

# CHALLENGES OF MEDIA COVERAGE

OF ISRAEL'S WAR ON  
LEBANON

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In this report, Maharat examines **the dynamics of the media war** taking place in Lebanon surrounding Israel's military offensive against Hezbollah. It underscores the importance each conflicting party assigns to media as a tool for psychological warfare—a phenomenon observed in conflicts worldwide, where **each side seeks to control propaganda and impose its narrative to sway public opinion.**

The report explores **the difficulties journalists encounter when covering wars and crises**, where reporting under such conditions becomes significantly challenging. Journalists find themselves in a genuine dilemma: How can they circumvent the media censorship imposed by the military on reports about the progress of battles? Should they convey what they know and observe, or comply with the warring parties' demands, potentially portraying a reality that contradicts the truth or conflicts with national interests? War poses significant challenges to journalists, the foremost of which include maintaining their freedom, selecting news stories, framing their approach, and presenting the facts as they observe them rather than as the military portrays them.

**Lebanese media coverage has revealed deep internal divisions** related to the coverage of the ongoing war. Political factions opposed to Hezbollah's policies have not adopted its narrative, intensifying tensions among Lebanese groups and escalating hate speech and division, leading to accusations of treason and even death threats.

**The media landscape in this war was marked by a prominent role for alternative media**, including digital platforms, websites, and various social media outlets. The public space became open to everyone for unlimited publishing and consumption, with individuals, including X users, competing directly with professional journalists in shaping public discourse.

The report shows **the media strategy adopted by the parties** to the conflict, as **Israel sought to portray its war as "defensive"** and claimed that its destruction of villages and residential neighborhoods was part of the fight against terrorism, **while Hezbollah's media tried to show the enemy's brutality on the one hand and raise the morale of its fighters and supporters on the other**, especially after the military setbacks it suffered at the beginning of the war.

The report also discusses the penetration of Israeli propaganda into Lebanese homes, Hezbollah's narrative to confront the enemy, and the absence of any official Lebanese media entity to cover the war, respond to propaganda and rumors, especially those that spread on social media, or correct errors made by some media outlets in their coverage.



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**The coverage of Israel's war on Lebanon varied according to the editorial, professional, and political orientations of Lebanese media institutions.**

Editorial stances and commentators' opinions ranged widely, from those supporting Hezbollah's resistance stance to others who criticized the idea of opening a new front in support of Hamas' battle in Gaza, calling instead for the implementation of international resolutions, particularly Resolution 1701.

**This division in media coverage revealed deep internal divisions** in Lebanon, paving the way for extensive debates among various parties.

Polarization escalated to the point where critics of Hezbollah's stance faced accusations of **treason**; some media outlets and journalists were labeled as 'Zionists,' while certain parties were designated as 'agents,' with implications that they could meet violent ends (Al-Akhbar, October 18, 2024). Meanwhile, journalists on the opposing side viewed the ongoing battle as irrelevant to Lebanon, arguing that **Hezbollah's policies are destroying the country.**

**This reflects an information war running parallel to the military conflict.**





## The Central Role of Media During Wartime

The struggle to **control media outlets** underscores their pivotal role during wars and crises. Media becomes an extension of artillery, driving the **propaganda war**, or what is known as psychological warfare, that runs parallel to **military conflict**, equating its role and impact. Consequently, Hezbollah views media that do not align with its narrative as serving the enemy, even if these outlets were previously critical of Hezbollah's arms and policies before the war, insisting that no voice should overshadow the call to battle against the enemy.

**Hezbollah's stance, seeking to control media outlets and compel them to adopt its narrative, is not an exception** but aligns with the positions of all armies during wars. Every country that has engaged in wars has always harnessed the media to serve its military objectives, including democratic systems that enshrine respect for freedom of opinion and media plurality in their constitutions. **This is what Israel is currently doing, with its media operating in accordance with its military statements, revealing only what military censorship allows.** This is also the case for Russia and Ukraine in their war, as well as what the United States has done in its recent wars in the Gulf. **The military wants to oversee what is published and what is not,** regulate journalists' work, activate censorship, and establish a military cell responsible for communicating with the media and providing it with publishable material. The military views journalists as obstacles to be overcome. Governments believe that all components of the nation, including journalists, must stand behind the soldiers, and if this is not the case, censorship must be applied to them. **This censorship allows the military to present its narrative of the war, such as distorting news and concealing certain information, which helps boost the morale of its fighters while undermining that of the enemy.** Therefore, the Resistance Axis considers that media outlets not adopting Hezbollah's positions in the conflict are traitorous, contributing to the weakening of the resistance and serving the enemy.



