The failure of UNIFIL: Do your job, or get out of the way

written by Arsen Ostrovsky | 17.10.2024

It is hard to think of a United Nations agency with a more glaring failure in its core mission than the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, more commonly known as UNIFIL — and there has certainly been no shortage of contenders this year.

Following the 2006 Israel–Lebanon war, which was initiated after Hezbollah terrorists ambushed an Israeli border patrol, killing eight soldiers and kidnapping two others, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1701. This mandated the creation of a demilitarized zone south of Lebanon's Litani River and entrusted UNIFIL to oversee Hezbollah's disarmament and withdrawal from the area.

That, however, did not happen.

Instead, with the acquiescence of the Lebanese government, Hezbollah entrenched itself, including literally burrowing in tunnels, along the common border with Israel. It amassed an arsenal of 150,000 or more Iranian-made precision guided rockets, in addition to an arsenal of missiles and suicide drones. All of this happened under the watchful eye of UNIFIL.

UNIFIL's ineffectiveness has been underscored over the last 12 months. A day after Hamas's rampage in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, Hezbollah joined the war as well, with notional plans to recreate a similar massacre in Israel's north. Since then, the group has fired more than 10,000 rockets at Israel from southern Lebanon, killing dozens and displacing tens of thousands of Israelis from their homes.

One may be forgiven for asking what, if anything, UNIFIL has done to uphold UNSCR 1701. The answer: nothing of substance.

Just this week, Hezbollah terror tunnels and weapons caches meters away from UNIFIL observation posts and bases, literally right under the noses of U.N. peacekeepers. That UNIFIL was unaware of this state of affairs is simply implausible.

Rather, it has either been grossly incompetent, acting as no more than as a passive bystander while Iran's chief terrorist proxy arms itself for war with Israel. Or, worse yet, it has become a shield allowing Hezbollah to attack Israeli civilian communities while complicating Israel's subsequent response.

On Sunday, a statement issued on behalf of U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres defiantly reiterated that "UNIFIL peacekeepers remain in all positions and the UN flag continues to fly." That's a lofty statement, to be sure. But it obscures the real contours of the problem.

By staying in place, UNIFIL is not only obstructing the IDF's legitimate military operations against Hezbollah, it is also recklessly putting its own peacekeepers at risk.

Just the other day, five UNIFIL peacekeepers were inadvertently injured when Israeli forces fired in the direction of their Lebanon headquarters in Naqoura, while engaged in a fight against Hezbollah terrorists in the vicinity. This tragic consequence was the result of UNIFIL's rejection of repeated prior requests by Israel for it to withdraw from Hezbollah strongholds and active combat zones.

But UNIFIL isn't just an obstacle; it has also become an active enabler. Over the last month, at least 25 rockets and missiles have been launched at Israeli communities and troops from Hezbollah terrorist compounds embedded near UNIFIL posts in southern Lebanon, exploiting their proximity to U.N. forces. One of the attacks even resulted in the death of two Israeli soldiers.

How, then, can UNIFIL be entrusted to keep the peace and continue its mission?

In the 18 years since the adoption of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701, UNIFIL has been an abject failure, allowing Hezbollah to rearm and entrench itself in southern Lebanon, setting the stage for the current conflict in the process. Moreover, it has done so with international support and American largesse. Last year, the U.S. appropriated $143 million to UNIFIL for 2023, amounting to about one-quarter of the force's total budget of $507 million. And once the current war ends, history suggests it won't not take long for Hezbollah to return to southern Lebanon, in spite of UNIFIL's presence there.

For the time being, however, there are only two feasible options. Either UNIFIL ceases to serve as a willing pawn for Hezbollah and actually enforces UNSCR

1701, or it closes up shop and leaves.

In other words, the U.N. should either do its job or let Israel do it.

The article was written in collaboration with Ilan Berman from the American Foreign Policy Council in Washington, D.C.

