

Lebanon – As Seen On US TV

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There have been some accusations that the [British media](#) is failing to cover the conflict in the Middle-East fairly. But it's notable that the criticisms come largely from highly political groups or individuals who are long-time critics of Israel or the BBC. Generally, the British media has worked hard to maintain balance. That's why the BBC's Middle East expert special correspondent Jeremy Bowen is squeezed in to frame to talk to every presenter in Lebanon to explain the context of each incident. He carefully reminds the viewer that Hezbollah seized two Israeli soldiers and that it's political goals include the eradication of Israel and that it is backed by Syria and Iran and that it is lobbing hundreds of missiles in to Israeli residential areas.

I personally think that the BBC misplayed the evacuation story – leading their bulletins on perfectly safe British tourists and businesspeople getting on to Royal Navy ships at a time when Lebanese civilians were being massacred – but the BBC has effectively admitted that it got the running orders wrong. More generally I feel that the UK media is allowing our obvious sympathies with the Lebanese caught in the cross-fire to misread the wider politics of a possible ceasefire. It's quite clear that [Jeremy Paxman](#) and [Jon Snow](#) to name just two, have lost patience with the Israelis and are bursting with righteous indignation.

But come with me to the other side of the Atlantic and see how the American Networks are reporting the conflict and you get a somewhat different story. Although, not an entirely unreflective one, as [Roy Greenslade](#) has noted. The one good thing for the White House about the mess in Lebanon is that it's knocked Iraq off the front pages – even though 40 Americans died there in the last month.

Much more in the US media coverage of Qana was devoted to a “how shameful of Hezbollah to hide among civilians” line. Israel is represented as being in a war against terror, pure and simple, responding to unprovoked attacks. The US media is much more sympathetic to Israel's genuine dilemma that UN Resolution 1559 has not been implemented and that men with guns cannot be allowed to sit in a parliament and launch attacks against Israel. There've been endless TV lives from Haifa with a brilliant blue sky and not many rockets landing, to balance the carnage in Lebanon. A striving for balance which is perhaps as irritating as the UK media's loss of it. This has been a fascinating media campaign on both sides of the Atlantic so far, with the professional and amateur online coverage a vital factor in providing more context, detail and debate. Only time will tell how the various media's different emphases will shape the political consequences of the stand taken by Bush, Blair and Olmert.