## Hezbollah's Propaganda

**Hezbollah** has sought to win its media battle by highlighting the Palestinian cause and the Israeli crimes in Gaza to demonstrate that the **support front** it has launched is **justified**. The appearances of the party's Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah, have been crucial in this context. However, the media coverage of this support front has been far from what it was during the 2006 war. Many factors differed between the two conflicts; **the deep internal political division became blatantly evident in media coverage** and the positions of analysts and commentators, as this war did not receive unanimous support from the Lebanese people, and many criticized it.



**The significant blow to Hezbollah's propaganda** came from **the military setbacks** it suffered and **the painful blows inflicted by the Israeli army**. This recalls Nazi propaganda chief **Joseph Goebbels**, who believed that **propaganda derives its strength from victories on the ground**.

With **the assassination of Hassan Nasrallah** and the Israeli army's pursuit of the party's leaders, Hezbollah's voice diminished, and **the role of its media outlet, Al-Manar, declined, no longer serving as the "media authority" leading the battle as it had in 2006**.





**Hezbollah's media regained some of its influence** following **limited victories on the ground** against the Israeli army, which was attempting to advance on the southern frontlines. This resurgence was also supported by the appearances of the party's media relations official, **Mohammed Afif**.

Afif sought to boost the morale of supporters and members by asserting that "the channels of military and logistical support for the party have returned to their previous state," noting "significant losses in lives and tanks inflicted upon the enemy." In response to the Israeli Defense Minister, he stated, "Our answer to you is fire for fire, blood for blood, and iron for iron." He addressed the party's supporters, who were suffering from the destruction of their homes and displacement, stating: 'Our homes in the proud Bekaa, the great suburb, and the resilient south are not made of stones and clay, but of security, spirit, and dignity. You will return. The south is life, and there is no life without the south; we will surely triumph.'

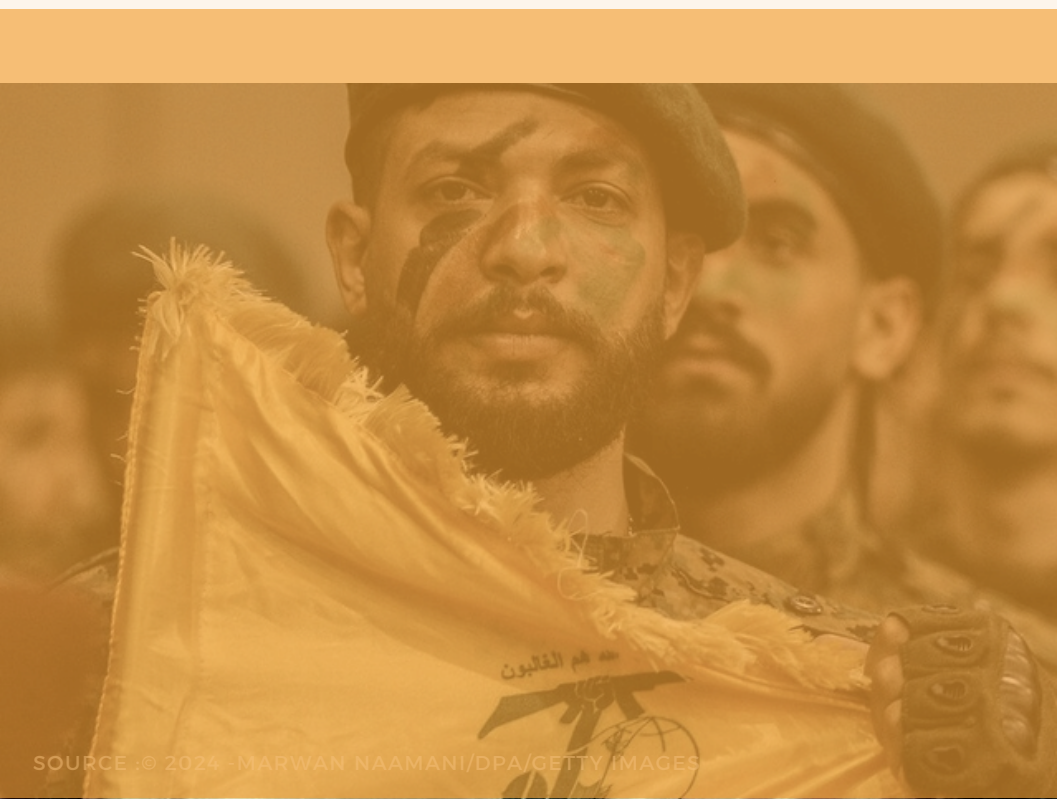
He also **responded to the media that criticized Hezbollah's political and military choices**: "Media freedom does not grant you immunity for incitement or complicity in murder. You are delving into forbidden blood and calling it media freedom! You are inflating strife from all sides and calling it media freedom! You provide coordinates to the enemy at every intersection and in every direction and call it media freedom!"

