


From Violation to Accountability: Israel's Operation Pager from the Perspective of International Law and Iran's Diplomatic Options

Mohammad Saleh Taskhiri

Assistant Professor of International Law, University of Qom, Qom, Iran.

taskhiri.ms@gmail.com

 0009-0009-6768-6223

Abstract

Since 2023, Israeli military operations have been accompanied by a series of breaches of international legal rules and obligations, including deliberate famine, mass killings, the use of prohibited weapons, and other grave violations. Among these actions, the “Pager Operation” in Lebanon and Syria stands out, resulting in nearly 40 fatalities and over 3,000 injured or disabled individuals. This article seeks to answer two key questions: which international legal obligations were violated by this operation under international law, and what form of legal or international response should be adopted by Iran? Accordingly, through a descriptive-analytical methodology, the article provides a legal assessment of the operation. The findings indicate that the Pager Operation can be evaluated under four legal frameworks: international human rights law, international humanitarian law, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and other specific treaty regimes. Within these frameworks, the operation constitutes multiple violations, including the infringement of the right to life and the carrying out of extrajudicial killings, the violation of the right to health and dignified living, the breach of obligations prohibiting unnecessary suffering and indiscriminate attacks, the direct targeting of civilians and the infliction of collateral damage, the use of booby-traps, and the violation of the principle of distinction. In light of the recurring threats of similar operations against Iran and its allies and the potential harm to national and regional interests, the article concludes that Iran should employ international legal mechanisms to prevent the recurrence of such illegal acts or to raise the costs of their commission.

Keywords: Iran's international legal policy, Diplomatic protection, Extrajudicial killing, Israel, Rome Statute.

Introduction

Following the commencement of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood on October 7, 2023, an armed conflict erupted between the Zionist regime and the Resistance Front against occupation and oppression. During this period, over fifty thousand nationals of Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria were martyred, and countless others were wounded or disabled. This war—which, at the time of writing, has continued for nearly two years—has been marked by numerous instances of international crimes (Jannah & Mahfud, 2023: 206), involving various allegations. These crimes include the use of prohibited weapons, the destruction of medical and healthcare facilities, direct attacks on shelters, the imposition of blockades, and the deliberate creation of famine (Ak, 2024: 85–87; Zaman, 2024: 50–52). Over time, the aforementioned list has continued to grow and expand.

One of the events in which the parties to the conflict engaged in narrative contestation for a considerable time afterward was the incident known as the “Pager Explosion.” The pagers, which served as communication tools among segments of the populations in Lebanon and Syria, were detonated. This event was portrayed by the Israeli side as a major success, whereas it was characterized by Lebanese and Syrian sources as a grave atrocity (Paternoster, 2024). Although this incident has been consistently featured in the narrative constructed by the Israeli side and its network of supporters, it has not received adequate attention from the opposing side, particularly regarding its legal dimensions. This neglect can be traced back to the broader inattention of the academic community in generating legal scholarship and pursuing legal action through international mechanisms.

This article examines the Pager Operation from the perspective of international law and seeks to answer the following question: which international legal obligations have been violated by this operation under international law, and what form of legal-international response should be adopted by Iran? Accordingly, this study, without delving into other aspects of the matter, presents a legal analysis of the Pager Explosion based on relevant data necessary for legal interpretation. It formulates the legal framework of the incident under various branches of international law and investigates the obligations violated by the Zionist regime in the course of this operation, as well as the legal grounds upon which this act may be pursued through international legal proceedings.

International organizations, especially the UN and international

courts, first examine the legal characterization of a subject before proceeding to its adjudication. This article aims to provide a legal characterization of Israel's action in the Pager Operation, examines the importance of Iran's response to the issue from the specific perspective adopted in the article, and outlines the appropriate legal policy that Iran should adopt and pursue in this regard.

