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Booby-trap Attacks on Lebanon: Indian Army Chief's Shocking Views



India's Chief of the Army Staff, General Upendra Dwivedi.

India's Chief of the Army Staff, General Upendra Dwivedi, in a TV interview to 'Firstpost' on 01st October 2024, has unabashedly defended the method adopted by Israel to use booby-trap weapons in Lebanon by describing it as a "masterstroke". The Army Chief appears to be wholly oblivious of the fact that India is a 'High Contracting Party' to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons of 1981, which prohibits the use of booby-trap weapons. Or was the Army Chief actually voicing the opinion of the Government of India, which – despite being a signatory to the CCW – has maintained studied silence on the mindless and illegal use of proscribed booby-trap weapons by Israeli intelligence agencies in Lebanon?

On 17th September 2024, at around 15.30 hrs local time, thousands of pagers were simultaneously detonated in Lebanon killing 12 people and inflicting injuries on about 3000 others. Outside of Lebanon, 14 people were injured in similar blasts in neighbouring Syria.

Although the attacks appeared to be a complex Israeli operation targeting Hezbollah, “*an enormous amount of civilian casualties were also reported, as the detonations occurred wherever members’ pagers happened to be — including homes, cars, grocery stores and cafes.*”

That was not all. The following day, at around 17.00 hrs local time, several other hand-held devices were targeted, including walkie-talkie radios, mobile phones, laptops, etc., killing 20 more people and injuring about 450 others. The indelible marks of Israel’s dirty tricks departments were very much discernable behind these terrorist attacks as is evident from the following report from CNN:

“...CNN has learned that the explosions were the result of a joint operation by Israel’s intelligence service, Mossad, and the Israeli military. Israel’s defense minister, Yoav Gallant, tacitly acknowledged his country’s role the day after the pager attack, praising “excellent achievements, together with the Shin Bet, together with Mossad.”

Shell Company

Apparently about five months ago, Hezbollah had procured about 5,000 new pagers from a Taiwanese company ‘Gold Apollo’ that were actually manufactured and sold by a company based in Budapest, Hungary, which had a license to use its brand on the pagers. However, the *New York Times* [‘*How Israel Built a Modern-Day Trojan Horse: Exploding Pagers*’, 20th September 2024] has uncovered that, for all intents and purposes, the Hungarian company was just a shell company:

“By all appearances, B.A.C. Consulting was a Hungary-based company that was under contract to produce the devices on behalf of a Taiwanese company, Gold Apollo. In fact, it was part of an Israeli front, according to three intelligence officers briefed on the operation. They said at least two other shell companies were created as well to mask the real identities of the people creating the pagers: Israeli intelligence officers.

B.A.C. did take on ordinary clients, for which it produced a range of ordinary pagers. But the only client that really mattered was Hezbollah, and its pagers were far from ordinary. Produced separately, they contained batteries laced with the explosive PETN, according to the three intelligence officers.

The pagers began shipping to Lebanon in the summer of 2022 in small numbers, but production was quickly ramped up after Mr. Nasrallah denounced cellphones.”

Implanting and exploding as little as 3 grams of PETN (Pentaerythritol tetranitrate – a stable high explosive chemical compound) in each device was sufficient to cause havoc. Similarly,

the handheld radio sets were also recently procured purportedly from a company with logos of the Japanese manufacturer 'Icom'.

According to the Associated Press (AP): “A sales executive at the U.S. subsidiary of Japanese walkie-talkie maker Icom told the AP that the exploded radio devices in Lebanon appear to be a knock-off product and not made by Icom.” Apparently, Israeli intelligence agencies had succeeded in implanting the explosive devices into the walkie-talkie sets and other electronic items before they reached Lebanon.

Attacks Condemned

Lebanon's Prime Minister Najib Mikati condemned the attack as “a serious violation of Lebanese sovereignty and a crime by all standards”, according to the state-run NNA news outlet. UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), through a statement issued on 19 September 2024, also condemned the blasts in no uncertain terms:

“UN human rights experts today condemned the malicious manipulation of thousands of electronic pagers and radios to explode simultaneously across Lebanon and Syria as “terrifying” violations of international law....

‘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,’ the experts said.

‘Simultaneous attacks by thousands of devices would inevitably violate humanitarian law, by failing to verify each target, and distinguish between protected civilians and those who could potentially be attacked for taking a direct part in hostilities.’

‘Such attacks could constitute war crimes of murder, attacking civilians, and launching indiscriminate attacks, in addition to violating the right to life,’ the experts said.”

Humanitarian law additionally prohibits the use of booby-traps disguised as apparently harmless portable objects where specifically designed and constructed with explosives – and this could include a modified civilian pager, the experts said.”

“Masterstroke”

On the contrary, India's Chief of the Army Staff, General Upendra Dwivedi, in a TV interview with Firstpost's Managing Editor, Palki Sharma, has expressed views that are absolutely shocking. General Dwivedi has actually gone to praise the methods adopted by Israel to carry out its terrorist attacks as a “masterstroke”. This is clear from the text of the relevant excerpts from the video clip of the said TV interview that is reproduced below. Palki Sharma did ask a very pertinent question to the General.

Q: Palki Sharma [at 0.15 seconds of the video clip]:

“It seems some disturbing precedence being set in this conflict [in West Asia], including the use of everyday gadgets and turning pagers and walkie-talkies into bombs and it makes people think everywhere in the world that we are all carrying some gadgets or the other at all points and we are all sitting ducks. So does India share this concern about these methods and what are we doing to ensure that we are not at the receiving end of something like this?”

