

Israeli soldiers raid Al Jazeera office in Ramallah

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Ramallah, September 22 (RHC)-- Israeli forces have raided Al Jazeera's offices in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank and imposed a 45-day closure, in the latest push to curtail the news network's coverage.

Heavily armed, masked Israeli soldiers entered the building and handed the closure order to the network's West Bank bureau chief Walid al-Omari early on Sunday. They did not provide a reason for the decision.

"There is a court ruling for closing down Al Jazeera for 45 days," a soldier told al-Omari as Al Jazeera Arabic broadcast the conversation live on television. "I ask you to take all the cameras and leave the office at this moment," the soldier said in Arabic.

The Israeli government banned Al Jazeera from operating inside Israel in May. That initial order was also for 45 days, but it has been renewed and Al Jazeera journalists are still not able to report from inside the country.

Speaking over the phone from Ramallah, Al Jazeera's West Bank correspondent Nida Ibrahim said the raid and closure order "comes as no surprise" after that earlier ban on reporting from inside Israel.

"We've heard Israeli officials threatening to close down the bureau. We've heard the government discussing this, asking the military ruler in the occupied West Bank to close down and shut down the channel. But we [had] not been expecting it to happen today," Ibrahim said.

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