1. The Pager Explosion Operation

On September 17, 2024 (27 Shahrivar 1403), a large number of pagers—used as a communication device by a significant portion of the populations in Lebanon and Syria—were detonated. This device, which had been primarily employed by individuals affiliated with Hezbollah for secure communication, had been purchased from a Taiwanese company. Hezbollah did not designate this device as exclusively reserved for its secure communication purposes, but rather introduced it as a commonly used tool among building security units and similar entities (Almanar, 2024). The operation was repeated on September 18, 2025, resulting in an increased number of martyrs and wounded individuals.

The Israeli government vividly claimed responsibility for this act and revealed details of its complex operation involving the insertion of explosive materials into the pagers during the manufacturing phase. The Zionist regime declared the operation a major blow against Hezbollah, and the political and military leaders of the regime have consistently referred to their action with particular pride, presenting commemorative gifts related to the Pager Operation to the political and military leaders of their allied states (Krever, 2025). Israel has sought, within its narrative, to portray the victims exclusively as members of Hezbollah and to frame the operation as controlled and solely directed toward military objectives.

The Pager Operation resulted in nearly forty martyrs in Syria and Lebanon, and more than 3,500 individuals were wounded or disabled—many of whom were children, women, and the elderly. One indication that the pagers were not exclusively in the hands of Hezbollah members was the reported collection of pagers from Lebanese employees of U.S.-affiliated institutions (including medical centers and the American University of Beirut) prior to the operation (L'Orient, 2024). This fact also undermined the United States' claim of having no prior knowledge of the operation.

The Pager Explosion Operation carries significant legal implications. Under international law, a state may be held internationally responsible only when two conditions are met: first,

there must be a breach of an international obligation—whether treaty-based or customary—and second, that breach must be attributable to the state (Crawford, 2002: 81–82). According to the Articles on Draft of the Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, once these two elements—namely, the breach of an obligation and its attribution—are established, the international responsibility of the state is confirmed, and the resulting legal consequences will be borne by that state (Crawford, 2013: 45–46). Given that formal organs recognized under international law as official institutions of the Zionist regime have explicitly acknowledged responsibility for this operation, attribution of the operation to the regime is evident under Article 4 of the 2001 Draft Articles on State Responsibility of the International Law Commission (ILC, 2001: Art. 4). This acknowledgment not only details the manner in which the operation was carried out, but is also inferred from the explicit references made by political and military leaders to the Pager Operation and the successes it allegedly achieved (Krever, 2025).

With the element of attribution clearly established, the next step is to assess which international obligations—treaty-based or customary—were violated by the Pager Operation. Accordingly, this article focuses on identifying the obligations breached by this act and, in order to provide a comprehensive legal analysis, examines the matter under four legal frameworks: human rights law, international humanitarian law, international criminal law, and relevant treaty law.

2. Violation of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law Obligations

The United Nations human rights framework is structured around a network consisting of the Human Rights Council, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and a system of Special Rapporteurs (Freedman, 2013: 297–299). Each Special Rapporteur focuses on a specific human rights issue or individual right and provides assessments concerning violations of their respective mandates. This network of Special Rapporteurs endeavors to maintain greater independence from political influence and external pressure compared to the Human Rights Council and the High Commissioner, thereby offering more expert-driven and specialized opinions—although a degree of mutual influence between this network and political actors remains (Williams & Chapman, 2022: 88). When a group of Special Rapporteurs issues a joint report or statement, it is generally indicative of a grave human

rights violation that has prompted a collective response in the form of a unified document.

Two days after the Pager Explosion, more than twenty Special Rapporteurs issued a joint, report-like statement condemning Israel's actions as a grave violation of human rights. In this document, the Rapporteurs described the explosions in Lebanon and Syria as a “terrifying violation of international law” and structured their substantiated and evidence-based statement around the framework of human rights (Human Rights Council, 2024). According to the joint report, the incident resulted in the killing of 32 individuals and the injury of 3,250 others, including 200 critically injured and 500 who suffered visual or ocular trauma. Other official documents also recorded at least 2,750 injured persons (Kalaji et al., 2024: 1–2). The Human Rights Council's report explicitly states that among the killed were girls and boys as well as medical personnel, and it confirms that one of the injured was a diplomat (Human Rights Council, 2024).