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The Operational Objectives in Lebanon and the Strategic Context

written by Prof. Kobi Michael | 17.10.2024

The State of Israel cannot afford to revert to an approach of containment, nor to miss the strategic opportunity to inflict significant damage on Iran and all elements of the axis it leads. Israel has no choice but to maintain and even intensify its momentum. This is not merely a historical opportunity which may not present itself again, but also a unique strategic opportunity that must be fully seized. The reality that has emerged allows a return to the concept of decisive action and a departure from the now significantly eroded concept of deterrence. Political leaders must harness and subordinate military actions to political strategy, which should first set the conditions for building the new regional architecture and then accelerate its construction, understanding that not only will this process involve the reshaping of the region, but also inevitably result in global implications.

When Hamas launched its offensive on October 7, the IDF mobilized many reserve forces. Part of this force was sent to the northern front, recognizing that Hezbollah has the capability and motivation to join the battle, with its Radwan force having been equipped, trained, and prepared to invade the Galilee for years. The deployment of forces to the north was aimed at taking up defensive positions before Hezbollah could attempt to execute its plans. Hezbollah’s entry into the

conflict on October 8 began with relatively low-scale fire, mainly targeting military objectives. Later, as the organization gained confidence and identified a policy of containment on the part of Israel, it ramped up fire across the entire front.

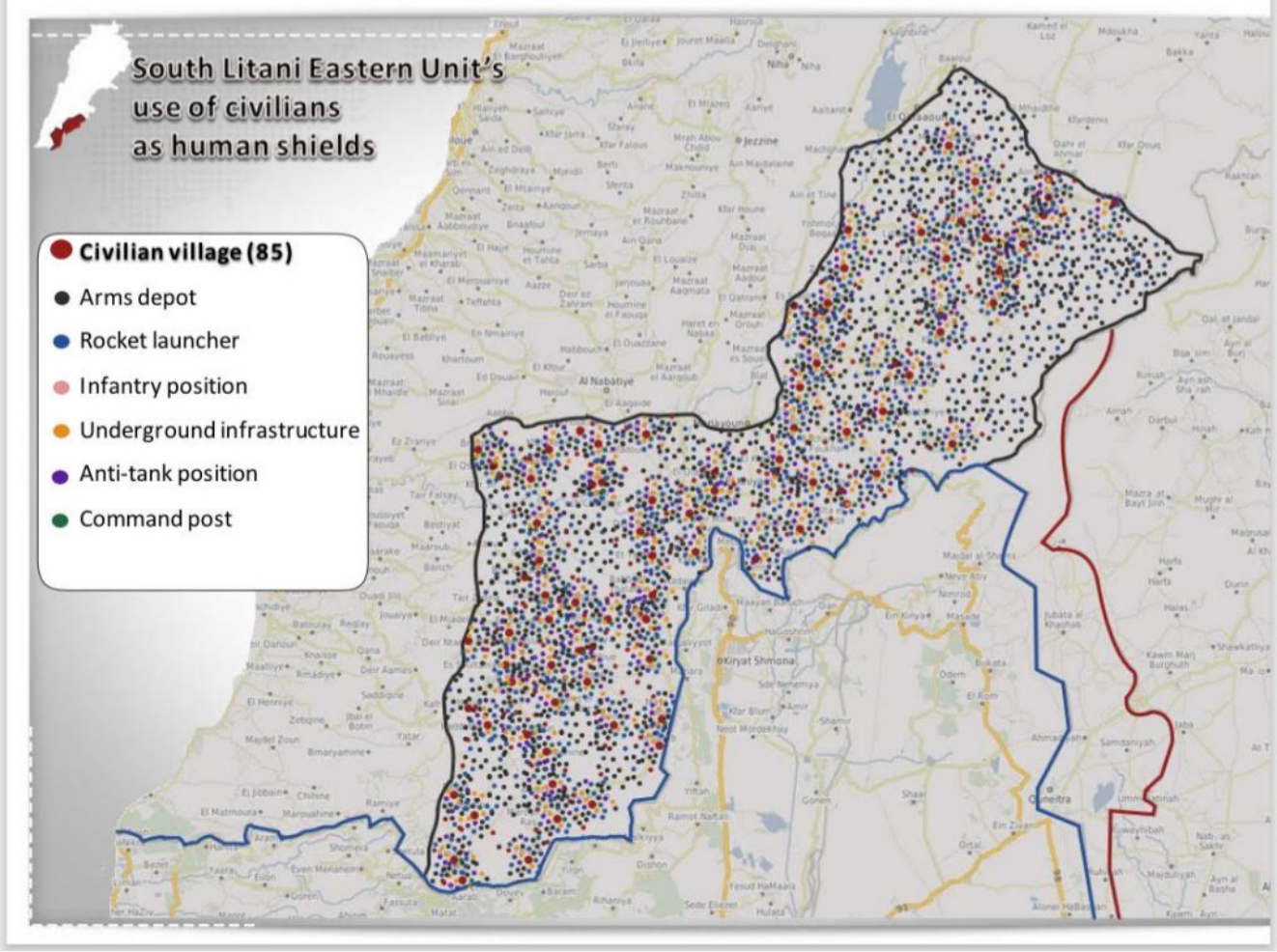
At the beginning of the campaign, Israel chose to separate the fronts and focus its primary efforts on the southern front. This situation persisted for nearly ten months. The Israeli intelligence-driven offensive on September 17, 2024 signaled a change in approach, and since then, Israel has been engaged in an expanding and evolving offensive against Hezbollah across all of Lebanon. After eliminating Hezbollah's Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah, and decapitating a significant portion of the organization's senior command levels, as well as damaging its infrastructure, Israel launched a limited ground operation in southern Lebanon in early October 2024.

