

# 'Dahiyeh Doctrine' returns to Dahiyeh

## Targeting civilian life, an Israeli tactic under infamous 'Dahiyeh Doctrine'



By Somdeep Sen  
Scholar

### OPINION

When Israel struck an underground Hezbollah command centre in Beirut's southern suburb of Dahiyeh last Friday, killing its longtime Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, the damage to civilian life was huge. Reportedly, Israeli jets dropped more than 80, 2000-pound "bunker-busting" bombs that have a destruction radius of 35 metres on their target. The strike that killed Nasrallah also flattened six residential buildings. Similar Israeli attacks in the past two weeks have wreaked havoc on civilian infrastructure in Beirut and across Lebanon. The death toll in Lebanon has now crossed the 1000 mark and a million people have fled their homes. Israeli leaders have called on the people of Lebanon to get out of harm's way and to not become "human shields" for Hezbollah. Such messages suggest that the killing of civilians and the destruction of civilian infrastructure are unintended consequences of Israel's warmaking. In reality, targeting civilian life is a well-established tactic of the Israeli armed forces under the infamous "Dahiyeh Doctrine".

The doctrine, which takes its name from the Hezbollah stronghold in Beirut and entails the large-scale destruction of civilian infrastructure to pressure a hostile government or armed group, was devised in the context of Israel's 2006 war on Lebanon.

At the time, Israeli forces levied a destructive assault on the densely populated Dahiyeh and the remainder of Lebanon. According to the Red Cross, the 34-day campaign killed more than 1000 people and displaced 900,000. The Israeli forces destroyed or seriously damaged the country's entire civilian infrastructure, including its airports, water reserves, sewage treatment and power plants, fuel stations, schools, health centres and hospitals. In addition, 30,000 homes were destroyed or seriously damaged.

Experts have asserted that this tactic is a gross violation of international law and that targeting civilian infrastructure, no matter the justification offered, is a war crime. Yet, Israeli authorities insist that it's a legitimate tactic of war and helps deter future attacks on Israel by its enemies.

Two years after the devastating 2006 campaign on Lebanon, the head of Israel's northern command, Gadi Eisenkot, asserted that Israel will continue to use the strategy in future conflicts.

"What happened in [Dahiyeh]... will happen in every village from which Israel is fired on," he said. "We will apply disproportionate force on it and cause great damage and destruction there. From our standpoint, these are not civilian villages, they are military bases."

"This is not a recommendation," Eisenkot added, "This is a plan. And it has been approved."

And the plan was indeed followed. In the following years, the doctrine was implemented, over and over again, just not in Lebanon, but in Gaza.

The doctrine, for example, was clearly in play during Israel's "Operation Cast Lead" in 2008 that killed 1,400 Palestinians, including 300 children, in Gaza. The Goldstone report from the UN's post-war fact-finding mission found that Israeli soldiers "deliberately subjected civilians, including women and children, to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment... in order to terrorize, intimidate and humiliate them". It also detailed that the Israeli forces systematically destroyed Gaza's civilian infrastructure, including flour mills, farms, wastewater treatment plants, water installations and residential buildings. In fact, the report said Israeli soldiers engaged in a "wave of systematic destruction of civilian build-



ings" during the last three days of the operation, despite being "aware of their imminent withdrawal".

In 2012, Israel's "Pillar of Defense" operation similarly targeted civilian infrastructure in Gaza. Israeli forces destroyed or severely damaged 382 civilian residences. This included an airstrike on a three-storey home in the al-Nasser neighbourhood that killed 12 people, including 5 children. Israeli forces also destroyed or damaged bridges, sports facilities, banks, hospitals, media offices, farms and mosques.

"Operation Protective Edge" killed more than 2,000 Palestinians - including 1,400 civilians - in Gaza, in 2014. It also followed the Dahiyeh Doctrine. In violation of international law, Israeli rockets and mortars targeted "civilian buildings and infrastructure, including schools and houses, causing direct damage to civilian property amounting to almost \$25 million". In total, 18,000 housing units were damaged or destroyed. Israeli forces also struck Gaza's water, sanitation, electricity and healthcare infrastructure as part of this operation.

Of course, the most severe display of the Dahiyeh Doctrine has been during Israel's ongoing genocidal campaign in Gaza. Since October 7, Israel's apparent strategy of targeting Gaza's civilian population and infrastructure with the full force of the military to try

A man runs for cover as a smoke rises in the background following an Israeli airstrike in Dahiyeh, Beirut, Lebanon, on Oct. 4, 2024.  
● HASSAN AMMAR/AP



Israel's strategy of destroying civilian life to deter its adversaries reached its peak in Gaza, and has now returned to its namesake - Beirut's Dahiyeh.

Hezbollah paramedic staff left on the debris after an airstrike hit an apartment in a multistorey building, in central Beirut, Lebanon, on Oct. 3, 2024.  
● HUSSEIN NALLA/AP

and deter Hamas has brought a catastrophe comparable only to the Nakba of 1948. In just a year, Israel's military completely devastated all infrastructural and institutional bases of Palestinian civilian life in Gaza.

Now, in a tragic turn of events, the Dahiyeh Doctrine has returned to the very neighbourhood it was originally conceived in - Beirut's Dahiyeh. Israel is not only continuing its air assaults on Dahiyeh and wider Lebanon but has initiated a ground invasion. More than 1,000 have died

and entire neighbourhoods have been devastated, with no end in sight to what the Israeli military calls a "limited, localised, targeted" operation. Israel is once again implementing the Dahiyeh Doctrine, waging war on an entire civilian population, with no regard for international law or human rights.

That Israel has been allowed to pursue the wholesale destruction of civilian life as a military objective, first in Lebanon, then repeatedly in Gaza, then again in Lebanon, with complete impunity is a grim reminder of the

extent to which the peoples of the region have been devalued and dehumanised. Their lives seem to count for so little that rather than being condemned as a blatant assault on international law and morality, the "Dahiyeh Doctrine" appears to have been accepted by those leading the global community - Israel's Western allies and backers - as a legitimate pathway to achieving regional stability.

The global majority is of course deeply critical of Israel's assaults on civilian infrastructure in Gaza and Lebanon. Yet, Israel's partners in the West continue to support these efforts both materially and ideologically. Even when Israeli authorities outrageously claim that they are "escalating" their war efforts - meaning killing and maiming civilians and making their environments inhabitable - to "de-escalate", they nod in approval.

Israel's use of the Dahiyeh Doctrine, against different peoples, repeatedly and openly over two decades, without facing any official sanction, is yet another confirmation that the same countries and leaders who posture as the guarantors of the liberal order are also woefully guilty of violating its fundamental ethos.

Tragically, the hypocrisy of the leaders of the global community means that there is no incentive for Israel - today or in the foreseeable future - to confine this brutal, illegal and inhuman strategy to the dustbin of history. Until the masses across the world rise up to apply pressure on their leaders to put an end to Israel's many excesses, civilians in Lebanon, Palestine and across the region will continue to suffer and die under the Dahiyeh Doctrine.

The article first appeared on Aljazeera.