Following the documentation of the aforementioned facts and its conclusion that the Pager Operation constituted an attack with a wide scale of civilian casualties, the report characterized the explosions as a gross violation of the right to life. It emphasized that: “These attacks violate the human right to life, absent any indication that the victims posed an imminent lethal threat to anyone else at the time.” According to the Rapporteurs, the crime in question amounts to a mass killing, and they called upon international institutions to take action, stating: “Such attacks require prompt, independent investigation to establish the truth and enable accountability for the crime of murder.” (Human Rights Council, 2024).

This report was cited at the beginning of the human rights section because it was issued by an official international authority and is therefore admissible as evidence before international institutions and courts. Moreover, its issuance by a collective of Special Rapporteurs adds to its evidentiary and legal significance. According to the report, the right to life of a group of individuals in Lebanon and Syria represents a clear instance of a human rights violation in the Pager Explosion Operation. In human rights discourse, the right to life encompasses both negative and positive dimensions. The negative aspect of the right to life refers to the prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of life. From a human rights perspective, no one's life may be taken except pursuant to law and as part of a lawful and legitimate punishment (Casey-Maslen &

Heyns, 2021, pp. 21–23). In other words, deprivation of life is permissible only based on a reasonable judicial decision grounded in law and legitimate legal evidence, and any instances outside this framework constitute a violation of the right to life under international human rights law. Based on the aforementioned data, the individuals who were killed in this operation lacked any judicial ruling or were not convicted of any specific crime that would legitimize the deprivation of their lives.

Over the past decade, another human rights concept has gained prominence, commonly referred to as “extrajudicial killing” or “summary execution.” This term describes situations in which an individual or group of individuals is killed by military forces based on various claims, without undergoing transparent judicial proceedings (Hossain, 2017, p. 1117). Some states, under the pretext of combating terrorism or similar threats, carry out targeted killings or assassinations, which from a human rights perspective are unjustifiable and classified as extrajudicial or summary executions (Susila, 2021). In this operation, Israel's claim of targeting Hezbollah does not constitute legal justification for deprivation of life; accordingly, the Special Rapporteurs emphasized that none of the victims posed a specific or verifiable threat to Israel (Human Rights Council, 2024). Therefore, the act effectively amounts to extrajudicial killing.

From the positive dimension, the right to life imposes an obligation on states to ensure a life lived with dignity and prohibits its violation (Hnitidou, 2016, pp. 71–75). What is primarily examined under this positive aspect is that the Pager Operation deprived more than three thousand individuals—including a significant number of civilians—of their right to health and to live with dignity. The wide geographic scope of the explosions, spanning southern Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley, Beirut, and Syria, indicates a lack of focus on military objectives (Helou et al., 2024, pp. 1–2). Another important point concerning the geographic spread of the victims is that even if some of these individuals were members of Hezbollah, they were considered non-combatant personnel under international law and thus protected by human rights law, and are not classified as military targets (Henckaerts & Doswald-Beck, 2005: 88–91). Notably, the casualties of this operation were not present in a combat zone nor engaged in active hostilities; this factor facilitates legal scrutiny from both human rights and international humanitarian law perspectives, given that the operation was conducted in civilian and urban environments.

International humanitarian law (IHL) refers to the body of rules governing the conduct of armed conflict and situations of war, and its legal terminology differs from that of human rights law. While human rights law addresses rights such as the right to life, health, assembly, housing, and similar protections, IHL employs concepts such as the rights of civilians, protections for medical personnel, places of worship, and the fundamental principles governing warfare. In essence, IHL serves as a protective shield for human beings during armed conflict and on the battlefield (Sassòli, 2024, pp. 186–187). Consequently, the context of application and the legal language of IHL and human rights law are distinct and separate. The Pager Operation, which the Zionist regime describes as an attack against military objectives, can be examined under the framework of international humanitarian law. The body of obligations classified as IHL commitments is codified in numerous treaties that have been developed and adopted continuously since the 1899 Hague Conference. A significant portion of state obligations under IHL and the rules governing armed conflict have been consolidated and codified in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their 1977 Additional Protocols (Tsagourias & Morrison, 2023). A vast body of international humanitarian law rules remains in the form of customary law, and this aspect is also taken into consideration.

