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General Overview of the Conflict in Lebanon

Background and History

The conflict between Lebanon and Israel is a deeply entrenched and tragic saga that has left an indelible mark on Lebanon and its people. It began in 1948, when the creation of Israel led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Many of these displaced Palestinians sought refuge in Lebanon, significantly altering the country's demographic and political landscape. This influx of refugees set the stage for future conflicts, as tensions simmered between the displaced Palestinian population and the host Lebanese communities.

In 1978, Israel launched Operation Litani, its first major incursion into Lebanon, aimed at pushing the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) away from its northern border. This military action resulted in widespread destruction and civilian casualties, marking the beginning of a long series of Israeli interventions in Lebanon. However, it was the 1982 invasion that truly devastated Lebanon. Israel's Operation Peace for Galilee, ostensibly aimed at expelling the PLO from Lebanon, led to the Siege of Beirut and the horrific Sabra and Shatila massacre, where an allied Lebanese militia, under the watch of Israeli forces, brutally killed between 460



and 3,500 Palestinian refugees. This massacre is widely condemned as one of the most egregious war crimes of the conflict.

During the subsequent occupation of southern Lebanon, which lasted until 2000, Israel established the South Lebanon Army (SLA) as a proxy force, which committed numerous human rights abuses against the local Lebanese population. The occupation period was marked by frequent clashes and Israeli military operations, including Operation Accountability in 1993 and Operation Grapes of Wrath in 1996. These operations resulted in significant civilian casualties and mass displacement. The Qana massacre in 1996, where 106 civilians were killed while sheltering in a UN compound, stands out as a stark reminder of the brutal nature of the conflict.

Despite Israel's withdrawal in 2000, peace remained elusive. Hezbollah, which had gained strength and popular support as a resistance movement against Israeli occupation, continued to clash with Israeli forces. The situation escalated dramatically in 2006 when Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers, prompting a massive Israeli military response. The 2006 Lebanon War was characterized by widespread aerial bombardment and ground operations that resulted in the deaths of over 1,191 Lebanese, mostly civilians, and caused extensive destruction of Lebanon's infrastructure. Entire neighborhoods were reduced to rubble, and vital services like hospitals, schools, and roads were heavily damaged or destroyed. Many international observers and human rights organizations labeled Israel's actions during this war as war crimes, citing the disproportionate use of force and deliberate targeting of civilian areas.

The latest escalation began in October 2023, with skirmishes and clashes along the border. Israel's military response included airstrikes on Hezbollah positions and populated areas in southern Lebanon. Human Rights Watch documented the use of white phosphorus by Israeli forces, a substance known to cause severe injuries and fires, further exacerbating the suffering of civilians. As the conflict continued into 2024, the humanitarian situation worsened. Tens of thousands of Lebanese were displaced from their homes, seeking refuge in safer areas or even abroad. Infrastructure once again suffered, with homes, schools, hospitals, and roads being targeted and destroyed.



The ongoing conflict poses severe threats to Lebanon. The humanitarian crisis is deepening, with more civilians at risk of injury, death, and displacement. Lebanon's already fragile economy is under immense strain, struggling to cope with the cost of reconstruction and the needs of displaced populations. The environmental impact of the conflict, including the use of illegal munitions, adds another layer of suffering.

The Lebanese people are victims of a long history of Israeli aggression and military dominance. Each phase of the conflict has brought immense suffering, loss, and destruction to Lebanon, reinforcing the perception of Israel as a perpetrator of systematic violence and war crimes.

Israel's motives for its actions and military interventions in Lebanon can be understood through several key factors:

Security Concerns

Israel often cites security concerns as the primary motive for its military actions in Lebanon. The presence of armed groups like the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the past, and Hezbollah more recently, near its northern border has been a significant source of anxiety for Israel. These groups have launched attacks and raids into Israeli territory, prompting Israel to carry out preemptive and retaliatory strikes to neutralize perceived threats.

Strategic Control

Israel seeks to maintain a buffer zone to prevent militant groups from using southern Lebanon as a staging ground for attacks. By establishing and supporting proxy forces like the South Lebanon Army (SLA) during its occupation, Israel aimed to create a security belt to keep hostile forces at a distance. This strategy is driven by a desire to protect Israeli settlements and infrastructure from cross-border attacks.

