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Israel's war on Lebanon's history and heritage

Israel isn't just fighting Hezbollah. It intentionally seeks to eradicate Lebanon's rich cultural heritage and collective history, aiming to raise the Lebanese cost of supporting the resistance and reshape the state's political and demographic fabric.



Photo Credit: The Cradle

In modern history, Guernica stands as a poignant symbol. During the Spanish Civil War, the Basque town was subjected to an [unprecedented aerial bombardment](#) by General Franco's "Nationalist" forces in April 1937, and has become a haunting reminder of the horrors of war.

This was the first modern instance of civilian-targeted aerial bombing, carried out with the aid of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy against Republican forces – a coalition that included communists, socialists, and others resisting Franco's fascistic ambitions.

The tragedy of Guernica was immortalized by [Pablo Picasso's mural](#), capturing the devastation that struck the town, burying its inhabitants beneath the rubble, most of whom were women and children. Picasso's intent was to etch the bloody incident into the collective cultural consciousness as a symbol of the atrocities that humans can commit – a lasting admonition for future generations.

The west has skillfully harnessed cultural propaganda, and Picasso's mural has traveled the world, featured in exhibitions and international events as a counter-symbol to the concept of war. It has become a humanitarian document of solidarity with the civilian victims of Guernica and other tragedies.

Destruction across Lebanon

Yet, this global celebration of art as a reflection of human progress seems to apply selectively, particularly when it comes to the countries and people of West Asia.

For the past 40 days, in Lebanon's [Baalbek](#), Jabal Amel, Nabatieh, Tyre, and the southern suburb of Beirut, Israel has unleashed destruction on ancient cities, villages, and towns with ruthless intent. Entire neighborhoods have been leveled with precision, as if to erase their history.

Lebanon's *National News Agency* (NNA) has reported that at least 40,000 housing units have been destroyed by Israel in south Lebanon since 8 October 2023, and 37 towns wiped out, the majority of them within three kilometers from the southern border. Towns like Aita Shaab and Kafr Kila are among the worst hit. Since Israel launched its [ground invasion](#) on 2 October, the scale of destruction has escalated, with nearly 80 percent of the damage occurring after that date. Satellite analysis from [The Washington Post](#) reveals that nearly a quarter of buildings in 25 Lebanese towns near the border have been damaged or destroyed.

Occupation soldiers can be seen [reveling](#) in the obliteration of homes, taking vengeance as though punishing the people who once lived there – people who, as history tells us, are intertwined with resistance. These villages, towns, and cities, which were once the stronghold of nationalist sentiment, have resisted since the days of the [Hujair Conference in 1920](#) and beyond.

In these places, one still finds octogenarians, bearded and resolute, who revere figures like Gamal Abdel Nasser or Antoun Saadeh. Others remain fiercely loyal to the left and hold

onto the ideals of the Soviet era, or have fought alongside the Palestinian resistance since its inception.

After humiliating losses to the occupation state, and when the Arab nationalist tide receded in the 1970s, when states turned their backs and allied with Lebanon's enemies, the people of these areas embraced [revolutionary Islam](#) as a bulwark against occupation and hegemony.

War on Lebanon's culture and heritage

In Lebanon's case today, Israel's attacks are not just aimed at Hezbollah, the Amal Movement, or even the [Sunni-led Islamic Group](#) – they target the country's collective history, its present, and the very legacy of resistance that has long shaped its identity.

In the southern suburbs of Beirut, it is not just residential buildings that have been hit. Israel's raids have systematically targeted infrastructure, including water systems, telecommunications, electricity grids, and roads.

In Tyre, a [city steeped in history](#), the destruction mirrors the border areas. Cultural heritage, once safeguarded through centuries, is being obliterated under the barrage of Israeli shelling. In Baalbek, the devastation extended to [UNESCO-classified archaeological sites](#), including 3,000-year-old Roman ruins near the Baalbek Citadel, a landmark of immense historical significance.