The first obligation violated by the Pager Explosion under the framework of international humanitarian law is the duty to prohibit the infliction of unnecessary suffering. In the governing documents regulating armed conflict—particularly the Hague Law—parties to hostilities commit to refraining from causing harm that lacks a definite military advantage. This means that parties may only lawfully target military objectives, locations, and property, and if they intend to target combatants, they must avoid causing harm that is not strictly necessary for combat. The principle of precaution, as an established rule of international humanitarian law, affirms this obligation (Breeze, 2024, p. 314). In this context, the use of blinding laser weapons or non-lethal toxins causing long-term suffering is prohibited under Protocol IV of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) (Moon, 2022, p. 21; Tsybulenko, 2022, pp. 369–371). This prohibition exists because the effects of such weapons are not limited to the time and place of the conflict, inflicting enduring and unnecessary suffering on victims beyond the battlefield. All narrations of the Pager Operation emphasize that, since the pagers were devices used for transmitting written messages and the explosions were timed to occur just seconds after

message reception—when the pager was held directly before the user's eyes—this operation caused significant ocular and visual injuries. Such harm, even assuming a wartime context, is prohibited under the principle of prohibiting unnecessary suffering.

Another obligation breached under international humanitarian law arises from the principle of distinction. This principle requires parties to a conflict to direct attacks solely against military personnel, objectives, locations, and property, while refraining from causing harm to civilian persons, objects, and property to the greatest extent feasible (Quéguiner, 2016, p. 161). If an attacker conducts an assault without assessing or having knowledge of its effects on civilian targets and persons, such conduct constitutes a violation of the obligation to respect the principle of distinction. According to Geneva law doctrine, this constitutes an “indiscriminate attack.”

Legal scholars widely consider the Pager Operation to be a clear example of an indiscriminate attack (Kampmark, 2024). This issue was also addressed in the joint, report-like statement by the Special Rapporteurs of the Human Rights Council, which states: “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. 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” (Human Rights Council, 2024). The characteristics of the Pager Operation constitute a precise violation of the international humanitarian law obligation prohibiting indiscriminate attacks. Indiscriminate attacks focus on two main factors: the absence of reasonable assessment regarding the attack's impact on civilians and the lack of means to direct the attack specifically toward a legitimate military target (VanderWilt, 2021, pp. 29–30). Paragraph 4 of Article 51 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions defines an indiscriminate attack as one carried out by “method or means of combat which cannot be directed at a specific military objective.” This provision, along with Article 57 of the same Protocol, further clarifies the scope and limitations related to the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks. Legal scholars widely consider the Pager Operation to be a clear example of an indiscriminate attack (Kampmark, 2024). This issue was also addressed in the joint report-like statement by the Special Rapporteurs of the Human Rights Council, which states: “To the extent that international

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Moreover, intimidation and the creation of widespread terror are recognized as violations of international humanitarian law (Boughrara, 2024, pp. 252–253). Intimidation and widespread terror do not necessarily imply that a large segment of the population is physically harmed; rather, even limited military actions that spread terror among the civilian population constitute breaches of international legal obligations (Henckaerts & Doswald-Beck, 2005, pp. 8–9). This principle is explicitly addressed in paragraph 2 of Article 51 of the 1977 Additional Protocol I, which provides that: “Acts or threats of violence the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population are prohibited.” The Pager Explosion generated widespread terror regarding the use of electronic devices without military utility. The Human Rights Council statement highlights this aspect, stating: “It is also a war crime to commit violence intended to spread terror among civilians, including to intimidate or deter them from supporting an adversary. A climate of fear now pervades everyday life in Lebanon” (Human Rights Council, 2024). Based on the principle of distinction, the principle of proportionality in international humanitarian law mandates that, in a military attack, the attacker must choose a means of achieving its military objectives that minimizes incidental harm to civilian persons and objects. In other words, the collateral damage to civilians resulting from a military operation must not exceed the direct and definite military advantage anticipated. The Pager Operation, by causing harm to more than three thousand individuals, demonstrably inflicted extensive damage disproportionate to any concrete military benefit, thereby constituting a violation of the principle of proportionality.

