

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)

Media Ground Rules

For the safety and security of ISAF Forces and embedded media, media will adhere to the below established ground rules. These ground rules will be agreed to in advance and signed by media prior to embedding. Violation of the ground rules may result in the immediate termination of the embed, revocation of ISAF media credentials, and removal from the area of operations. These ground rules recognize the right of the media to cover military operations and are in no way intended to prevent release of derogatory, embarrassing, negative or uncomplimentary information. ISAF does restrict the release of certain categories of information which could provide mission details useful to the enemy, putting military and civilian lives at stake.

Violations of any of the following rules may result in termination of accommodated status:

1. Unless supported through national programs, accommodated media are responsible for obtaining their own passports and visas and entrance into the Area of Operations (AOR). We recommend arriving in Afghanistan via civilian air in order to obtain proper passport stamps upon arrival. Departure from Afghanistan will be delayed without entry stamps. Media are strongly encouraged to be properly immunized before embedding with units as per the Center for Disease Control recommendations for the region or country;
2. Accommodated media must wear their media credentials in a clearly visible location at all times.
3. Accommodated media will not enter any restricted areas without a military escort.
4. Accommodated media are responsible for procuring / using personal protective gear, to include as a minimum military-grade helmet and body armour. Clothing and equipment will be subdued in color and appearance, but non-military in appearance (i.e. camouflage).
5. Accommodated media are responsible for their own personal and professional gear, including protective cases for professional equipment, batteries, cables, converters, personal protective equipment, etc. Each media representative is responsible for carrying his own gear.
6. When accepting accommodation from units under NATO command, media will comply with the respective national military codes of conduct (e.g. bans on alcohol, taking of war trophies, etc.).
7. All interviews with service members will be on the record. Security of information will be the responsibility of the service member being interviewed; however the military member must be informed by the accommodated media when he/she is in an interview situation. The service member will always have the right to decline an interview, Interviews with service personnel are authorized upon completion of missions; however, release of information must conform to these media ground rules.

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8. Media will be expected to follow instructions regarding activities and movements.
9. Media representatives, support staff, producers or personal protection teams will not carry weapons while accommodated.
10. Products will be datelined according to local ground rules that will be provided to accommodated media.
11. Visible light sources and infra-red devices, including flash or television lights, will not be used when operating with troops at night unless specifically approved in advance by the on-scene Commander. Likewise, media will follow tactical movement and noise discipline while covering operations.
12. Temporary embargoes may be imposed to protect operational security. Embargoes will be lifted as soon as the operational security issue has passed.
13. Communications equipment (such as cell phones) will not be specifically prohibited. However, unit commanders may impose temporary restrictions on electronic transmissions for operational security reasons and as the threat assessment or security situation dictates.
14. Media are expected to be self sufficient with respect to filing product. On occasion, media may be allowed to file stories via military communications systems subject to national regulations and the limitations of available systems. Media may not be allowed to connect privately-owned computers or USB thumb drives to military networks and should have the capability to burn to CD/DVD. It should be noted that bandwidth limitations may restrict the ability to file video and large files.
15. If, in the opinion of the unit commander, a media representative is unable to physically, psychologically, mentally, or emotionally withstand the conditions required to operate with the forward deployed forces, the commander or his/her representative may limit the representative's participation to ensure both the reporter's and the unit's safety. Disputes should be raised through PAO channels. The PAO community will work as the honest broker but the ultimate decision to accommodate media is held by the commander.
16. NATO forces will provide emergency medical treatment to any media who have been injured while accommodated with a NATO formation or unit in accordance with NATO or national regulations within available capabilities.
17. If a media representative is injured or killed in the course of military operations, NATO will notify the media representative's agency in accordance with instructions provided on the embed application. It is important that media representatives clearly communicate your desires for these contingencies. The agency will be responsible for further notification of next of kin. Repatriation of media who have been killed or injured is the responsibility of the media outlet employing the journalist. Media outlets employing freelance journalists must pay particular attention to this responsibility.

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18. The following will not be visually recorded without the expressed approval of the local Chief Public Affairs Officer (CPAO) and the local commander:

- (a) Restricted military areas, facilities or installations, such as Operations Centers and field detention sites and unit capture facilities.
- (b) Images of maps, navigation devices, communications equipment or Counter Improvised Explosive Device/Electronic Warfare equipment. Care should be taken in tactical vehicles to ensure these categories of sensitive equipment are not documented.
- (c) Classified systems, classified equipment or demonstrations of their capabilities.
- (d) Any flight line in the theatre of operations and military aircraft operating on or near it. Media will adhere to the ground rules for ramp ceremonies as briefed prior to each ceremony.

19. The following information is not releasable:

- (a) Specific information on troop strength and capabilities, equipment or critical supplies (e.g. artillery, radars, trucks, water, etc.).
- (b) Specific number of aircraft in units below wing level, or identification of specific mission aircraft points of origin; stating “land or carrier based” as a point of origin is acceptable. Number and type of aircraft may be described in very general terms such as “large flight”, “small flight”, “many”, “few”, “fighters”, “fixed wing”, etc.
- (c) Units in the Area of Operation, unless specifically authorised by the unit PAO at the Task Force, Regional Command, or IJC level in which the embed is taking place.
- (d) Information regarding future, current, postponed or cancelled operations – unless otherwise indicated by the local CPAO.
- (e) During an operation, specific information on friendly force troop movements, tactical deployments, and dispositions that would jeopardise operational security or lives. Information on on-going engagements will not be released unless authorised by the on-scene commander.
- (f) Imagery that would show level of security at military installations or encampments, especially aerial and satellite imagery which would reveal the name or specific location of military units or installations.
- (g) Names of military installations or specific geographic locations of military units in the area of operations, unless specifically released by the ISAF or authorized by IJC Public Affairs. News and imagery products that identify or include identifiable features of these locations are not authorized for release.