This prompted the Lebanese government to file a complaint with UNESCO to protect this invaluable heritage. In Nabatieh, the bombardment reached unprecedented levels, with 1,763 raids reducing the city's historic market – a vital hub of economic, historical, and cultural life – to rubble.

By 26 October, satellite analysis revealed that [at least 9,934 buildings](#) across Lebanon had been damaged or destroyed, representing nearly one percent of all buildings in the country. This is part of Tel Aviv's broader strategy – to increase the cost of resistance in the minds of its supporters.

Raising the cost of resistance

In line with the notorious "[Dahiye Doctrine](#)" and through sheer disproportionate destruction, Israel hopes to raise the price of rejecting occupation and defending Palestinian rights, using methods designed to both punish and demoralize, to erase people, their historical heritage, and the physical traces of their existence.

The targeting of homes, neighborhoods, and cultural landmarks is a calculated campaign to sever ties between people and their land – to bulldoze the physical and emotional connections that define a community.

In southern villages such as Al-Adaisa and Mohibib, even the graves of ancestors have not been spared. What Israel is doing is a parallel war – not just a military assault but a moral and cultural eradication, an attempt to bulldoze both the material and spiritual resilience of a society that has long resisted.

This collective punishment, a flagrant violation of international laws and conventions, is designed to undermine the material and moral infrastructure of Lebanon. People, urbanization, infrastructure, and services – these are the pillars of strength in any society, and all are under systematic attack, as was seen with Israel's recent targeting of [Al-Qard al-Hassan](#) branches, the Hezbollah-run financial institutions set up to provide interest-free loans and other basic services to Lebanese civilians.

Challenges of returning and rebuilding

No doubt, the effects of this destruction will echo for generations. As the conflict drags on, with no apparent end in sight, Lebanon's people are being [systematically displaced](#). Entire communities have been uprooted, many of them displaced more than once, with some seeking refuge as far as [Iraq](#), Syria, Iran, and Africa.

Even if a ceasefire is reached, returning home is no simple matter. The destruction left behind means that many will find their villages and towns uninhabitable. Rebuilding will take time, and the [specter of sectarian displacement](#) looms, threatening to permanently alter the delicate demographic fabric of the country.

Israel's intent goes beyond its stated objectives – which have already [failed](#) to materialize, including the [return of the northern settlers](#). The leveling of border villages and the obliteration of livelihoods hint at a larger project – a deliberate reshaping of geography and demography.

This is evident in the attempt to establish a buffer zone on the Lebanese border, similar to the model in Gaza. Meanwhile, the resistance is preparing for a long, drawn-out conflict, understanding that this is [not just a battle for territory](#) but an existential confrontation over Lebanon's identity and future.

Under its new leadership, the resistance remains steadfast, knowing that Israel's campaign is aimed not only at disarming it but also at dismantling the connection between the Lebanese people and their cause, as in Gaza with the "[Generals' Plan](#)."

Civilizational struggle

Yet, despite the relentless bombardment and the attempts to fracture Lebanon, solidarity persists. The displaced from the south, the Bekaa, and the suburbs have found refuge

across Lebanon, and the embrace they have received speaks volumes about the resilience of the Lebanese spirit.

While divisions remain, and while the pressures of displacement could potentially sow discord, the current climate is one of broad humanitarian sympathy. But this solidarity is fragile, vulnerable to the pressures of prolonged displacement and economic hardship. If mismanaged, it could easily become a flashpoint for internal conflict, exploited by those with an interest in sowing further chaos.

The US-backed Israeli campaign in Lebanon is not just about military superiority; it is about reshaping Lebanon's political, social, and cultural reality. Fortunately, the resistance understands this, as do the people who continue to endure.

The challenge now is not only to resist militarily but also to preserve Lebanon's unity, culture, and [historical identity](#) in the face of a deliberate and systematic effort to dismantle it.

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