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# Exploding pagers in Lebanon: Supply chain tampering prime suspect in Hezbollah deaths

The attacks took place a day after Israeli leaders said they were considering stepping up their ongoing military campaign against Hezbollah

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 **NewsGuard**

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Civil defense first-responders carry a wounded man whose handheld pager exploded at al-Zahraa hospital in Beirut, Lebanon, Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2024. AP/PTI

On January 5, 1996, Hamas bombmaker Yahya Ayyash, who was linked to several suicide bombings that killed almost 100 Israelis, got a call from his father on a cellphone. As Ayyash spoke, the phone exploded, killing him instantly.

Israel's security agency Shin Bet is said to have put a trace amount of RDX in the cellphone. Its operatives remotely detonated the device as Ayyash was using it.

## 2,750 injured, 8 killed

So, on Tuesday, when **hundreds of handheld pagers** exploded across Lebanon and parts of Syria, the prime suspect was Israel, a country with a storied history in executing remote and targeted attacks to take out its adversaries.

Most of those impacted were said to be members of the Iran-backed Shia militant group Hezbollah — they were blown up on busy streets, at shop counters, on bikes, inside cars, at their homes, and even in a barber shop.

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Lebanon's Health Minister Firass Abia said the explosions injured 2,750 people and killed eight across Lebanon. Injuries were mostly reported to the face, hands, and stomachs of the victims, Abia told a press conference.

How was the attack carried out?

### Supply chain infiltration?

Early speculation was centered on some kind of a hack that caused the pager batteries to overheat, which resulted in the explosions. But this was quickly debunked, given the way the pagers seemed to have exploded in the footage that emerged.

The Russia-born, US-based security expert Dmitri Alperovitch said on X that the explosions would make the operation "perhaps one of the most extensive physical supply chain attacks in history".

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Alperovitch is the chairman of Silverado Policy Accelerator, a geopolitics think tank in Washington, [DC](#), and a co-founder and former chief technology officer of the Texas-based cybersecurity company CrowdStrike.

After the war in Gaza began last year, Hezbollah apparently warned its members to not use mobile phones for fear that they could be tampered with by Israeli

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communicate, Frank Gardner, the BBC's security correspondent, reported.

A new batch of pagers was delivered recently. Several experts were suspecting that the Israelis may have infiltrated the supply chain, and likely lined each of the devices with military-grade explosives.

An unnamed British security establishment officer that the BBC spoke to said the pagers could have been potentially armed by an electronic signal on the lines of an alphanumeric text message.

Although it is still unclear how these devices blew up, a Hezbollah official told The New York Times that “the devices were programmed to beep for several seconds before exploding”.

## Israel-Hezbollah war

The attacks took place a day after Israeli leaders said they were considering stepping up their ongoing military campaign against Hezbollah.

Lebanon's Prime Minister Najib Mikati characterised the attack as “criminal Israeli aggression” and called it “a serious violation of Lebanese sovereignty”, according to The NYT.

A Hezbollah source told The Guardian that they believed that the attack was “in response to the alleged assassination attempt by the Shia militia on a former top Israeli defence official, revealed on Tuesday by the Israeli Shin Bet security agency”.

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Speaking to The Guardian, Yossi Melman, a co-author of Spies Against Armageddon and other books on Israeli intelligence, said: “This absolutely has all the hallmarks of a Mossad operation. Somebody has planted minor explosives or malware from inside the pagers. I understand they were recently supplied as well.”

Melman, however, also questioned whether there was any strategic gain to be made from the coordinated explosions. “It won't change the situation on the ground, and



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Israel has long viewed Hezbollah as the biggest threat on its borders, and has fought several wars with the Shia militant group. The last open war was fought in 2006.

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