3. Violation of the Rome Statute and Other Specific Treaties

The Rome Statute, also known as the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court (ICC), addresses four categories of crimes: war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and the crime

of aggression, placing them within the Court's jurisdiction. Although violations of international humanitarian law may also fall under the scope of the Rome Statute, the purpose of this section is to identify the specific criminal classifications under the Statute that may apply to the Pager Operation. It is important to note that the ICC has, in two separate phases, initiated proceedings against Israeli officials for crimes committed in Gaza (Bensouda, 2021); however, the scope of crimes related to the conflicts in Lebanon and Syria remains largely unaddressed. This article highlights the neglected dimension of those crimes, which may be subject to prosecution before the Court. Moreover, the Human Rights Council report uses the term “international crime” on several occasions (Human Rights Council, 2024), suggesting that the Special Rapporteurs themselves characterize the acts committed by the Israeli regime as falling within the jurisdiction of international criminal justice before the ICC.

As previously stated, each of the four core international crimes under the Rome Statute encompasses multiple criminal offenses. In addition to the fact that Israel's conduct in the war on Gaza clearly constitutes numerous criminal acts falling under the category of war crimes, as outlined in the Rome Statute (Mohammed Alashqar, 2023: 61; Arı & Turan, 2023, p. 445), the documented details of the Pager Operation indicate that it constitutes at least two specific offenses under Article 8 (War Crimes) of the Statute.

The first offense is the direct attack against civilians, explicitly prohibited under Article 8. Targeting civilians as such constitutes a war crime and falls within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (Miller, 2023, p. 575). More specifically, in the Pager Operation, Israel deliberately targeted individuals through a military tactic that involved no plausible humanitarian application. The nature of the attack—through devices designed to explode in close proximity to the users' faces—meant that human users themselves were the direct targets of the operation.

The second criminal classification under the Rome Statute that is applicable to the Pager Operation is the commission of “excessive incidental harm and death” (Sari, 2025, pp. 16–19). The explosions caused by the pagers lacked the capability for precise targeting or tracking that would ensure harm was directed exclusively at combatants. As noted in the report by the UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteurs, a significant number of girls, boys, and medical personnel—none of whom qualify as combatants under international law—were injured or killed in the operation (Human Rights Council, 2024). This type of harm aligns with the offense outlined in Article

8(2)(b)(iv) of the Rome Statute, which criminalizes launching an attack “in the knowledge that such attack will cause incidental loss of life or injury to civilians... which would be clearly excessive in relation to the concrete and direct overall military advantage anticipated.” The Pager Operation, by failing to distinguish between military targets and civilians, and by causing disproportionate harm, clearly meets the threshold for this war crime.

Moreover, the Pager Operation may also be classified under the titles of “assassination” and “terrorist operation.” Following U.S. and coalition military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq—justified under the pretext of counterterrorism—various international organizations and institutions have asserted that many such actions were indistinguishable from acts of terrorism. Consequently, these institutions maintain that the fight against terrorism does not justify violations of international legal frameworks (Boughrara, 2024, pp. 257–258). Israel's action in detonating the pagers, despite being framed as part of a counterterrorism strategy, in effect constitutes a form of state terrorism, and as such, is subject to international legal and judicial accountability.

The Pager Operation has also clearly violated two specific international treaties. The first is Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). Under this Convention, the use of booby traps is explicitly prohibited. The Convention defines booby traps as devices that are ordinarily harmless civilian objects, used in everyday life, but when repurposed for military objectives, qualify as prohibited explosive devices. This legal characterization is affirmed in the statement by the UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteurs, which reads:

“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. A booby-trap is a device designed to kill or injure, that functions unexpectedly when a person performs an apparently safe act, such as answering a pager.” (Human Rights Council, 2024).