To this end, the Israeli government added an additional war goal, stating that the State of Israel would work to safely return the displaced residents of the North, who had evacuated their homes as Hezbollah ramped up its attacks. Based on what is publicly known, the IDF's ground operation is advancing cautiously, with forces currently operating only in the area adjacent to the line of engagement with an aim to destroy terrorist infrastructure close to the border (approximately 4 km deep). After four weeks of ground operations, a reality more severe than the Israeli intelligence likely knew has emerged—and far more than what was made clear to the public before the ground operation.

Hezbollah has built an extensive terrorist infrastructure. This was done under the laxity of the Lebanese army, which failed to fulfill its obligations; under the eyes of the UNIFIL forces; and most gravely, due to Israel's decision not to instruct the IDF to thwart the transfer of massive quantities of weapons into the area. Weapons and equipment stockpiles were stored in extensive tunneling that reached very close to the Israeli border, and in at least one case, even crossed it. Extensive use was made of residential homes and civilian infrastructures such as mosques and schools. In fact, nearly every house and building in the Shiite villages along the front have been turned into a Hezbollah military outpost or prepared for offensive military effort. While it is clear that the overwhelming majority of buildings in these Shiite villages are considered legitimate military targets, and although it is evident that clearing the area cannot be limited to narrow surgical operations in a strip of a few kilometers, the IDF has so far

refrained from systematically and thoroughly destroying all of these buildings.

However, even if a security buffer zone of a few kilometers' width is created, this space will not provide adequate protection to northern communities and will not allow evacuated residents to return to their homes safely. Defending the northern communities requires a broader approach that does not limit itself to addressing only the line of engagement. This defense requires the removal of Hezbollah forces from the entire area, at least up to the Litani River, and in certain areas where the river's course is closer to the Israeli border, even beyond. Since Hezbollah operatives are integrated into the Shiite villages––some even living there––and given that many of the Shiite villages conceal terrorist infrastructure, it will not be possible to allow residents of these villages to return to southern Lebanon. The map below illustrates a small portion of Hezbollah's terrorist infrastructure up to the Litani in the eastern sector (as of 2015).



In the initial phase, the IDF must take control of the entire area up to the Litani River (and in certain places beyond it) while fully evacuating the population of the Shiite villages in the area for their protection and to allow for the clearing of the

area without endangering the Lebanese population. The IDF has already begun the process of evacuating the population, but there is still work to do as it is necessary to address the presence of terrorist infrastructure in the city of Tyre, which lies south of the Litani.