**Local media outlets responded to Hezbollah's spokesperson, comparing him to Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf** (the Information Minister of Iraq under Saddam Hussein), asserting that what he said was merely "artificial bullying and imaginary heroics far from the truth."



**However, in reality, Hezbollah's media relations official is performing his role perfectly:** he challenges the enemy to boost morale, encourages supporters, criticizes skeptics, and promises victory. **This stance by Hezbollah is no different from what all the armies in the world do when they utilize media as one of the tools of warfare to achieve victory.** In times of crises and wars, the media becomes as important as artillery, and armies must know how to use it while also avoiding its risks. Numerous examples illustrate this point.

For instance, during the U.S. invasion of Iraq, journalists were prohibited from approaching the front lines, with the military controlling their movements and specifying where they could be stationed and what they could film. Moreover, officials from the U.S. military's public affairs office distributed news and footage to news agencies. As a result, the world witnessed a "clean war" without corpses on screens. The press was also barred from photographing the coffins of soldiers to maintain military morale. Accompanying this was a promotional effort by the military to portray the occupation of Iraq as a "liberation war."







## The Propaganda Model in the Russia-Ukraine War

**The parallel media war accompanying the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine highlights the importance of media in wartime and how both sides seek to control the weapons of propaganda and psychological warfare.**

Since the beginning of its invasion of Ukraine, **Russia** has refused to label the operation a war or conflict. It is termed a "**special military operation**", and those using other terms risk imprisonment. This designation implies that the operation is limited and not large-scale, occurring within the borders of Russia, of which Ukraine is seen as an extension. The operation aims to "counter neo-Nazism" and defend persecuted Russian groups, providing justification and **legitimacy** for it.

Reporters Without Borders indicates that Russia has established a **special institute to train war correspondents** covering the conflict in Ukraine which acts as "a new propaganda factory, which complements the systematic repression of independent journalists in order **to prevent access to independent information and enforce the official narrative**. Reporters Without Borders accuses "the Russian forces meanwhile continue to suppress any dissenting voices with impunity, forcing independent journalists in Russia to choose between exile or prison".

**In contrast, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky presents himself as a resistance leader**, visiting world capitals in military attire and positioning himself as the defender of the free world against the Russian threat to Europe. **Ukrainian propaganda revolves around five main themes: the just cause of self-defense, the resilience of Ukrainian resistance, the brutality of the Russian operation, the Russian military's disarray, and Ukraine's urgent need for support to sustain its resistance.** (These principles can also be applied to Hezbollah's discourse.)

On the ground, the Ukrainian army has sought to undermine the enemy's morale and cause the surrender of Russian units. This was evident through the launch of a hotline and a Telegram channel ("I Want to Live"), which Russian soldiers participating in the war can download to request surrender, with guarantees of being treated according to international treaties.



**NATO and the European Union, allies of Ukraine, are participating in the propaganda war:** The alliance has created a page on its website dedicated to "**debunking Russian disinformation**", showcasing facts that refute the Russian narrative of the war and its events. The European Union has also established a special task force directed at Russia and Eastern Europe with three main objectives: effective communication and promotion of EU policies towards the Eastern Neighbourhood; strengthening the overall media environment in the Eastern Neighbourhood and in the EU Member States, including support for media freedom and strengthening independent media, and improved EU capacity to forecast, address and respond to disinformation activities by external actors.