In light of this definition, the detonation of modified pagers clearly constitutes a violation of Protocol II, as the devices were civilian in appearance, lacked military function, and were intentionally engineered to cause unsuspecting harm.

Paragraph 2 of Article 7 of Protocol II prohibits:

“It is prohibited to use booby-traps or other devices in

the form of apparently harmless portable objects which are specifically designed and constructed to contain explosive material.”

Paragraph 3, while outlining certain exceptions or justifications for the use of booby traps, states that incidental effects on persons or objects “in the close vicinity” of the intended military target may not automatically result in international responsibility. On this basis, some have argued that the Pager Operation falls under the exception in subparagraph (a), suggesting that the individuals harmed were merely in proximity to legitimate military targets (i.e., Hezbollah members). However, in response to this argument, international reports and the statement by the UN Secretary-General make it clear that the scale, diversity, and number of victims indicate that the use of booby traps was indeed realized, and that many of those harmed were not located near or beside military personnel or objectives (Jayaprakash, 2024). Therefore, the operation does not fall within the permissible exceptions under Article 7(3) and instead constitutes a direct violation of the core prohibition in Article 7(2).

The use of civilian objects for military purposes and weaponizing civil consumer technologies—as occurred in the Pager Operation—undermines the psychological security of societies in using everyday items (Back, 2025: 22; Sheng et al., 2024: 2350; Lavazza & Farina, 2024, pp. 70–71). As a result, the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, condemned the operation in an official statement, denouncing the weaponization of civilian devices as a violation of international norms (Guterres, 2024). A particularly significant point is Israel's status as a party to this Protocol. Its involvement renders the act a breach of Israel's treaty obligations under international conventional law (Giacomo, 2024). This treaty violation strengthens the legal basis for holding Israel internationally responsible under binding multilateral legal frameworks.

In addition, the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations was also partially violated, as the Ambassador of Iran to Lebanon sustained injuries—specifically, visual impairment—as a result of the Pager Operation. This occurred despite the fact that, under the Convention, and particularly Article 29, ambassadors, their family members, premises, correspondence, communications, and diplomatic pouches enjoy full international legal protection, rendering any form of attack or interference absolutely impermissible. Israel's justification of the operation as a strike against Hezbollah members does not exempt it from international responsibility, especially given that the attack not only caused injury

and death to individuals in Syrian territory, but also resulted in serious harm to a protected diplomatic agent residing in Lebanon. This act constitutes a clear breach of the inviolability principle under international diplomatic law and reinforces Israel's international legal liability.

4. Iran's Necessary Legal Response and Available Legal Remedies

Following the Pager explosions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran issued an official statement declaring that “the operation was contrary to all moral and humanitarian principles and violated international law, in particular international humanitarian law, and thus entails international criminal responsibility, prosecution, and punishment. This hybrid terrorist act, which in fact amounts to a form of mass killing, once again clearly demonstrates that the Zionist regime, in addition to committing war crimes and genocide against the Palestinian people, poses a serious threat to regional and international peace and security. Accordingly, confronting the terrorist acts committed by the regime and the threats arising therefrom is an evident necessity, and the international community must take immediate action to confront the impunity of the Zionist regime's criminal officials” (Kanaani, 2024). The language used by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was grounded in the terminology of international law, particularly in its emphasis on the concept of impunity, which occupies a foundational position in international legal discourse.

