coverage from Israel of the war in Lebanon, Israeli officials are implementing military censorship guidelines which make specific provisions about general news coverage, coverage of activity leading to the ground operation and coverage of actual combat.

For example, it is "strictly forbidden to show a picture of the full battle coverage, with an emphasis of identifying the location (long shot pictures)".

Another provision states: "There is a special emphasis on matters regarding the activity of special forces and the use of unique kinds of ammunition and weaponry."

IDF takes media into Lebanon

International news agencies note that although the army has made available cockpit footage of attacks on Hezbollah positions, few photographs have emerged after fierce ground clashes in southern Lebanon.

The daily briefings which IDF officers used to hold, which were on the record and sometimes live on air, were suspended earlier this week, Israeli newspaper Haaretz's Arab affairs correspondent Yoav Stern told the BBC. But Israeli briefings to journalists from all media in closed forums have continued.

The IDF does not have any "embedded" reporters with its units. But on 26 July Israeli forces took some reporters into Lebanon for a few hours.

Israel's Hebrew-language media are concentrating on the Israeli casualties from Katyusha rockets, the dead soldiers and the daily sirens and shelling in the Galilee.

Haaretz newspaper on 28 July interviewed Israeli soldiers wounded in the battle for Bint Jubayl on 26 July. One corporal told the paper: "It was hell on earth." And he added that Hezbollah fighters had demonstrated impressive combat capabilities. "They are strong fighters, not like us, but better than Hamas," he said.

Yoav Stern told the BBC: "In Haaretz we try to give a few items a day on what's going on in Lebanon, not easy considering the fact that Lebanese and even foreigners in Lebanon are not very happy to talk to Israelis, to say the least. I think that you can find the numbers of Lebanese casualties in all media, but the question is how much space is given to this."

While some Israelis might look at Al-Jazeera “to get a glimpse about what the other side thinks, since Arabic is not very common here, I can’t say it’s a widespread phenomenon,” Stern added.

Video cameras for IDF troops

Israeli censorship is still strong when it comes to sensitive aspects of the military operations, such as how to show on TV the damage at sites where missiles have fallen.

On 25 July Associated Press reported that the Israeli army had equipped its soldiers in Lebanon with video cameras, hoping they would return from the battlefield with footage of Hezbollah casualties and weapon stockpiles.

“The move is Israel’s latest attempt to ward off criticism that it is restricting media access to the front despite daily media briefings by top generals. Israel has not allowed reporters to accompany the troops and its censors can delay the release of information,” Associated Press noted.

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