The EU launched a Russian-language page on its website to expose Russian propaganda and respond to it. The number of facts addressed has exceeded 2,500 cases.



The European Union had previously banned four Russian media outlets accused of disseminating Kremlin-backed propaganda and attempting to destabilize countries neighboring Ukraine while supporting the Russian invasion. The High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, **Josep Borrell**, stated that **the war in Ukraine “is not only conducted on the battlefield by the soldiers. It is also waged in the information space, trying to win the hearts and minds of people”.**





**Global social media platforms have also participated in this propaganda war**, as Meta (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp) adjusted one of its policies to allow hate speech against the Russian army and Vladimir Putin, justifying it as a form of 'self-defense' for Ukrainians. Meta also blocked "Russia Today" and "Sputnik" across the European Union. Shortly thereafter, Alphabet (Google, YouTube) did the same.

These steps have enabled the Russian state to implement a "digital sovereignty strategy," launching applications similar to their Western counterparts, such as Rossgram instead of Instagram, VKontakte as an alternative to Facebook, and creating a parallel digital space to restrict communication with its citizens.





## The Journalist: Between Freedom and Responsibility

Based on the media approach during wartime, news coverage in such circumstances presents significant challenges, placing **journalists in a real dilemma: should they report what they know and see, or adhere to the will of the belligerents by conveying a reality that may contradict the truth?**

This leads to fundamental questions:

- Should all Lebanese media outlets adhere to Hezbollah's narrative and adopt its positions to maintain "national unity"?
- Does controlling media outlets, regulating their news, and imposing censorship truly serve the national interest?
- Where does the public interest lie: is it in responding to the military's desires or in informing the public of the truth?

**Democratic systems consider media freedom to be an essential condition for the existence of a democratic regime.** There is no democracy without free media. The people have the right to know the complete facts in order to hold those in power accountable, as the people are the source of authority in these systems. How can they hold anyone accountable if the facts are not available to them?





**Therefore, discussions within these systems have sought alternative proposals to delineate the boundaries of freedom. Concepts such as self-censorship and social responsibility have emerged, along with ethical codes and charters urging journalists to prioritize national interest over other considerations and to adhere to their conscience and sense of national duty.**

**Here, too, this solution was not ideal,** not only because of the numerous professional necessities and temptations, such as advertising revenue and "scoops," that can lead to violations of codes of ethics, but also because every individual has their own judgment and perspective when asked to express an opinion. Additionally, **the concept of the public interest varies from person to person and from one party to another.** Moreover, the military believes that the objective of winning the battle surpasses the principle of respecting national laws, international treaties and upholding the freedom of the press.





## Adhering to Ethical Charters in Journalism

**Ethical codes** were established to guide journalists in fulfilling their responsibilities and preserving the mission and role of journalism. Returning to these codes during crises reinforces journalists' positions and steers them toward sound choices.

The ethical charters emphasize that a true journalist should consider **critical thinking, honesty, accuracy, integrity, fairness, and neutrality as pillars of journalistic work**; accusations without evidence, intentional harm, document tampering, misrepresenting facts, photo theft, lying, manipulation, censorship, self-censorship, and failing to verify information are among the most severe professional violations." The Munich Charter specifies in its first section, **"To respect truth whatever be the consequences to himself, because of the right of the public to know the truth."**

Likewise, ethical charters declare that the public has the right to receive high quality, comprehensive, free, independent, and pluralistic information. This responsibility towards citizens takes precedence over all else.

Based on these principles, **free and independent media must provide citizens with accurate, comprehensive, and high-quality information**, as this is both a right and a duty. Media should fulfill this fundamental role at all times, but it becomes even **more critical in times of crisis**. During such periods, the media must **facilitate discussions** on appropriate measures to address the causes and adverse effects of the crisis and work toward overcoming them.

**The journalist is neither a soldier nor a political activist.** They strive to serve society by **conveying facts and shaping an informed and free public opinion**. This audience constitutes the source of authority, which is why it is crucial for the public to be informed about the facts, enabling them to hold those in power accountable.

What distinguishes totalitarian regimes from liberal ones is that journalists in liberal regimes can express their opinions freely, even in times of war. Therefore, **journalists must report on the war freely, as they are witnesses to it** and are not beholden to any party that seeks to dictate their writing. Media outlets should also work to facilitate citizens' participation in discussions about the long-term changes necessary to enhance the community's resilience against potential future crises.