Iran cannot remain indifferent toward the Pager Operations for the following reasons: First, Iran possesses strategic depth in the region, and operations similar to the Pager explosions consistently pose threats to Iran's regional allies. At various points in time, Israel has threatened Iran and its allies with operations either similar to or more severe than the Pager attacks (Netanyahu, 2025). Furthermore, Iran's regional interest lies in the establishment of lasting peace among the countries of West Asia, and such operations undermine this regional interest. Regional crises disrupt or impair Iran's intergovernmental relations (Mohammadi & BadrGharmi, 2024, pp. 321–322; Biuck, 2020, pp. 216–217); therefore, Iran has invested considerable effort in the promotion of peace as part of its broader national interests. Israel has also pursued long-term strategies aimed at destabilizing Iran's relations with neighboring states and entities (Rajabi, 2021, pp. 271–275). In addressing regional issues, Iran has sought to align its political discourse with the vocabulary of international law; notably, in its proposal for a referendum in

Palestine as an Iranian initiative to resolve the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, Iran presented a discourse grounded entirely in the terminology of international law (Taskhiri, 2025, pp. 300–303). In light of the foregoing considerations, Iran is compelled to engage actively and decisively in response to the Pager Operations (Choudhury, 2024, pp. 361-362).

One key dimension of Iran's engagement operates within the framework of international law, as international law constitutes a universal and intelligible language whose meaning and implications are widely understood by global audiences. Within the scope of international law, the legal pursuit of the Pager Operations may be undertaken through various mechanisms. The matter of the Pager Operations may be brought before the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The ICJ is competent to render a contentious judgment in cases involving a legal dispute between two States (Li, 2023, pp. 46–47). Since the States directly affected by the Pager Operations are Lebanon and Israel, these States must initiate diplomatic protection on behalf of their nationals and institute legal proceedings against Israel, because only States are entitled to exercise diplomatic protection exclusively on behalf of their own nationals (Amerasinghe, 2008, p. 21). However, under the current circumstances—where an indifferent government is in power in Lebanon and the Syrian government, with the replacement of Assad by an Al-Golani government, seeks normalization with Israel—there is little hope for initiating contentious proceedings. Iran, for its part, is also unable to request a contentious judgment from the Court, even on the basis of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, as Iran does not recognize Israel as a State and has no intention of entering into contentious litigation in this regard.

It appears that recourse may be had to the advisory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in this matter. An advisory opinion of the Court is rendered when the United Nations or one of its specialized agencies formally requests the Court's legal view on a given issue (Li, 2023, pp. 47–49). Given Israel's consistent unwillingness to appear before international judicial forums, two advisory opinions have already been issued by the ICJ concerning Israel: *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory* and *Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem*. Although advisory opinions are formally non-binding, they carry significant legal and political weight in practice. Their interpretive authority and

normative influence render them particularly important in both legal and diplomatic spheres. For instance, following the Court's advisory opinion in the case concerning the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius by the United Kingdom, in which the ICJ affirmed the sovereignty of Mauritius over the islands, the United Kingdom was eventually compelled to return the occupied islands through a treaty arrangement (Monaghan, 2023, p. 148). In view of Iran's non-recognition of Israel and Israel's evasion of contentious proceedings before the ICJ, Iran may reasonably refrain from seeking a contentious ruling and instead encourage the member States of a United Nations organ or specialized agency to request an advisory opinion on the legal dimensions of the Pager Operations. In this regard, the use of international legal discourse could play an instrumental role in fostering the necessary consensus for initiating such a procedure.

Another level at which Iran may pursue appropriate legal action lies in the realm of human rights. In light of the statement issued by United Nations human rights rapporteurs, Iran can encourage both Iranian and non-Iranian human rights non-governmental organizations to seek justice for the victims of this atrocity through mechanisms such as the Human Rights Council, the United Nations Economic and Social Council, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and other affiliated UN bodies (Marks, 2016). Moreover, should any European citizens be among the Lebanese or Syrian victims, each of them may initiate proceedings before the European Court of Human Rights against European States, on the grounds of a violation of their obligations under customary international law; one such obligation is the duty of non-recognition of serious breaches of peremptory norms (*jus cogens*) (Talmon, 2006, p. 102). This obligation, in addition to being affirmed in the case law of the International Court of Justice, is reflected in several international legal instruments. The silent acquiescence or implicit approval of European governments in the face of the violations of human rights and humanitarian law resulting from these operations may provide a legal basis for adjudication before the European Court of Human Rights.