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- (h) Details of the rules of engagement or escalation of force measures or information regarding force protection measures to include, but not limited to, those at military installations or encampments, except those that are visible or readily apparent.
- (i) Information on intelligence collection activities including targets, methods of attack and results.
- (j) Extra precaution in reporting will be required at the start of an operation to maximize operational surprise. Therefore, live broadcasts from airfields by accommodated media members are prohibited until authorised by the unit commander.
- k) Information on missing personnel or sensitive equipment or downed aircraft while search and rescue and recovery operations are being planned and executed unless expressly authorised by PA staff.
- (l) Information on the effectiveness of enemy electronic warfare.
- (m) Information on friendly forces electronic warfare equipment or procedures or friendly forces counter-IED activities which would result in a tactical advantage to the enemy.
- (n) Information on effectiveness of enemy camouflage, deception, targeting, direct and indirect fire, intelligence collection or security measures.
- (o) All imagery of detainees or any transport of detainees will respect the detainee's rights, and protect the detainee from public curiosity in accordance with Article 13 of the Third Geneva Convention. No photographs or other visual media showing a detained person's face, nametag or other identifying feature or item may be taken.
- (p) Accommodated media will not interview or directly interact with detainees.
- (q) Accommodated media will not interview, photograph, film or report on Special Operations Forces or personnel and operations they conduct or participate in, without prior approval of a NATO Special Operations Forces Command representative and COMISAF.
- (r) Any other information that may be restricted from time to time by COMISAF due to operational requirements.

20. The following categories of information are releasable:

- (a) Non-sensitive, unclassified information regarding air and ground operations, past and present.
- (b) Size of friendly force participating in an action or operation may be disclosed using general terms such as "multi-unit". Specific force or unit identification may be released when authorised by COMISAF or his designate.

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- (c) Date, time or location of completed military missions and actions as well as mission results.
- (d) Types of ordnance expended in general terms (i.e. missile, hellfire).
- (e) Number of aerial combat or reconnaissance missions or sorties flown in the AOR.
- (f) Type of forces involved (e.g. air defence, infantry, armour) except for Special Operations forces and those of participating nations.
- (g) Confirmed figures of enemy personnel detained or captured.
- (h) Information and location of military targets and objectives previously under attack.
- (i) Date, time or location of previous conventional military mission and actions, as well as mission results is releasable only if described in general terms.
- (j) Names and hometowns of ISAF military units.
- (k) Service members' names and hometowns with the individual's consent.
- (l) Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan-approved media coverage of detainee release AFTER detainee has been released or transferred to GIRoA.
- (m) Approximate friendly casualty figures by service. Embedded media may, within OPSEC limits, confirm unit casualties they have witnessed.

21. Unless otherwise advised by the host unit PAO or commander, the following procedures and policies apply to coverage of wounded, injured, and ill personnel.

- (a) Accommodated media will honor the national policies for release of names and identity of soldiers killed and wounded; national policies differ and are beyond the scope of this document. Media who witness the deaths and injuries of coalition service members will not disclose – through video, photos, written or verbal description – the identities of the individuals until the nation has made appropriate notification to the next of kin. Service members will not prohibit news media representatives from viewing or filming casualties. Casualty photographs showing a recognizable face, nametag, or other identifying feature or item will not be used, except as indicated in (i) – (v) below. Media should contact the PAO for release advice.
- (b) Media will not be prohibited from covering casualties provided the following conditions are met:
 - (1) Names, video, identifiable written/oral descriptions or identifiable photographs of wounded service members will not be released without the service member's prior written consent. If the service member dies of his wounds, next-of-kin reporting rules then apply.

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(2) Media visits to medical facilities are authorized and will be conducted in accordance with applicable national regulations, standard operating procedures, operations orders and instructions by attending physicians. If approved, service or medical facility personnel must escort media at all times.

(3) Patient welfare, privacy, and next of kin/family considerations are the governing concerns about news media coverage of wounded, injured, and ill personnel in medical treatment facilities or other casualty collection and treatment locations.

(4) Permission to interview or photograph a patient will be granted only with the consent of the attending physician or facility commander and with the patient's expressed, informed consent, witnessed by the escort. "Informed consent" means the patient understands his or her picture and/or comments are being collected for news media purposes and they may appear in news media reports.

(5) Accommodated media will not report the identity of personnel who kill or injure opposing forces without the prior approval of COMISAF.

I, (print) _____, confirm that the following information is accurate:

- a. "I am not aware of any existing physical or health conditions which would adversely affect my participating in strenuous activities." _____ (Initial)
- b. "I have read the media ground rules provided to me by International Security Assistance Force Afghanistan (ISAF) Public Affairs staff and agree, with my signature, to abide by them. I also understand that any violation of these ground rules is cause for the revocation of my accommodated media status with ISAF" _____ (Initial)
- c. "I understand that should my accommodated media status be revoked by the command hosting my embed, final resolution of my embed status will be made by the ISAF Joint Command Chief Public Affairs Officer." _____ (Initial)

Signature

Date

ISAF Witness - Name, NATO Rank

ISAF Witness - Signature

Date