

Israel's Military Censors Demand 'Prior Review' of New York Times' Gaza Reporting

Free press advocates advise newspaper to ignore such censorship, but incident raises larger questions in debate over coverage of ongoing conflict

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Following its [reporting](#) of the latest events in the Gaza Strip on Friday, including available details about an IDF soldier captured by Hamas soldiers early in the day, the New York Times was contacted by Israel's military censor and told that future reporting related to the capture would need to be run through its office before publication.

The *Times* [updated](#) their original story by adding:

"...the military's censor informed The New York Times that further information related to the soldier would have to be submitted for prior review. Journalists for foreign news organizations must agree in writing to the military censorship system to work in Israel. This was the first censorship notification The Times had received in more than two years.

Israel's policy of placing 'gag rules' over foreign correspondents is well known to reporters who have worked in the country, but rarely acknowledged by U.S. outlets.

In response to the notice given to the *Times* on Friday, the Freedom of the Press Foundation—which advocates on behalf of journalistic freedoms—tweeted its advice to the newspaper:

The New York Times has received a censorship notification from Israel. They should refuse to comply. <http://t.co/y7RjoZcYU4>

— Freedom of the Press (@FreedomofPress) [August 1, 2014](#)

[Writing](#) on his *Pressing Issues* blog, freelance journalist and media critic Greg Mitchell notes, "that the *Times* [has been criticized in the past](#) for agreeing to what they call 'gag orders,' including by its public editor, when it revealed that it had buckled under to Israeli censorship in the past. Jerusalem bureau chief Jodi Rudoren [defended that when](#) it was exposed. "The *Times* is 'indeed, bound by gag orders,' Ms. Rudoren said. She said that the situation is analogous to abiding by traffic rules or any other laws of the land."

Noting that he had not seen an Israeli objection mentioned by other large outlets that reported on the captured soldier—including an *Associated Press* [article](#) published within a similar time frame—Mitchell wondered: “Was *NYT* singled out for this (despite very favorable coverage from Jerusalem bureau in past?) because of its importance? Or did compliant *Times* reporters just mention it as explanation to the Israelis that this story had already appeared before the censorship demand?”

The episode comes amid increased criticism of how many U.S.-based news outlets—including outlets [like MSNBC](#) and [the Times](#) which are often categorized as “liberal” by many—skew and bend their coverage in order to offer a narrative more friendly towards Israeli government and military policy.

In a [pointed essay](#) on the *Guardian*, written by correspondent Chris McGreal on Friday, the veteran journalists asks “if evolving conversations on the ground” in Gaza demand probing questions for U.S. television news audiences, “Why does [American] TV news look like a Netanyahu ad?”

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