



Israel's Illegal Military Occupation of Dozens of Villages in Southern Lebanon and Other Violations of International Law

Israel's military occupation of at least 55 villages in southern Lebanon and other breaches of international law in the country have garnered criticism. The situation has raised critical questions regarding how these violate Lebanon's territorial sovereignty and integrity, the laws of armed conflict, and the manner in which Israel has carried out its military operations. The number of internally displaced civilians in Lebanon has rapidly increased in recent months due to Israeli attacks and expanded ground operations. Israel's military operations in Lebanon have prompted analysts to compare them to those carried out in Gaza during the preceding years due to the use of mass destruction of infrastructure, targeting of civilian areas, and forced displacement. Experts have labeled this as the "Gazafication" of Lebanon because of the strikingly similar tactics being applied in an effort to depopulate areas of southern Lebanon. The comparison has drawn global attention, with international figures like UN Secretary-General António Guterres warning that the humanitarian crisis caused by the continuous displacement and unlawful Israeli military actions risks fueling instability across the region.

The Israeli "yellow line" militarized zone, which encompasses dozens of Lebanese towns and villages, amounts to de facto occupation – with the continuous strikes and incursions serving as a violation of international law and Lebanese sovereignty. Within the zone, Israel has destroyed homes and targeted other civilian infrastructure, not to mention the mass level of forcible displacement this has caused for those living in the area. All of these are deemed war crimes under the Geneva Conventions. Reports in recent months indicate that Israeli strikes have damaged or destroyed close to 1,400 buildings, many of which are homes, schools, or medical facilities. Over 1.2 million people have been forcibly displaced as a result of this – roughly one-fifth of Lebanon's population – creating a severe humanitarian catastrophe which has also seen more than 2,000 people killed, many of whom have been children. The crisis, characterized by widespread airstrikes and over 37,000 destroyed housing units, has overwhelmed emergency systems, forcing residents into overcrowded shelters or onto the street.

Exacerbating the scale of the current crisis is the fact that in recent years, Israel has repeatedly carried out strikes and attacks on Lebanon – even during times when these were supposed to be brought to a halt. The 2024 Israel–Lebanon ceasefire agreement, for instance, did not stop Israel from launching regular strikes – with UN agencies reporting that over 10,000 violations

were documented within the first year following its implementation – largely attributed to Israeli air and ground incursions. This has prompted many to become increasingly critical of Israel’s destabilizing and unlawful military actions in Lebanon. In addition to the humanitarian crisis that they have caused, they have also decimated Lebanon’s economy, resulting in an estimated \$15-\$20 billion in losses and the destruction of critical state infrastructure – particularly in the agricultural south. The extensive damage to homes, roads, water, electricity, and telecommunications networks alone has left reconstruction needs estimated at over \$11 billion.

Concerns that Israel’s military incursions and occupation in southern Lebanon could become a permanent one are mounting as well. The mass displacement of civilians from the south has led to fears of a foreseeable depopulated “no-man’s land” in the region. Israeli officials’ expression of an intent to not allow residents to return “until northern Israel is deemed secure” have been viewed as a blatant and vague attempt to create conditions for longstanding military occupation at the arbitrary whim of Israel itself. As proof of this, observers also point to Israel’s systematic and widespread destruction of infrastructure in southern Lebanese villages – actions carried out to leave these areas uninhabitable and nearly impossible for residents to return to in the future. As a result, world leaders from Canada, France, Italy, the United Kingdom and elsewhere have issued warnings against a prolonged Israeli occupation – highlighting its disastrous humanitarian consequences in addition to its likelihood to serve as a major impediment to peace and stability.

Ultimately, the Israeli patterns of systematic displacement and destruction of civilian infrastructure have led to increased scrutiny from human rights advocates, legal experts, and the international community. The scale and impact of these harmful Israeli military operations in southern Lebanon – as they did in Gaza – raise understandable questions about their true motives. They serve as a major obstacle to the prospects of long-term peace and stability, and should they continue, the chances of desirable political and diplomatic solutions remain increasingly unlikely.