## The Principle of Telling the Truth

Based on these codes, **journalists must possess critical thinking skills and be transparent with the public about the facts, even if those facts are uncomfortable or contradict the narratives of civil or military authorities.**



On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day in 2003, UN Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette raised the issue of media and war during the Iraq war, stating that “the commemoration came at a moment when the press was reckoning with the complexities of its role in armed conflict.” She also noted that “journalism always involved difficult choices, but wartime raised the level of intensity, leading journalists into a veritable minefield of issues: **objectivity versus propaganda; skepticism versus chauvinism;** the struggle by reporters to balance the need for objectivity with the benefits of access from being ‘embedded’ with troops.”

Fréchette added, “**where censorship was imposed, both democracy and development are lost.** A free and independent press was the lifeblood of strong, functioning societies, and a lifeline to progress itself.”

The late journalist **Riad Taha**, who served as the president of the Lebanese Publishers Association, adopted the principle of telling the whole truth, justifying this stance by citing the example of Lebanese authorities in the 1970s, who prevented the press from discussing the Lebanese army's preparations to confront Palestinian organizations building underground military facilities in the Tal al-Zaatar camp.



He writes: “These secrets and similar matters were not mentioned in the newsreports at the time due to adherence to military law on the one hand and a commitment to self-censorship imposed on them to avoid provocation and not publish anything that could stir unrest or crises.” He adds: “If our press had been free, it would have reported those news stories, which would have compelled the legislative and executive authorities to confront Lebanese and Arab public opinion, leading to a clear, honest, and stable national policy that would spare this country the evil of fragmentation and explosion...” In other words, **silence about the problem exacerbated it.**

**Neil Sheehan**, the New York Times' special correspondent in Vietnam, wrote in 2017: “It was essential to win the war, but it was also crucial for us as journalists to tell the truth to help win it. We definitely had to report this truth because it was vital for the interests of our country and for the world as a whole. The truth in question is that the U.S. military was involved in a conflict it could not win... **The truth must be told in order to win the war.**”







**Laurent Joffrin**, the former editor-in-chief of *Libération*, emphasizes the neutrality of journalists in their coverage and **the importance of journalists not aligning themselves with a particular political line**: “Committed individuals often make bad journalists. The committed journalist defends a cause just as a lawyer defends their client. Therefore, they will always tend to remove anything that may be embarrassing to the cause.”

Supporters of truth-telling present another example: Should the American press have remained silent about human rights violations and the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq under the banner of not challenging the military institution?

Given their role and the responsibility on their shoulders, **journalists are expected to remain witnesses, without compromise, no matter the cost**, and sometimes against their own convictions or sense of nationalism. Once a journalist transitions from the role of a critical witness to that of a committed participant, for example, by chanting slogans at a demonstration they are covering or applauding a politician, he or she ceases to be “purely a journalist.” The key word in journalism ethics is **independence**. Anything that undermines this independence should be avoided.





## The Role of the Journalist

Unlike the principles of propaganda, journalists covering wars are committed to reporting facts based on **their critical and supervisory role**. They are **not soldiers**, and they do not have to obey military commands or adhere to official narratives.

Of course, journalists may personally wish for one side to triumph. They can understand and share the hopes, fears, and suffering of the people who have been attacked, as well as their fellow citizens when their country is at war. However, the best way for them to serve their country or support a cause, and ultimately promote peace, prosperity, and progress, is to do their job by telling the truth about the war, its causes, and its consequences, without considering other imperatives. **The priority is to inform the public and serve the common good, rather than partisan interests.**

**The boundaries of truth are the safety of individuals, including their personal safety, and serving the public interest. For instance, not disclosing information that would put citizens and soldiers at risk, or withholding military information that does not benefit the public.** In such cases, the journalist must ask themselves multiple questions **before publishing accurate news and military information:**

- What is the purpose of publishing this?
- Who benefits from its dissemination?
- Is it beneficial to the public?
- Could it cause harm to civilians or military personnel?

