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# Israel admits it may have hit ambulance

- *Mark Dodd*
- December 27, 2006

**THE Israeli army has admitted its soldiers may have fired on a Red Cross ambulance during the war in Lebanon - an incident Foreign Minister Alexander Downer claimed was a hoax that had duped a gullible Australian and international media.**

The claims centred on a controversial July 23 attack in southern Lebanon in which two Red Cross ambulances were destroyed, either by artillery or missiles - injuring at least six Lebanese, including one man whose leg was later amputated.

Initial media reports claimed the Israeli Defence Force targeted the vehicles, firing a missile directly through the roof of one ambulance using the international Red Cross symbol as a target marker.

Others blamed Israeli artillery or armed unmanned drones.

An Israeli army spokesman has now gone closer than ever before to admitting responsibility.

"We (IDF) certainly do not target ambulances but in a combat zone, we cannot always co-ordinate their safety," Captain Benjamin Rutland said. "It (the ambulance) could have been struck by our mortar or artillery.

"There was (Israeli army) shelling in the vicinity of the ambulance, but we do not have UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) footage and we don't have access to the ambulance so we cannot tell for sure."

He made the comments during an Israeli army-hosted inspection of the South Lebanon border given to a group of Australian reporters earlier this month.

While admitting the possibility of a tragic mistake, Captain Rutland cited several incidents during the recent Lebanon conflict in which Hezbollah fighters had stage-managed or misrepresented evidence of civilian casualties.

In August, Mr Downer slammed Australian and international media for not checking facts and branded reports of the alleged attack on the ambulance a hoax.

His comments were based on unverified evidence carried on an unattributed right-wing website, [Zombietime.com](#).

"What concerns me greatly is the evidence of dishonesty in the reporting out of Lebanon," he said, adding: "After closer study of the images of the damage to the ambulance, it is beyond serious dispute that this episode has all the makings of a hoax."

The 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict, also called the July or Summer War, began when Hezbollah fighters launched a massive rocket attack into northern Israel to mask the abduction of two IDF soldiers captured in a brazen cross-

border ambush that left three of their colleagues killed.

In the bloody month-long stoush that followed, an estimated 650 Hezbollah fighters were killed and more than 1000 Lebanese civilians.

On the Israeli side, 119 soldiers and 43 civilians lost their lives in a campaign whose stated objective was to jointly recover the two captured soldiers and smash Hezbollah paramilitary forces, but which controversially failed on both counts.

*Mark Dodd was the guest of Israel's Foreign Ministry on a recent visit*

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