Political Pressure and Domestic Politics

Israeli military actions are also influenced by internal political pressures. Demonstrations of military strength can be used to rally domestic support, especially in times of political instability or elections. Showing a tough stance against groups like Hezbollah can bolster the standing of political leaders and parties within Israel.



Deterrence

Israel aims to deter hostile actions by demonstrating its military capabilities and willingness to respond forcefully. By carrying out large-scale operations and inflicting significant damage, Israel seeks to send a message to Hezbollah and other groups that any aggression will be met with overwhelming force. This doctrine of deterrence is intended to prevent future attacks by making the cost of such actions unacceptably high for adversaries.

Influence Over Regional Dynamics

Israel's interventions in Lebanon are also part of broader regional dynamics. By weakening Hezbollah, which is supported by Iran, Israel aims to reduce Iranian influence in the region. This fits into a larger strategy of countering Iran's regional ambitions and curbing the capabilities of its allies and proxies.

Punitive Measures

There is a punitive aspect to Israel's military strategy, intended to exact a high price for actions taken by Hezbollah and other groups. Operations that target infrastructure and civilian areas, while often criticized as disproportionate, are seen as a means to punish and destabilize areas that support or harbor militants.

The concept of "Greater Israel" refers to a nationalistic vision held by factions within Israel, advocating for the expansion of Israeli territory to include lands historically or biblically associated with ancient Israel. This idea has been associated with various interpretations, ranging from specific territorial ambitions to broader ideological and religious aspirations.

Historical and Ideological Background

- **Biblical and Historical Claims:** Some proponents of Greater Israel base their claims on biblical texts and historical assertions, advocating for Israeli sovereignty over lands that were part of ancient Jewish kingdoms. This includes territories extending into parts of modern-day Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and the Palestinian territories.
- **Zionist Ideology:** In the early 20th century, certain Zionist movements envisioned a Jewish state encompassing a much larger area than the present-day State of Israel. While mainstream Zionism largely accepted the borders established by the United Nations



partition plan and subsequent armistice agreements, more radical elements continued to aspire to a Greater Israel.

Strategic and Political Motives

- **Territorial Security:** Advocates argue that controlling more territory, including southern Lebanon, is essential for Israel's security. This view holds that buffer zones and strategic depth are necessary to protect Israeli population centers from attacks by hostile neighbors.
- **Settlement Expansion:** The concept of Greater Israel is often linked to the settlement movement, which promotes Jewish settlements in the West Bank and other areas. Although this movement primarily focuses on the West Bank, the underlying ideology of expanding Israeli territory can extend to other regions, including southern Lebanon.

Actions in Lebanon

- **Military Operations:** Israeli military actions in Lebanon can be seen as part of a broader strategy to weaken and control neighboring territories. The repeated invasions and occupations, particularly in southern Lebanon, are viewed as attempts to extend Israeli influence and control.
- **Proxy Forces and Occupation:** During its occupation of southern Lebanon (1982-2000), Israel supported the South Lebanon Army (SLA), a proxy militia. This occupation can be interpreted as an effort to establish a buffer zone that aligns with the concept of Greater Israel by exerting control over additional territory.
- **Destruction of Infrastructure:** The systematic targeting of Lebanese infrastructure and civilian areas during conflicts is seen as a means to destabilize Lebanon, reducing its capacity to resist Israeli influence and potentially paving the way for territorial ambitions.

Contemporary Relevance



- **Geopolitical Shifts:** Modern proponents of Greater Israel might see the destabilization of neighboring states, including Lebanon, as opportunities to assert control or influence. The current political and military actions in Lebanon can be viewed through this lens, as efforts to weaken Hezbollah and reduce Iranian influence align with broader territorial ambitions.
- **Political and Religious Extremism:** Within Israel, certain political and religious groups continue to advocate for territorial expansion based on the concept of Greater Israel. These factions, though not mainstream, influence public discourse and policy, particularly regarding settlements and military strategy.