**If so, they may decide to withhold the information or avoid publishing it in an inaccurate manner.**

Journalists are also committed to upholding general ethical principles in their coverage. **Not every piece of information that reaches a journalist is intended for automatic publication. They must consider respect for human values, ensure the accuracy of information, and assess whether publishing it serves the public interest.**





**Journalists strive to report what they witness without inciting fear or strife. They avoid hate speech and handle images with caution, respecting the principles of human dignity,** such as refraining from sharing shocking images or pictures of blood and corpses. **They verify information to avoid spreading rumors, carefully select their words,** and avoid offensive expressions or language that undermines human values when describing war, victims, and losses.

**Journalists can also question the strategies of warring parties, analyze the political and on-the-ground situation,** and treat citizens as informed adults who deserve to know the facts and can respond accordingly. They may **engage the public in discussion and analysis of the crisis,** thereby helping society become more resilient in the face of future crises. Journalists bear the dual traits of **responsibility and freedom,** so they must commit to accuracy and factual reporting. While they may wish for their side to prevail, they are not soldiers, nor are they obligated to embellish events or distort facts.

**Those who believe that journalists should adopt the military's stance and that censorship is necessary are, in fact, adopting a military perspective that contradicts the media's role and the citizen interests.**



## Lapses and Gaps in Coverage

In their coverage of Israel's war on Lebanon, media outlets have, on some occasions, made **lapses** likely due to rushed reporting or a lack of critical thinking before broadcasting news. Some examples of these errors include:

1

- The report on the "Islamic Group covering its name on its headquarters" in the Mina area of Tripoli. While it's understandable that the group fears an attack on its offices, **what value does sharing this news bring to the public?** Doesn't it, in fact, serve the enemy's interests?

2

- Images: Israel arrests 3 armed men from Radwan," and a video published by Israel showing a Hezbollah member named Waddah Younes saying: "The party's members were afraid of Israel." "Various international charters stipulate **not to publish images of prisoners**. Additionally, any statement attributed to a prisoner holds no value, as they lack freedom, and therefore, their statements should not be published."

3

- The report that "Israel bombed an underground weapons depot in Dahieh (the southern suburbs)." Media outlets often circulate such reports quoting the spokesperson for the Israeli army, thereby treating this information as accurate and **promoting the enemy's narrative without considering that the enemy may claim this to justify its bombings and destruction of buildings.**

4

- The report on "the Israeli army spokesperson sharing a video of the moment Nabatieh was bombed to destroy an underground tunnel belonging to Hezbollah." Here too, **the enemy's claims should not be accepted as facts;** rather, it is crucial to challenge those claims.





5

- The Israeli army spokesperson has become a familiar figure to the Lebanese audience, appearing on most channels and news sites. The Israeli army spokesperson has become a familiar figure to the Lebanese audience, frequently appearing on most channels and news sites. His statements are broadcast, urging Lebanese citizens to evacuate certain buildings and locations or to engage in dialogue with the Lebanese public. **The necessary distance has not been maintained from this spokesperson, whose actions should first be seen as propaganda, second as intimidation, and third as a war crime,** as he endorses the systematic destruction of residential buildings, hospitals, historical and commercial sites, and targeting of journalists. What amplified the impact of the Israeli spokesperson was the absence of a Lebanese media official to counter Israeli propaganda and its dominance over the local media space.

6

- In an attempt to "fill airtime," channels opened up to **guests** who rotated across all the screens. **At times, the views expressed by these guests exacerbated the existing internal divisions through radical and provocative opinions that accused others of being agents and traitors, while some even justified Israeli aggression** and held Hezbollah responsible for dragging Israel into war. This responsibility lies primarily with the channel, as it must understand that inviting a guest grants him social and intellectual legitimacy, and support for his or her position.

7

- One reporter broadcast live on air about the "arrest of an agent of the enemy" and provided his name. In doing so, she played the role of judge by **passing judgment** on that person and contributed to **damaging his reputation** before verifying the accusations against him.



8

- Furthermore, some young field journalists displayed **a lack of professionalism**, at times falling **victim to Israeli propaganda**. For instance, there was an attempt to explore warehouses at Sahel Hospital based on a request from the Israeli spokesperson. This incident occupied significant space on social media due to its uniqueness and the major professional mistake committed by the reporter. Many X users criticized it harshly, with some saying, "He should go back to school to learn the profession..."