The operation in southern Lebanon is closely linked to the overall strategy of the State of Israel. The extent of the damage inflicted on Hezbollah creates an opportunity to fundamentally change the situation in Lebanon and weaken Hezbollah to the point where it is no longer a relevant threat to Israel by continuously and persistently thwarting its efforts to recuperate and reconstitute itself.

In southern Lebanon, up to the Litani River and beyond where necessary, full Israeli control is required, preventing residents from returning to the villages to avoid Hezbollah operatives returning under the guise of the civilian population. The Shiite region must be completely cleared of any military and civilian presence under Hezbollah's cover. Regarding other villages, a specific assessment will be needed to determine the level of threat posed by their population to Israel's security, and a policy will need to be established regarding monitoring their exit from and return to the area. As for how the IDF should take southern Lebanon, this article does not provide an operational outline, but it is expected that IDF commanders will carry out this mission in a cunning and creative manner.

A second area of operations would be between the Litani River and the Awali River and the Qaroun Lake line in the east. This area will serve as an immediate depth zone of operation for the IDF to prevent capabilities from drifting towards the Litani. The IDF can operate through aerial actions and special operations. Lastly, operations, mainly aerial, should be carried out throughout Lebanon to prevent Hezbollah's attempts to rebuild its military capabilities.

Until an agreement that meets Israel's security needs is achieved (although under current conditions and for the foreseeable future, it is unclear if such an agreement can be established), there should be a buffer zone (security perimeter) established north of the security zone in southern Lebanon. This area must be cleared of infrastructure and buildings, enabling observation and fire control to prevent any entry into the security zone established in southern Lebanon and to destroy any Hezbollah force attempting to return to this area. This should resemble the buffer zone along the Gaza Strip border. In the case of Lebanon, this

zone should be 2–4 km wide depending on the terrain conditions. Therefore, a quick and efficient clearing of the area is required. For this purpose, maneuvering must be expanded and civilian structures destroyed to render the entire area uninhabitable.

Such a move would impose a painful cost on Hezbollah and the Shiite population in southern Lebanon that supports it, serving as a catalyst for Lebanon and the international community to dismantle Hezbollah and reach a security arrangement acceptable to Israel. Above all, it would allow effective military control and presence in the area until such an agreement is achieved. Given that this is likely to require a long-term commitment––perhaps even years until an achievable and enforceable agreement is reached––the IDF must prepare optimal conditions for military control in the area, which must also be better protected.

This improved defense will be achieved by emptying the area of its residents and blocking access to it while considering any entity trying to enter the area as a hostile element to be neutralized. This reality is fundamentally different from what we knew during the 18 years when the IDF was in the security zone. In those years, the zone remained populated, and despite the actions of the IDF and the South Lebanon Army (SLA), Hezbollah found it relatively easy to penetrate the area with the support of the large Shiite population and launch attacks on IDF and SLA forces.

Simultaneously with the necessary military organization in southern Lebanon, the IDF must continue its offensive actions against Hezbollah throughout Lebanon. In this regard, there cannot be and should not be a ceasefire until the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1559, which calls for the disarmament of all militias in Lebanon, including Hezbollah. Resolution 1701, meanwhile, should be discarded in the annals of history, as it is demonstrably unenforceable, nor can one rely on international actors for its implementation. Israel, after October 7, cannot afford to revert to a doctrine of containment regarding Hezbollah's growing strength. What is more, the ongoing pursuit of Hezbollah operatives, leaders, and military assets in turn weakens Iran and its entire axis. Hezbollah is the crown jewel of Iran, the spearhead, and the center of gravity in Iran's "Ring of Fire" strategy against Israel. Harming this key Iranian asset necessarily harms Iran, the central factor undermining regional security.

The effort in the northern arena must continue alongside the effort in the Gaza

Strip until Hamas is dismantled and the conditions are set for a civilian governance alternative with Israeli security responsibility and full military freedom of action in order to prevent any attempt by Hamas to recuperate and rebuild its military and governmental capabilities.