Criticism and International Response

- **Violations of International Law:** The pursuit of Greater Israel is widely criticized as a violation of international law and the principles of self-determination for neighboring peoples, including Palestinians and Lebanese. Actions taken to expand territory often result in human rights abuses and war crimes, drawing international condemnation.
- **Regional Stability:** The ideology of Greater Israel is seen as a threat to regional stability, perpetuating conflict and undermining efforts for peace and cooperation in the Middle East. Lebanon, as a direct neighbor, experiences the brunt of these ambitions through repeated military aggression and destabilization.

The conflict on Lebanon's southern border with Israel has deep historical roots, marked by periods of intense military engagement, occupation, and temporary peace.

1948 Arab-Israeli War: The creation of Israel and the subsequent displacement of Palestinians, many of whom sought refuge in Lebanon.

1978 and 1982 Israeli Invasions: Israel invaded Lebanon to target the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), leading to occupation of southern Lebanon until 2000.



1993 and 1996 Operations: Israeli military operations aimed at Hezbollah, causing significant casualties and displacement.

2000 Israeli Withdrawal: Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon after an 18-year occupation.

2006 Lebanon War: Sparked by Hezbollah's capture of two Israeli soldiers, this 34-day war caused extensive destruction and loss of life.

Analysis of Major Conflicts Involving Lebanon and Israel

1982 Lebanon War

- **Casualties:** Approximately 20,000 Lebanese, mostly civilians, were killed during the invasion and subsequent occupation.
- **Displaced:** Up to 1,000,000 people were displaced as a result of the conflict and ongoing occupation.

1993 Operation Accountability

- **Casualties:** Around 300 Lebanese civilians were killed.
- **Displaced:** Approximately 300,000 people were forced to flee their homes.

1996 Operation Grapes of Wrath

- **Casualties:** At least 154 Lebanese civilians were killed, including 106 in the Qana massacre.
- **Displaced:** Over 400,000 people were displaced due to the conflict.

2006 Lebanon War

- **Casualties:** Approximately 1,191 Lebanese were killed, mostly civilians.
- **Displaced:** The conflict displaced around 1,000,000 people, causing significant humanitarian and economic crises.
- **Damages:** Extensive destruction to infrastructure, with 15,000 homes destroyed, as well as roads, bridges, and power plants. The UN estimated damages at around \$3.6 billion.



2023-2024 Escalations

- **Casualties:** At least 432 Lebanese civilians were reported killed in recent escalations, and 465 wounded who had to be hospitalized.
- **Displaced:** Approximately 95,228 people were displaced due to the ongoing hostilities and military operations.

Key Data Points

1982 Lebanon War

- Casualties: 20,000
- Displaced: 1,000,000
- Damages: Not available

1993 Operation Accountability

- Casualties: 300
- Displaced: 300,000
- Damages: \$0.1 billion (approx.)

1996 Operation Grapes of Wrath

- Casualties: 154
- Displaced: 400,000
- Damages: \$0.2 billion (approx.)

2006 Lebanon War

- Casualties: 1,191
- Displaced: 1,000,000
- Damages: \$3.6 billion

2023-2024 Escalations

- Casualties: 432
- Displaced: 95,228 displaced
- Damages: \$0.6 billion (approx.)



Current Conflict (2023-2024)

Timeline of Recent Escalation

October 2023:

Initial Skirmishes: Tensions escalated following clashes between Hezbollah and Israeli forces along the border.

Israeli Airstrikes: Israel conducted airstrikes on southern Lebanon, targeting Hezbollah positions.

November 2023:

Use of White Phosphorus: Human Rights Watch documented the use of white phosphorus by Israeli forces in populated areas, causing severe injuries and fires.

December 2023 - January 2024:

Continued Airstrikes: Israeli airstrikes intensified, targeting infrastructure and civilian areas, leading to significant casualties and displacement.

February 2024:

Retaliation by Hezbollah: Hezbollah launched rockets into northern Israel, prompting further Israeli military responses.

March 2024:

Humanitarian Crisis: The ongoing conflict led to a humanitarian crisis, with tens of thousands displaced and significant destruction of homes and infrastructure.

Damage and Humanitarian Impact

Casualties:

- **Civilians:** At least 88 Lebanese civilians have been killed since the escalation began.
- **Combatants:** More than 300 fighters, including Hezbollah members, have been reported killed.