9

**The coverage by most Lebanese media outlets seemed lacking in substance**, as TV stations focused their cameras on **'live'** coverage, filling airtime with 'expert' commentators from various perspectives, often in repetitive discussions. Maharat has monitored an average of 80 guests hosted per day in Lebanese TV studios. Narration and supplementary news segments dominated much of the visual and audio content. Meanwhile, there was a significant gap in reporting on the hardships faced by citizens on the road to displacement and in displacement shelters.. **This event is not solely military** but also encompasses:

- **A social dimension**, reflecting the reality of millions of displaced Lebanese, those hosting them, and those forced to sleep along roadsides.
- **A dimension related to the role of health, medical, and social institutions**, which play a vital role in this context.
- **An economic dimension**, marked by the destruction caused by the war, damage to institutions, and the strain on host areas.
- **An environmental dimension**, with extensive harm to the environment that will have repercussions for many years to come.
- **An organizational dimension related to municipalities and civil society organizations** fulfilling their roles in relief, security, and organizing daily life.
- **A political dimension reflected in the crisis management and the monitoring of aid delivery**: the types of aid, how it is distributed, ensuring it reaches the displaced, and maintaining transparency in announcements.





10

The coverage was almost exclusively limited to scenes of reporters with helmets on, standing kilometers away from the frontlines. Often, what **they reported could have been relayed from the studio**, yet the impression given was of on-the-ground reporting. Some television news broadcasts did cover the various crises faced by citizens and the damage caused by the war.

11

- **There was a lack of sufficient legal coverage of Israel's violations of principles enshrined in international treaties and United Nations principles**, such as targeting civilians, attacking medical teams and preventing them from reaching those injured under the rubble, targeting journalists, and deliberately bombing places of worship, historical, and cultural sites, actions that can be classified as war crimes.



## Hate Speech

The **deep-seated political divisions** within Lebanese society are reflected in the media, which frequently exhibits bias toward one side or the other. **The highly charged rhetoric**, especially from guests on talk shows across audiovisual media, has contributed to the **proliferation of occasionally violent discourse**, resulting in mutual accusations of treason from both sides and further escalating tensions. It is important to note that the hostile stance against Hezbollah existed prior to the war, but the conditions of conflict have magnified its impact and introduced a new dimension. Some perceive the call for implementing international resolutions regarding the South as a betrayal of the resistance, despite it being a demand that predated the war.

During wartime, tensions peak and extend to supporters and the general public, where every statement or topic becomes a focal point for analysis regarding its implications for the conflict or its perceived benefits to the enemy. This underscores **how wartime conditions heighten sensitivities and lend media discourse a meaning different from what it has in peacetime.**

One station's broadcast of an investigative report on Al-Qard Al-Hassan, labeling it as a Hezbollah-linked banking sector, sparked a violent backlash against the station, with accusations of providing intelligence to Israel and contributing to its destructive raids on its branches. The backlash against the channel due to its editorial stance has left its reporters and correspondents cautious in their movements, fearing attacks.

**Hate speech was not confined to talk show participants but also permeated the streets.** Although it remained somewhat **contained within various media channels**, it reached a peak on social media. This makes it essential for journalists to exercise heightened caution to prevent incendiary rhetoric from exacerbating internal tensions and widening divides among the Lebanese. In this context, journalists **bear a substantial responsibility in their coverage, discussions, and choice of topics to help defuse negative stances and avoid provoking harmful reactions that do not serve the public interest.**



## Challenges and Limitations of Coverage

War and its extraordinary **circumstances** place journalists in front of significant **challenges**, primarily **the choice of news and the angle** from which to approach it. For example:

- The Israeli army issues statements calling on citizens to evacuate certain areas. Should a journalist report this, potentially serving enemy propaganda, or should they ignore it?
- Similarly, there is news of fighters being captured and the enemy army entering certain villages. Should such news be reported, or disregarded?
- Should the statements of the Israeli army spokesperson, which promote the enemy's image, be covered or ignored?
- Should the journalist publish the number of soldiers killed and wounded and the widespread destruction, or avoid this to prevent spreading despair?
- Should there be any mention of Hezbollah's weapon storage in border villages, or should this topic be entirely avoided?