A: Army Chief [at 01.36 minutes of the clip]:

“In this case Israel has decided very clearly that Hamas is primary focus, which I must maintain. So what is done is completely firstly wipeout Hamas opposition. Thereafter, it said okay let us see on the other side. And if you see the pager what you are talking about it is a Taiwan company being supplied to a Hungarian company. Hungarian company thereafter giving it to them. The shell company, which has been created, is something, which is a masterstroke by the Israelis. And for that it requires years and years of preparation. So it means they were prepared for it. And that is what it counts. That the war does not start the way you start fighting; it starts the day you start planning. And that is what is most important. So they had planned all these activities and what they did firstly they made sure that the pagers get blasted people get injured people died. Okay, now what happens? Perforce now you have to shift to mobile. The movement you shift to mobile what happens your signals are getting triangulated.... [At 02.58 minute] Coming to our side, yes the same threat arises. So supply chain interruption, interception, is something we have to be very watchful. So we have to have various levels of inspection on all these issues whether at the technological level or as well as manual level also to make sure that such things do not get repeated in our case.”

Shocking Views

The Interviewer had asked a pointed question: “*So does India share this concern about these methods?* She was referring specifically to “*some disturbing precedence being set in this conflict [in West Asia]*”. However, the Army Chief desisted from responding to this specific query. Instead, the General went on to praise the methods Israel had adopted to execute its terrorist attacks:

“The shell company, which has been created [to carry out the terrorist attacks], is something, which is a masterstroke by the Israelis. And for that it requires years and years of preparation. So it means they were prepared for it. And that is what counts. That the war does not start the day you start fighting; it starts the day you start planning. And that is what is most important. So they had planned all these activities and what they did firstly they made sure that the pagers get blasted people get injured people died.”

The Army Chief did not express any “concern” about the methods used; the General remained totally unmoved by the “*disturbing precedence being set*”! The General chose to eulogize not condemn Israel’s terrorist acts. However, the General did dwell on the precautionary steps that India should take to safeguard its security and ward off such threats.

India’s Principled Stand

How could the Army Chief have been oblivious of the fact that India was a ‘High Contracting Party’ to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons of 1981, which prohibits the use of booby-trap weapons, and had ratified the same on 01st March 1984?

How is it possible that the MEA had never briefed the General regarding India’s considered position as a ‘High Contracting Party’ on the matter, which India reiterates before the UN every year? For example, in 2007, India’s position regarding Protocol–II to the CCW was as follows:

“In stipulating that mines, booby traps or other devices must not be targeted against civilians or civilian objects or used indiscriminately, the Protocol effectively applies the core principles of the CCW Convention concerning the prohibition on the use of weapons that are indiscriminate and the prohibition on the use of weapons of a nature that cause unnecessary suffering or superfluous injury.”

UN’s Office for Disarmament Affairs had made it very clear that:

“By ratifying the CCW, States commit to the: ...Prohibition and regulation of the use and transfer of non-detectable anti-personnel mines, boobytraps, and other devices;...”

Apparently, the General was also unaware that Israel had carried out the terrorist attacks despite having acceded to the CCW on 22nd March 1995, which is nothing but display of utter contempt for even the treaties that Israel professes to abide by.

GOI Should Explain

It is amply clear that the Army Chief had made pronouncements that are wholly contrary to the principled stand adopted by the Government of India before the United Nations for the last 53 years. Or has the Government of India suddenly reversed its principled stand and decided to tacitly support the terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Israeli regime?

Anyway, the Government of India is not only duty bound to explain why it has refrained from condemning the terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Israeli regime on Lebanon on 17th & 18th September 2024 but also is duty bound to clarify how the Army Chief could have made statements that are wholly contrary to India’s principled stand against use of booby-trap weapons.

Booby Trap Attacks in India

The Army Chief's admiration for methods used by Israel to perpetrate its booby-trap attacks is all the more bizarre because India itself has been a victim of such terrorist acts from several quarters on numerous occasions for the past several decades and is continuing to face such threats. The most infamous of such attacks include: (a) the serial 'transistor bomb blasts' of 10/11 May 1985 in Delhi, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh that killed 85 people and injured another 150; (b) the Mumbai serial blasts of 12 March 1993 that killed 257 people and inflicted injuries on 1400 others; and the serial train blasts of 11 July 2006 in Mumbai that killed 189 people and injured over 800 others. Furthermore, 'Maoist' groups in India have been regularly using booby-trap weapons with telling effect. Under the circumstances, how has the Army Chief gone on to justify the methods chosen by Israel to use booby-trap weapons? The Army Chief has a lot to explain.

Adverse Consequences

The concerned global community has suddenly woken up to the ramifications of the misuse of mass-consumed electronic gadgets for terrorist activities. In the opinion of Subimal Bhattacharjee, *a defence and cyber security analyst*, there are three aspects to this massive impending threat:

“First, the usage of digital technology to levels that force multiple physical attacks and as a combination, lead to concerns over creating a larger havoc. With artificial intelligence becoming a major factor in enhancing kinetic weapons capabilities, the horizon is more complex.

Second, is the use of such techniques a harbinger for more deadly forms of cyber attacks? Can nations be allowed to go to such an extent of causing violence and death using digital techniques?

Third, how will the supply chain ecosystem deal with such attacks? Modern technology supply chains are incredibly complex, with components and software often sourced from multiple countries and suppliers. This complexity creates ample opportunities for malicious actors to introduce compromised hardware or software at various points in the supply chain. These compromises can be extremely difficult to detect and may lie dormant until activated for an attack.”

Until and unless concrete steps are promptly initiated to prevent gross misuse of mass-consumed electronic gadgets for terrorist purposes – especially by States such as Israel – the adverse consequences that the entire human society would be compelled to face would be unimaginable.

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