All these efforts are intended to pave the way for the third effort. This effort should focus on weakening Iran itself through strikes on military and governmental assets, and subsequently on its nuclear infrastructure. Following Iran's 181-ballistic missile barrage launched at Israel which targeted military and civilian infrastructure alike (1 October 2024) and Israel's precise and targeted retaliatory strike against Iranian military infrastructure (26 October 2024), Iran seems poised to respond. Should it choose to, Israel's ambition should be to utilize such an Iranian response to persuade the United States to prepare to destroy Iran's nuclear infrastructure. Should Israel fail in this crucial effort, it must prepare to carry out this operation independently.

The fourth effort should focus on painful responses in Yemen, western Iraq, and southern Syria in response to missile and drone launches from these areas. As part of this effort, Israel should make it clear to Syria's president that it would be in his best interest to restrict the steps of Iran and the Shiite militias operating within Syria's sovereign territory or else his regime would be in danger.

It may seem that the multitude of required efforts stretches Israel's capabilities to the limit. Indeed, this series of efforts demands significant resource investment and is not without risks. However, in the reality that has emerged, Israel wields strategic momentum that it cannot afford to lose. Israel has no choice but to maintain and enhance its momentum as it can lead to the weakening of the entire Iranian axis and the laying of the foundations for establishing a new regional architecture, which–– beyond its contribution to regional security, stability, and prosperity–– would further weaken and restrain the Iranian axis and open new opportunities for addressing the Palestinian issue.

The State of Israel cannot afford to revert to an approach of containment, nor to miss the strategic opportunity to inflict significant damage on Iran and all elements of the axis it leads. Israel has no choice but to maintain and even intensify its momentum. This is not merely a historical opportunity which may not present itself again, but also a unique strategic opportunity that must be fully seized. The reality that has emerged allows a return to the concept of decisive

action and a departure from the now significantly eroded concept of deterrence. Political leaders must harness and subordinate military actions to the political strategy, which should first set the conditions for building the new regional architecture and then accelerate its construction, understanding that not only will this process involve the reshaping of the region, but also inevitably result in global implications.

1. This map, which includes only the eastern sector, was released by the IDF in 2015. Since then, Hezbollah's terrorist infrastructure has expanded significantly and is likely much broader today.

Israel's elimination of Nasrallah was just and legal under laws of war

written by Arsen Ostrovsky | 17.10.2024
All necessary principles and doctrines were met.

The Law Of Exploding Pagers

written by Arsen Ostrovsky | 17.10.2024
It is hard to imagine a more surgically precise procedure than the destruction of personal devices that were (literally) held by terrorists.

Nasrallah is trapped by his own false propaganda

written by Ofir Gendelman | 17.10.2024

For years, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah repeatedly claimed that “Israel is weaker than a spider’s web.” This message was woven throughout his speeches and echoed in Hamas propaganda. The entire Iran-backed alliance believed it. The goal wasn’t just psychological; it had an operational purpose. It was meant to motivate the organization’s operatives, especially the Radwan Force, to train even more vigorously for the conquest of the Galilee, seen as the first step in Israel’s total destruction.

To be honest, albeit regrettably, some Israeli actions reinforced this message in the narrative of the “resistance axis” and Hezbollah itself, rather than undermining it. The refusal to eliminate armed Hezbollah operatives approaching the border, instead chasing them away; the months-long reluctance to destroy two tents Hezbollah erected on Mount Dov beyond the international border line as a challenge to Israeli sovereignty and a sign of its weakness; along with Israel’s internal weakness displayed in the year before the war – all these strengthened Nasrallah’s belief that Israel was indeed a paper tiger that would immediately collapse once the Radwan Force invaded northern settlements and conquered the Galilee.

The 500 casualties Hezbollah has suffered since deciding to attack Israel on Oct. 8, 2023, and the enormous losses Hamas endured in the Gaza Strip following its terror attacks against Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, began to change the picture, both within Hezbollah and among the Lebanese public.