The war and its exceptional circumstances place journalists in front of significant challenges, the most important of which is selecting the news and determining the angle from which to cover it. An example of this would be:

- During the Battle of Nahr al-Bared, it became evident that the Lebanese army lacked sufficient and advanced weaponry to confront terrorist groups. In this case, should the journalist remain silent on this issue to avoid impacting the army's morale and revealing its weaknesses to enemies, or, conversely, highlight this point to address the shortfall and pressure political authorities to provide the necessary resources to the military?
- If mistakes were made in the management of the battle, should silence be maintained to preserve the morale of the military institution and avoid weakening it, or should these mistakes be addressed to hold the institution accountable and strengthen it?

**The answers to these questions are not straightforward and vary depending on individuals and their intellectual backgrounds. However, the underlying motive for these questions is the public interest, and the responses should also serve that interest.**



## Transformations in the Media Space



**Israeli propaganda** was active through its media offices, targeting Lebanese society via statements, media outlets, and social media. Israeli military spokesperson **Avichay Adraee** became a prominent figure in the daily narrative of the war with his statements, announcements, and various claims, penetrating Lebanese homes through Lebanese media. **There was no equivalent media official on the Lebanese side who matched his role and presence.**

Despite Hezbollah's efforts, its statements and the role of its media spokesperson often focused on military announcements, especially since the public appearances of its officials became increasingly difficult. **The Ministry of Information was absent from this role, as were the media outlets within the Lebanese security institutions.**

**Compared to the 2006 war, the 2024 war witnessed a shift in military field strategies** concerning the use of electronic technologies and smart applications, as well as a transformation in psychological warfare and **media coverage. The media space became entirely open**, eliminating any possibility of monitoring what reaches citizens or jamming the enemy's messages.



The proliferation of smartphones enabled anyone to become a journalist, writer, commentator, and publisher, sharing their observations and expressing their opinions and impressions, effectively turning them into news sources through their presence on the battlefield or as witnesses to specific events. **Influencers on social media became just as significant as journalists in terms of their impact and the dissemination of information.**

News platforms and applications enabled the reception of all types of news and videos from various sources, both friendly and hostile. This turned the digital space and social media into **battlegrounds** between various parties, where any form of censorship was absent, allowing hate speech, threats, insults, and misinformation to flourish without restrictions. **This situation deepened internal divisions, especially with the spread of many rumors and false news that thrived during wartime.**

News platforms have become increasingly less constrained by ethical standards, and media outlets frequently turn to social media for news, photos, and videos. This reliance has occasionally resulted in the dissemination of false information or shocking images.







It is widely recognized that **wartime conditions create a thirst for news** among citizens, **leading to an increase in rumors and misinformation**. Consequently, **there is a pressing need for a body that addresses citizens' news expectations and keeps pace with their information needs**. This body should also **counter enemy propaganda, discredit false claims, and expose its crimes to the local and international public**.

**Israeli propaganda** was active globally, portraying its aggression against Lebanon as **self-defense** and claiming it was at war against "terrorist organizations" to win over global public opinion. Despite the thousands of civilian casualties and injuries resulting from shelling on Lebanese villages and cities, Israeli propaganda repeatedly asserted that it did not target the Lebanese people. **Israel succeeded in keeping pace with the battle from a media perspective and promoting its narratives, as evidenced by the fact that much of the global media adopted the Israeli narrative in its coverage of the war on Lebanon**.





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## Principles of Military Propaganda

In order to avoid falling into the traps set by propagandists and to enable journalists to understand their messages, one can refer to the **principles of wartime propaganda** as outlined by media specialist Anne Morelli, which armies use during combat:

- We do not want war, we want to **defend** ourselves.
- The **other side** is solely **responsible** for the war.
- The enemy has the face of the **devil**.
- It is a **noble cause** that we defend and not particular interests.
- The enemy commits atrocities **knowingly**; if we make unfortunate mistakes, it is involuntary.
- The enemy uses **unauthorized weapons**.
- We suffer **very few losses**, while the losses of the enemy are enormous.
- Artists and intellectuals **support** our cause.
- Our cause has a **sacred** nature.
- Those who question our statements are **traitors**.







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Maharat Foundation

Address:  
Jdeideh, Metn  
Beirut, Lebanon

Contact Information:  
Website: [maharatfoundation.org](http://maharatfoundation.org)  
Email: [info@maharatfoundation.org](mailto:info@maharatfoundation.org)



مهارات  
Maharat