

“We will never leave”: Defying Israeli ethnic cleansing in South Lebanon

In his latest on the ground report for The Grayzone, Wyatt Reed travelled to the ancient city of Tyre to document the aftermath of a brutal wave of Israeli strikes on residential buildings and local businesses. Despite Israel’s claims that their attacks target Hezbollah, he found no evidence of militant activity. Instead, he only encountered civilians attempting to rebuild their lives — and, in many cases, refusing to obey a forced evacuation notice imposed by Israeli forces seeking to ethnically cleanse southern Lebanon. ||| The Grayzone ||| Find more reporting at <https://thegrayzone.com> Support our original journalism at Patreon: <https://patreon.com/grayzone> Facebook: <https://facebook.com/thegrayzone> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/thegrayzonenews> Instagram: <https://instagram.com/thegrayzonenews> Minds: <https://minds.com/thegrayzone> Mastodon: <https://mastodon.social/@thegrayzone> #TheGrayzone

#Wyatt Reed

We are here at the waterfront in the biblical city of Tyre in southern Lebanon, and behind me you can see the impact of Israeli strikes, which occurred just over a month ago. Three minutes before a ceasefire took effect at midnight on April 17th, Israel struck and destroyed six buildings. The impact of these strikes left 27 Lebanese people killed. Over 50 people were injured. This is how the Israeli forces rang in the ceasefire, and their modus operandi does not appear to have shifted very much in the time since—relentless ceasefire violations, including over the past two days. We've seen at least seven strikes here in the city of Tyre alone, leaving at least three people killed.

The devastation is incredible. We have bits and pieces of people's lives strewn among the rubble, along with trees that were shattered by the force of the impact. The Israelis say that these strikes are targeting, quote-unquote, Hezbollah terrorists. But as you can see, the impacts are not restricted to militants. They extend to all types of civilian life and have not stopped. Daily ceasefire violations have become a normal occurrence for the people of southern Lebanon, and it remains an open question just exactly when they'll end. As the United States and Iran were moving towards a ceasefire, the reaction from the Israelis was what it generally always is.

They decided to attempt to sabotage it by bombing in southern Lebanon once again. Here, on April 8th, you can see the impact of a massive Israeli strike. Locals were told that an evacuation order was being put in place for a mosque down the street, several hundred meters away. Hearing this news, many people came to this side of the street to observe. Instead, Israel struck here, killing three people and injuring dozens more. A few blocks away, at the Al-Ghadir bakery, I spoke with the son of the owner, who showed me the damage done to their business by the latest round of Israeli attacks.

#Local

My father is the owner of this bakery. We are in Tyre, as you know, the history of Lebanon is here in this place. It got bombed in this area three times. We don't know why. They are all civilians. They are our neighbors. We know them, they know us. Like, trust me, trust me, trust me, they don't even know what a weapon means. So I don't know why they got bombed here. They just want to damage everything. It's chaos right here. Like, here bomb, here bomb, there bomb, beside bomb. I don't know why. No military assets, no weapons, no rockets, nothing at all. It's just a bakery, poor people here. That's all. And we don't know why.

#Wyatt Reed

Now, this is not the first time, I understand. It's the third time. This is the third time that your building has been struck. Exactly, yes. This bakery.

#Local

The third time. And Alhamdulillah, we are still here in this land. We're not going to go anywhere. Alhamdulillah.

#Wyatt Reed

So you're going to rebuild it for the fourth time.

#Local

For the fourth time. And five, six times. We don't have any problem. Like you see, there's nothing here. It's a bakery, nothing. You can see, dough machine.

#Wyatt Reed

Maybe it's a dual-use military dough machine.

#Local

Oh, this is a dough machine. No military, nothing at all. It's all broken, damaged.

#Wyatt Reed

Wood-fired oven.

#Local

Nothing, yes. Like you see, it's cracked.

#Wyatt Reed

Yeah. So you're going to have to repair the crack.

#Local

Repair this and all of that.

#Wyatt Reed

What else was damaged here? Can you tell me?

#Local

Okay, the damaged part was, like, you see this? Yeah. From the... There was a journalist here who got bombed in this building. All of this got damaged. This is a new one. We were renewing it during the war.

#Wyatt Reed

This whole section?

#Local

Yeah, this whole section. You built this out? We built this. It was all damaged. The roof was on the floor. The motor there is broken. This area.

#Wyatt Reed

So this was bombed in 2024?

#Local

2024, exactly. And before the ceasefire, this building was bombed, as I mentioned.

#Wyatt Reed

So you suffered damage in that? Yeah. So this is the second time in a month.

#Local

Exactly, exactly. Hezbollah fighters are bombing Israelis, military, D9, Hummer, everything, everything, everything.

#Wyatt Reed

All types of military assets.