Displacement:

Population Displacement: Approximately 93,000 people have been displaced from southern Lebanon, seeking refuge in other parts of the country or abroad.

Infrastructure Damage:

- Homes: Thousands of homes have been destroyed or severely damaged.
- Public Infrastructure: Schools, hospitals, and roads have been targeted, exacerbating the humanitarian situation.
- Economic Impact: Estimated damages are around \$0.5 billion, adding to Lebanon's existing economic woes.

Threat of Escalation

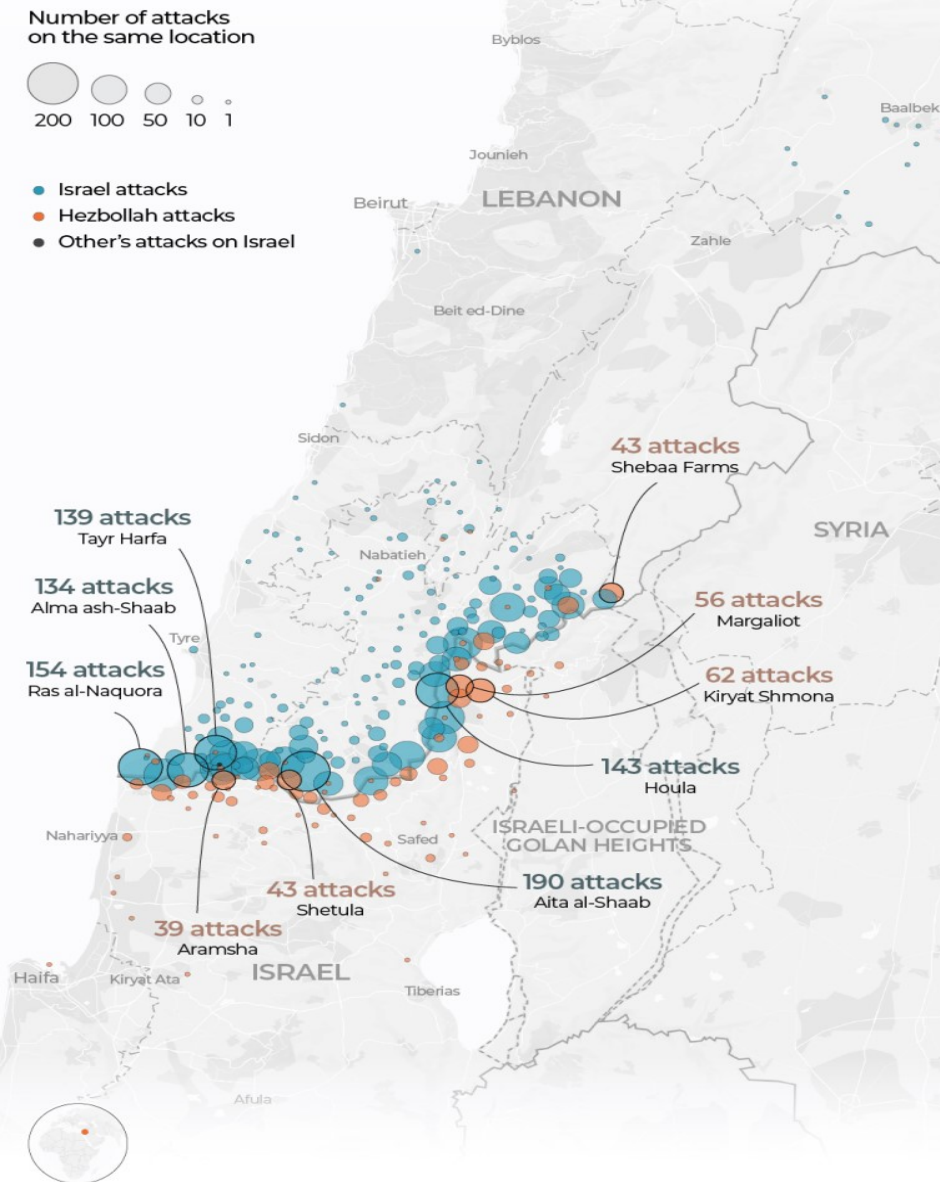
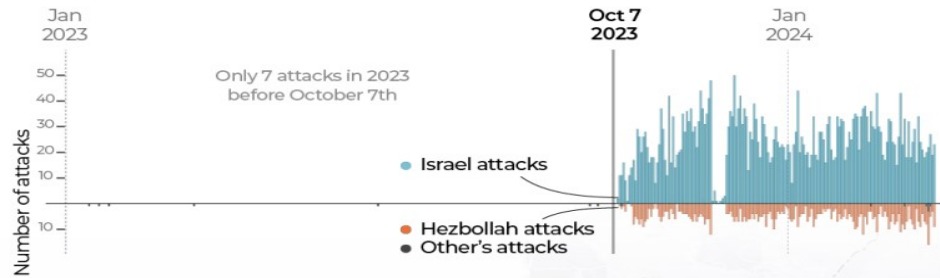
The current conflict poses several severe threats:

- Regional Instability: The conflict risks drawing in regional players, potentially leading to a broader Middle Eastern war.
- Humanitarian Crisis: Continued violence will exacerbate the already dire humanitarian situation, with more civilians at risk.
- Economic Collapse: Lebanon's fragile economy is further strained by the conflict, threatening national stability.
- Environmental Damage: The use of white phosphorus and other munitions has long-term environmental impacts.

Israel-Lebanon cross-border attacks

October 7, 2023 - March 15, 2024

4,733 Combined attacks	3,952 Israeli attacks on Lebanon	781 Hezbollah and other's attacks on Israel	379 Combined deaths	357 Lebanese deaths	22 Israeli deaths
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Source: The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) | March 15, 2024

Israel has attacked these locations in southern Lebanon the most:

Aita al-Shaab - 190

Ras al-Naqoura - 154

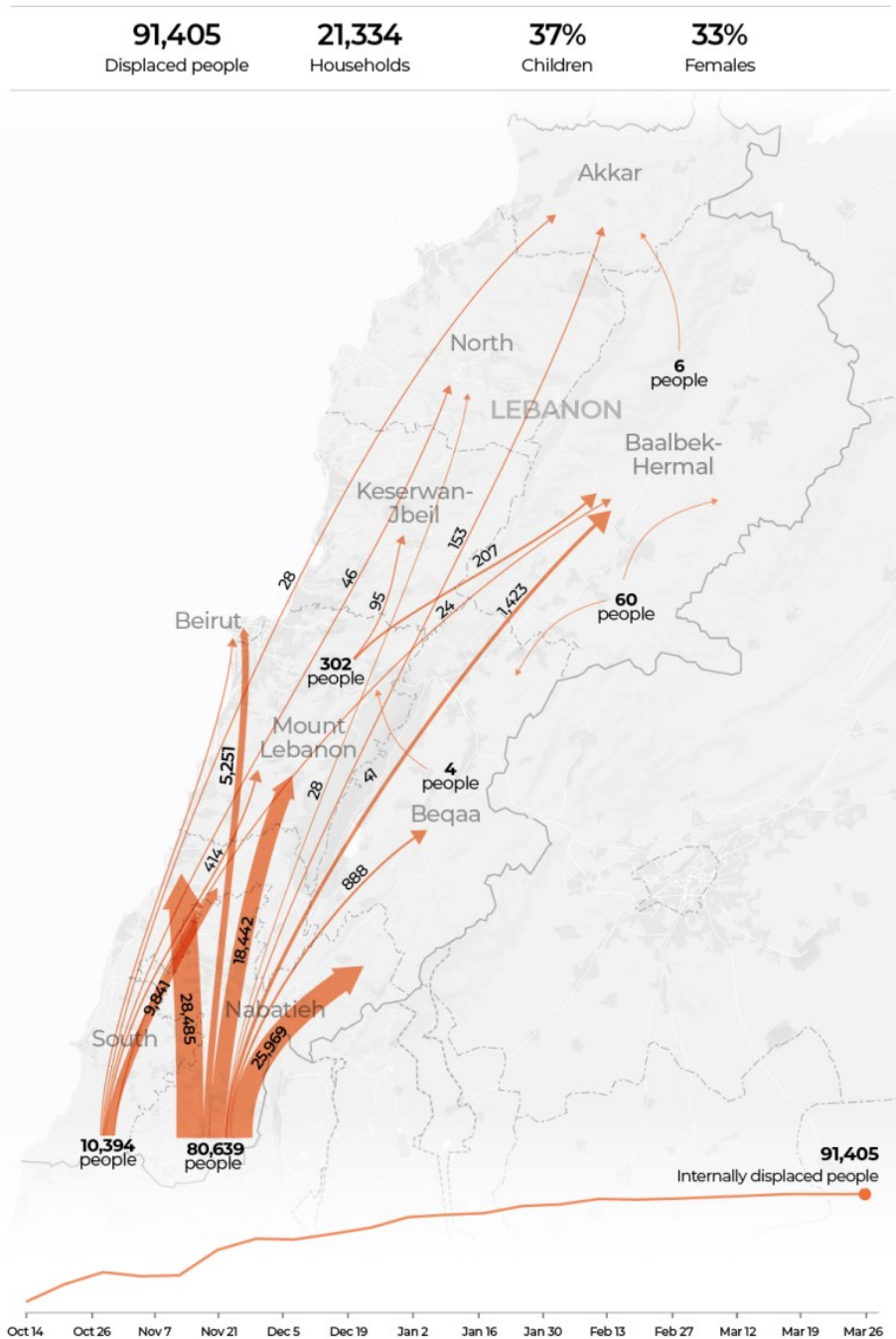
Houla - 143

Tayr Harfa - 139

Alma ash-Shaab – 134

Internally displaced people in Lebanon amid Israel's war on Gaza

October 7, 2023 - March 26, 2024





Israel's arsenal

- Israel holds the most advanced missiles in the Middle East, many of which it produces domestically but most of its precision-guided missiles are from the United States.
- According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), much of Israel's capabilities are short-range tactical systems including the Popeye, Extra and Gabriel missiles.
- Among Israel's long-range missiles are its Jericho 2 and Jericho 3 ballistic missiles with a range of 1,500-3,500km and 4,800-6,500km respectively.
- Also, despite not officially acknowledging it, Israel is believed to possess at least 90 nuclear weapons.

Israel's widespread use of white phosphorus in south Lebanon is putting civilians at grave risk and contributing to civilian displacement, Human Rights Watch said today. Human Rights Watch verified the use of white phosphorus munitions by Israeli forces in at least 17 municipalities across south Lebanon since October 2023, including 5 municipalities where airburst munitions were unlawfully used overpopulated residential areas.