Many in Lebanon, even if not among Hezbollah supporters, who witnessed the increasing power of Israeli Air Force strikes in Lebanon and the massive destruction in Gaza, began to express public opposition to the war. This is an unprecedented phenomenon in Lebanon.

The situation took another dramatic turn last week following the pager and radio communication device attack on Hezbollah operatives and senior officials, which took thousands of them out of the fight within seconds. It intensified further with the surprising and, from Nasrallah’s perspective, shocking elimination of the

Radwan Force leadership in the heart of Dahieh.

Although Nasrallah claimed in his speech responding to these events that they didn't affect the organization's operational capabilities, no one in Lebanon believes him anymore. Hezbollah is perceived as weak, and there's a prevailing understanding that in this conflict, Israel undoubtedly has the upper hand – technologically, militarily, and in terms of intelligence.

The Israeli Air Force bombings in southern Lebanon and the Beqaa Valley over the past two days, which hit hundreds of important Hezbollah assets built over many years, and Israeli awareness efforts directed at Lebanese public opinion, aimed at evacuating civilian populations from villages turned by Hezbollah into weapons depots and launch sites for cruise missiles, rockets, and drones, make it clear to every Lebanese and every member of the Iran-backed alliance that Israel is a real tiger. Everyone now understands that underestimating it was a very costly mistake.

Even in interviews with Lebanese commentators on the country's TV networks, it's explicitly stated: "We thought we could destroy Israel and liberate Palestine. We were gravely mistaken."

Even if Nasrallah publicly maintains that the Lebanese front is linked to the Gaza front and that his organization will continue to fire at Israel as long as there's no ceasefire in the Strip, it seems that, watching the refugee convoys traveling from southern Lebanon to Beirut and the significant casualties his organization suffers daily at Israel's hands, Nasrallah surely regrets now believing his own false propaganda.

The consequences of this mistake are now manifesting in Hezbollah's unprecedented and long-term weakening. Every day that the Israel Defense Forces powerfully strikes Hezbollah's infrastructure and denies it capabilities built over decades to harm Israel brings closer the day when northern residents will return to their homes and enjoy long-term peace.

Alongside the military effort, successful influence and psychological warfare efforts on the Lebanese public, whose trust in Hezbollah has been severely shaken and whose fear of Israel has intensified sevenfold, must continue. This axis – which sears the enemy's consciousness – will also ensure long-term quiet on the northern border.

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Sorry, AOC: Israel's Precision Attack Against Hezbollah Was Humane—and Legal

written by Arsen Ostrovsky | 17.10.2024

This week, in a scene one would expect from a Hollywood thriller, thousands of pagers and walkie talkies exploded across Lebanon and the Middle East, killing, maiming, or severely injuring thousands of Hezbollah terrorists.

Although the attacks were immediately attributed to Israel, the Jewish state has so far not claimed responsibility. In the event that Israel did carry out the operation, it could only be understood as the most audacious and unprecedented counter-terrorism precision attack in military history, and one that was entirely justified and in full accordance with international law.

The attack not only disrupted Hezbollah's terrorist capabilities and infrastructure; it re-established Israeli deterrence and leveled psychological trauma on the entire terror organization, from its leader Hassan Nasrallah, to the most junior of Hezbollah foot soldiers, who now know that no-one is safe, and every terrorist can be reached at any time.

Lest you be swayed by the false and malicious narratives of those trying to defend Hezbollah or blame the Jewish state, some necessary context is in order.

First, Hezbollah is a Lebanese-based jihadist terrorist organization and a standing army that is funded, supplied by, and serves entirely at the behest of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Like Hamas, Hezbollah *also* has genocidal intentions to annihilate Israel and kill all the Jews, intentions which they have made repeatedly clear and have continuously sought to act on. Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah has

said that that the entire Middle East will not rest until the “cancerous gland” that is Israel is removed, and on October 8 last year, a day after the Hamas massacre, Hezbollah formally joined the war in the wistful hope that they might help eradicate the Jewish state.