#Local

All types of military assets are being bombed. They're not even wearing boots, they're wearing Crocs. And they say, Alhamdulillah, look, I'm very happy. If they need my blood, I'm here. This is my brother. If they need him, then go. Exactly.

#Wyatt Reed

Well, that seems to be a very common belief here. The people of South Lebanon, many of them are Shia Muslims. Even those who aren't, they don't want to see their land given up and occupied by a foreign army. Exactly, exactly. We never give up.

#Local

You know, like in the 20s, 2006, we never gave up. And now, 2024, we never give up. 2026, we will never give up. In the future, we will never. This is not a choice for us.

#Wyatt Reed

Well, as you can see again, the strikes are targeting not military infrastructure, but civilian locations.

#Local

It's 100% civilians, 100%, 100% civilians.

#Wyatt Reed

Civilian locations, including this bakery, targeted for the fourth time. Why? Because they're feeding people. That in and of itself appears to have become a crime under the new Israeli set of rules that have been laid down on the people of South Lebanon. Even more horrifying was the devastation left on nearby Haram Street, where Israel first struck with a missile and reportedly detonated a second in mid-air. A coffee stand at the epicenter had disappeared entirely, and even days later, the street resembled a post-apocalyptic wasteland. Here on Haram Street in the city of Tyre, you can see one of the most destructive strikes I have witnessed in my time here in southern Lebanon. The impact crater right here, at least 20 feet in diameter. And you can see the blast went over a hundred feet, impacting buildings, residential buildings, all the way behind me.

And I was told by a local resident that it was not just one single missile strike, that this happened first, but then minutes later, Israel launched a second missile on the night of Wednesday, May 27th. The second one, they said, exploded in the air. And that's something that's backed up by the horrifying destruction all around me. If you look at this tree, you can see it was shorn limb from limb. These tree limbs now laying in the middle of the street several days later — local officials have still been unable to clean up this area. Obviously, the trees weren't the only things impacted. Homes all around me, obliterated, covered in soot and ash, vehicles that were burnt to an absolute crisp. This, again, just a small taste of what's been going on in southern Lebanon, thanks to Israel. This here was an espresso machine. As you can see, it still has grounds in it.

The force of the blast I showed you earlier launched this espresso machine 60, 70 yards, and it's left it a husk. You see any Hezbollah terrorists in there? Thankfully, residents had managed to evacuate the area before the terrifying Israeli strike, but not everyone was so lucky. All around me here in Tyre, the site of another Israeli strike, which happened without warning on Wednesday evening, just after 8 p.m., the paramedics who arrived on the scene were instructed by what is called the mechanism — a coordination committee organized by the United States in conjunction with Israeli officials. That mechanism told local paramedics to evacuate the scene. They were not given permission to sort through the rubble and look for survivors. Instead, they were forced to leave for over 36 hours.

It wasn't until early morning Friday that paramedics and rescue workers were allowed to return. At that point, they recovered three bodies. It's unclear whether those three victims were merely injured in the first blast and could have been saved. Thanks to the intervention by the United States and by Israel, we'll never know. When Israel issued its forced displacement notice last Wednesday, over 200,000 people here in Tyre and in the surrounding neighborhoods were affected. They've been left to group into a small Christian neighborhood here at the waterfront, an area no larger than about half a square kilometer. Outside, it's effectively a ghost town. In here, you'll see that later in the evenings, thousands of people congregate because it's the only place that they feel safe.

Given the threats that have been issued by top Israeli officials, including Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel's national security minister, who are threatening to flatten the Beirut suburb of Dahiyeh, we've decided to take our chances and head back to Beirut. Unlike the normal, average Lebanese citizens here, we're afforded a measure of protection by our body armor and by our status as journalists. However, given Israel's extremely poor track record in respecting journalists, it's unclear whether that will matter very much. Less than three hours after we left Tyre, Israel launched a massive series of strikes on the city, completely leveling three buildings and heavily damaging the Jabal Amel Hospital, the third hospital struck by Israel in less than a week. Four people were killed by the blast and 127 were left injured, most of them medical staff.

#Speaker 1

Are you alive?

#Wyatt Reed

The following day, June 2nd, Israel suddenly issued a new evacuation order, declaring the tiny Christian neighborhood we'd been staying in a military target and claiming it had been infiltrated by Hezbollah. The only way Christian residents could avoid being bombed, Israel said, was if they forcibly ejected the so-called terrorists from the area. The goal is obvious: pit Christians against Muslims and compel them to once again displace all of the Shias who briefly managed to find refuge in the old city of Tyre. It's a strategy Israel exploited in the Lebanese Civil War from 1975 to 1990. But in the time since, the various ethnic and religious groups of Lebanon have come to live in relative peace with one another. It remains to be seen whether Israel can reopen the wounds of decades past and destroy not just Lebanese infrastructure, but also the social cohesion people here have worked so hard to build. Wyatt Reed, reporting from Lebanon, for The Grayzone.