White phosphorus is a chemical substance dispersed in artillery shells, bombs, and rockets that ignites when exposed to oxygen. Its incendiary effects inflict death or cruel injuries that result in lifelong suffering. It can set homes, agricultural areas, and other civilian objects on fire. Under international humanitarian law, the use of airburst white phosphorus is unlawfully indiscriminate in populated areas and otherwise does not meet the legal requirement to take all feasible precautions to avoid civilian harm.



Israeli War Crimes

Proportionality and Distinction

- **Human Rights Watch & Amnesty International:** Questioned the legality of Israel's actions due to high civilian casualties, particularly women and children. Allegations of indiscriminate attacks on residential areas without military targets.
- **UN Reports:** More children killed in Gaza in four months than in four years of global wars. Concerns over lack of protection for civilians.

Indiscriminate Attacks

- **Airstrikes:** IDF conducted 6,000 airstrikes, killing over 3,300 civilians. Strikes hit hospitals, markets, mosques, and refugee camps. Allegations of expanded bombing authorizations for non-military targets.
- **Human Rights Groups:** Called attacks indiscriminate and illegal, potentially constituting war crimes.

Collective Punishment

- **Blockade:** Israel's blockade on Gaza, restricting food, water, and medical supplies, deemed collective punishment. Multiple international entities condemned the blockade as a violation of international law.

Medical Neutrality Violations

- **Attacks on Health Facilities:** IDF targeted hospitals and ambulances, killing medical staff and crippling healthcare services. These attacks were deemed systematic and potentially war crimes by international bodies.



Summary Executions

- Reports of Israeli soldiers executing unarmed men and civilians. Calls for investigations into these actions as potential war crimes.

Last Updated: 7/13/2024