Since then, Hezbollah has fired more than 8,500 rockets at Israel, each an unquestionable war crime, murdering 47 people, including 12 children who were struck while playing football in the Majdal Shams massacre in July. In the meantime, over 80,000 Israelis have also been displaced from their homes in the north of the country, as a result of the ongoing attacks.

By any stretch of the imagination, Israel is fully entitled under international law, including but not limited to Article 51 of the UN Charter, to exercise its right to self-defense.

Some so-called “experts,” like Ken Roth, former head of Human Rights Watch, and New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, have immediately and reflexively rushed to condemn Israel for violating international humanitarian law, including by unlawfully using booby traps. But what does the law actually state?

Generally speaking, under Article 7 of the Amended Protocol II to the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, the use of booby traps in communication devices are indeed prohibited *in certain situations*. There is, of course, an overriding caveat, which is that pursuant to Article 52 of the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention I, such acts are permissible in circumstances where the objects in question are no longer used for civilian purposes.

In this case, the pagers and hand-held devices, which were distributed specifically to Hezbollah operatives, were being used for the purposes of communicating, planning and conducting operations. As such, they immediately ceased to be considered “civilian objects” and became legitimate military targets.

Accordingly, their destruction constitutes a clear military objective under customary international law (per Art. 52 of the Additional Protocols), and they are a lawful target of attack.

Under the Principle of Distinction, one of the cornerstone principles of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), parties to an armed conflict must also at all times distinguish between civilians and combatants.

In this case, the operation was also aimed solely at Hezbollah terrorists. Indeed, only Hezbollah operatives were known to be in possession of these devices, which were *not* widely or generally available, and were in fact ordered by Hezbollah and distributed by Hezbollah leadership specifically to circumvent Israeli intelligence.

Under the Laws of War, parties must also abide by the Doctrine of Proportionality, which requires that any anticipated loss of civilian life must not be excessive in comparison to the potential military advantage to be gained from such an attack and or action, as well as taking feasible precautions in planning and conducting attacks to reduce the risk of harm to civilians and other persons and objects protected from being made the object of attack.

In this case, the clear military advantage would be to stop the ongoing Hezbollah rocket fire, allow for the 80,000 displaced Israeli residents to safely and permanently return to their homes, and render a large part of an enemy army unable to fight.

Of the 4,000 reported Hezbollah operatives injured, only a handful of civilians were reportedly harmed. That is an *extraordinary* feat in modern warfare and the textbook definition of a precision and proportionate attack.

Lots of people like to claim Israel has the right to self-defense, and yet the moment the Jewish state lawfully exercises that right in an almost unimaginably targeted way, they are outraged, looking to cast Israel as an aggressor. For the record, 8,500 unprovoked and indiscriminate rocket attacks is what might be called an escalation, not the pinpoint accurate response to stop those rockets.

The article was written in collaboration with John Spencer, chair of urban warfare studies at the Modern War Institute (MWI) at West Point and host of the "Urban Warfare Project Podcast" and Dr. Mark Goldfeder is Director of the National Jewish Advocacy Center, and teaches at the Touro Law Center.

Published in Newsweek, September 20, 2024.

Will Hezbollah strike back? It depends

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 17.10.2024
Once the full extent of the damage suffered by Hezbollah becomes clear in the near future, the group's leadership will need to recalculate its approach to the war. The primary factor influencing the organization's conduct will likely be the number of casualties, both among Hezbollah operatives and civilians.

All-out war or strikes? This is how Hezbollah can respond

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 17.10.2024
The recent elimination in Beirut marks a new phase in the conflict between Israel and the terrorist organization. Israel must fully utilize its intelligence tools to anticipate future responses. If an all-out war breaks out, Israel would be better off initiating a preemptive strike.

Time to Strike Nasrallah's Soft Underbelly

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 17.10.2024
Alongside targeting senior Hezbollah figures and infrastructures, Israel should wisely exploit Nasrallah's Shiite community vulnerabilities.

The key implications of Hezbollah’s Aziz Unit commander assassination

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 17.10.2024

Israel needs to strike these weapon transfers to limit Hezbollah’s ability to benefit from the strategic backing provided by Tehran as much as possible.