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Dahiya Doctrine

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Dahiya Doctrine

An Israeli military strategy of asymmetric warfare named after Beirut's southern suburbs—the target of Israel's aerial bombardment during the Second Lebanon War of 2006. The originators announced the doctrine in a series of press interviews in 2008, and Israeli military strategists subsequently published analytical studies. The doctrine responds to the new and complex demands of Israel's asymmetric engagements with Hezbollah in the north and Hamas in the south. Both groups share a strategic conception that attacks on Israel's civilian rear can offset the Israel Defense Forces's (IDF) military superiority and achieve political success. Operationally, they use high-trajectory missiles capable of targeting Israeli civilian settlements.

In response, Israeli strategists advocate a military doctrine intent on inflicting severe damage on their opponent's infrastructure and civilian centers to achieve deterrence and avoid getting dragged into wars of attrition. The originators, Major General Gadi Eizenkot, chief of General Staff of the Israel Defense Forces since 2015, and Colonel (Ret.) Gabriel Siboni, now serving as the director of an important Israeli military think tank, argue that Israel must respond to enemy hostilities immediately, decisively, and with disproportionate force. By setting a painful and memorable precedent, quick military operations serve to shorten and intensify the period of fighting and lengthen periods of calm between rounds of fighting. Israel's explicit goals include increasing the cost of postwar recovery for the states and civilian populations that support and finance attacks on Israel. Israel's archenemies consider postwar recovery imperative and integral to any victory. They mobilize their financial and noncombat resources for large-scale reconstruction efforts aimed at the rapid alleviation of civilian suffering.

Since its inception, the Dahiya Doctrine has guided IDF military operations in Gaza in 2008, 2012, and 2014. In each of these wars, human rights groups and international organizations widely criticized Israel for its disproportionate use of force and for the scale of the devastation inflicted. For critics of the Dahiya Doctrine, this intention to inflict immense destruction, explicitly not distinguishing between civilian and military targets and the purposefully high damage inflicted on civilian property and infrastructure, constitute a breach of international conventions and laws of war, especially of the principle of proportionality.

Proponents of the Dahiya Doctrine justify its use in asymmetric engagements with enemies fighting out of uniform. They contend that the international community should revisit the laws of war in an era of nonstate actors and transnational terrorism.

Proponents of the Dahiya Doctrine attribute the calm on Israel's northern and southern fronts to the deterrence imposed by Israel's disproportionate use of force in Lebanon and Gaza.

Fouad Gehad Marei

See also: Hamas; Hezbollah; Israel; Israeli Invasion of Lebanon; Lebanese Republic; Palestine

Further Reading

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