A realistic perspective on the function of international law in relations among States is that the law either succeeds in achieving its primary objective or renders the breach of legal obligations significantly costly. In other words, legal actions may either attain their principal aim—namely, the prevention of similar future incidents—or increase the perceived cost and risk associated with

violating legal norms. Accordingly, Iran's silence or inaction in this regard would only serve to reinforce the likelihood of recurrence of such incidents against Iran and its regional allies.

Conclusion

Israel's military offensive following October 7, 2023, against Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria has been accompanied by numerous violations of international legal obligations. A wide range of breaches of the laws of armed conflict—including forced displacement, mass killings, naval blockades, and severe damage to medical services—have been attributed to Israeli forces during this period. One such instance is the Pager Operation, involving the detonation of communication devices in Lebanon and Syria—an operation that resulted in the death of approximately forty individuals and caused severe physical injury and disability to over three thousand others. While Israeli officials have portrayed the operation as a major military success, it has been characterized by the opposing side—and reinforced by international reports—as a grave violation of international law and a potential war crime.

The Pager Operation constituted a violation of multiple obligations under the framework of international law. From the perspective of international human rights law, the operation led to the infringement of the right to life and amounted to a form of extrajudicial killing, for which the justification of combating terrorism does not confer legitimacy. Furthermore, due to the resulting disabilities and the recording of over 500 cases of visual impairment, the operation also breached the “right to health” and the “right to life with dignity,” both of which are recognized in human rights treaties. From the standpoint of international humanitarian law—the body of law governing the conduct of hostilities—the Pager Operation reflected a complete disregard for the principles of distinction and proportionality. More specifically, the operation resulted in “unnecessary suffering” and qualified as an “indiscriminate attack,” both of which are well-established violations under the Geneva law framework.

The Pager Explosion also constitutes an international crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, specifically falling within the scope of Article 8 of the Statute, as the operation resulted in a direct attack against civilians. According to the Statute, the occurrence of indiscriminate or disproportionate harm is likewise classified as an international crime. The aforementioned explosion, conducted without any reasonable

assessment of the individuals possessing these pagers, inflicted extensive harm on civilians—including children and medical personnel—none of whom were present in an active combat zone (Helou et al., 2024, pp. 1–2). In addition, the Pager Operation violated two specific international treaty obligations. First, it breached the prohibition on the “use of booby traps” as set forth in Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. Second, it infringed upon the immunity and special protections afforded to diplomats stationed in the territory of a foreign state. The term “booby trap” in this Convention refers to the military use of devices that have no military function in everyday civilian life and are widely accessible to the general public.

Based on the foregoing, the Pager Operation constitutes a series of violations of international law across multiple branches, including human rights law, international humanitarian law, international criminal law, and treaty-based obligations. Therefore, in response to the characterization of this operation as a significant achievement by the Israeli regime and the efforts of its supportive legal circles to legitimize it, it is incumbent upon legal scholars to thoroughly document and analyze these violations and to develop and disseminate scholarly literature on the subject. Such efforts will strengthen the evidentiary and scientific foundation supporting claims against the Israeli regime before the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice, particularly during the judgment phase, thereby reinforcing the legal mechanisms aimed at preventing the recurrence of such actions.

In light of the extensive violations of international law committed during the Pager Explosion Operation, the Islamic Republic of Iran's legal response is not merely a moral and humanitarian necessity, but a strategic component of its legal foreign policy in the face of escalating regional threats. Given the repeated threats of similar operations against Iran and its allies, as well as Israel's continued efforts to undermine legal norms, adopting an active position within the framework of international law is imperative for Iran. Utilizing the advisory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice, engaging with UN-affiliated human rights bodies, and articulating a legal discourse at the international level can strengthen Iran's legal claims and increase the legal and political costs of Israel's actions. In such a context, Iran's legal silence or inaction would not only weaken its position but also risk implicitly legitimizing the recurrence of such unlawful operations.

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