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FROM GAZA TO LEBANON: UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS OF THE ESCALATING CONFLICT

By Laila El Abbadim, Roma El Ouardy, and Francesca Maria Lorenzini
In collaboration with Iris Durif



AMMAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES



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INTRODUCTION

The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza has reached alarming levels, with widespread destruction raising concerns about genocide in the region. The conflict has also impacted the West Bank, Jerusalem, and Lebanon, resulting in increased settler violence and regional instability.

Since October 7, Israel, Hezbollah, and various Lebanese factions have conducted over 10,200 attacks, leading to a significant escalation of tensions by September 2024. This surge in hostilities has been marked by explosive incidents and Israel's intensified targeted assassinations within Lebanese territory.

Hezbollah frames its military actions as a moral obligation to resist what it describes as ethnic cleansing in Palestine, while Israel defends its actions as necessary for self-defense.

As of September 23, the casualties in Lebanon have been significant, with the Action On Armed Violence (AOAV) reporting 4,285 deaths and over 100,000 Lebanese citizens displaced from border areas. However, numbers keep increasing: on September 29, the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health reported at least 105 people killed and 359 wounded in the last few hours.

The significant impact of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and airstrikes highlights the extensive destruction caused by the conflict. This report aims to analyze the humanitarian impact of such events, shedding light to how international directives and human rights have been violated.

Overview of the Attacks

On September 17, thousands of pagers exploded almost simultaneously in parts of Lebanon, killing at least 25 people and injuring over 600, including women and children.

The attacks targeted pagers used by Hezbollah members. Around 5,000 of these devices had been imported into Lebanon as part of an effort to replace older, more vulnerable models. According to an anonymous senior Lebanese source, 3, 000 of the pagers that exploded received a coded message that activated up to three grams of hidden explosives, which had gone undetected by Hezbollah for months.

On September 18, attacks on radios resulted in 20 fatalities and over 450 injuries. The Lebanese government and Hezbollah have attributed these attacks to Mossad, Israel's national intelligence agency, known for its history of cyber operations. Israel has not commented on the allegations.

The following day, an Israeli F-35 jet targeted a southern suburb of Beirut, killing 16, including Hezbollah's top commander Ibrahim Aqil.

On 27 September 2024, the Israeli Air Force launched an airstrike on Hezbollah's headquarters in Beirut, reportedly targeting Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary-general of the group. At least six people were killed and over 90 injured following the strike, with several missing.

As of now, bombings and attacks in Lebanon are raising significant concerns regarding violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, particularly the right to life. The ongoing conflict has indeed targeted civilians, with recent airstrikes and bombings resulting in casualties among non-combatants such as healthcare workers and children. Moreover, many attacks appear to lack proportionality. It means the civilian harm caused is excessive compared to the military advantage, a violation of international law.

ACHRS notes how these actions highlight urgent issues concerning compliance with international legal standards designed to protect human life and dignity in conflict zones.

War Ethics and International Humanitarian Law

Several human rights organisations, including United Nations special rapporteurs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, have raised significant concerns about the lawfulness of Israel's attack on Hezbollah's communication devices.

"These attacks violate the human right to life, absent any indication that the victims posed an imminent lethal threat to anyone else at the time," the experts said. "Such attacks require prompt, independent investigation to establish the truth and enable accountability for the crime of murder."

Experts also argue that the attacks violated the International Humanitarian Law, which prohibits indiscriminate attacks that do not clearly distinguish between military and civilian targets. In armed conflict, only active combatants may be targeted. Civilians, including political and administrative personnel, should not be attacked unless they are directly involved in hostilities.

"To the extent that international humanitarian law applies, at the time of the attacks there was no way of knowing who possessed each device and who was nearby," UN experts said.

Additionally, the devices used in these attacks are part of the category of prohibited booby traps - objects that civilians are likely to be attracted to or are associated with normal civilian daily use such as watches, cameras and pagers.

"The use of an explosive device whose exact location could not be reliably known would be unlawfully indiscriminate, using a means of attack that could not be directed at a specific military target and as a result would strike military targets and civilians without distinction," said Lama Fakih, Middle East and North Africa Director at Human Rights Watch.

UN experts expressed solidarity to the victims of these attacks and called for a thorough and impartial investigation.

Possible Future Scenarios



Thousands of civilians are leaving their homes because of growing concerns of a possible Israeli ground invasion in southern Lebanon. As Israeli strikes intensify, they fear that an armed occupation as the siege of Beirut of 1982 occurs again. Olivier Rafowicz, Israel's military spokesperson, has left the door open for such an invasion, further heightening fears.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has cautioned against turning Lebanon into "another Gaza," suggesting that it could set off a chain reaction. This sentiment is echoed by a large part of the countries of the region, such as Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt, which accused Israel of dragging the region towards a full-scale war.

Kobi Michael from the Institute for National Security Studies, believes that if no diplomatic solution is found, a ground invasion similar to the one nearly 50 years ago will likely happen. Reports from the Israeli public media KAN also indicate that Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has been overseeing preparations for such a scenario, even if the Israeli army did not communicate about such an operation.

In conclusion, ACHRS fears an escalation of violence and subsequent threats to the right to life.

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