



Syria lithium-ion battery technology

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NEW YORK (AP) -- In what appears to be a sophisticated, remote attack, pagers used by hundreds of members of Hezbollah exploded almost simultaneously in Lebanon and Syria Tuesday, killing at least nine people -- including a young girl -- and wounding thousands more.

The Iran-backed militant group blamed Israel for the deadly explosions, which targeted an extraordinary breadth of people and showed signs of being a long-planned operation. How the attack was executed is largely uncertain and investigators have not immediately said how the pagers were detonated. The Israeli military has declined to comment.

Here's what we know so far.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah previously warned the group's members not to carry cellphones, saying they could be used by Israel to track the group's movements for targeted strikes. As a result, the organization uses pagers to communicate.

A Hezbollah official told The Associated Press the exploded devices were from a new brand the group had not used before. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the press, did not identify the brand name or supplier.

With little disclosed from investigators so far, multiple theories have emerged Tuesday around how the attack might have been carried out. Several experts who spoke with The Associated Press suggest that the explosions were likely the result of supply-chain interference.

Very small explosive devices may have been built into the pagers prior to their delivery to Hezbollah, and then all remotely triggered simultaneously, possibly with a radio signal, said Carlos Perez, director of security intelligence at TrustedSec. By the time of the attack, "more than likely the battery was probably half-explosive and half-actual battery."

After security camera footage appeared on social media Tuesday purporting to show one of the pagers explode on a man's hip in a Lebanese market, two munitions experts also said that the blast appeared to be the result of a tiny explosive device.

"Looking at the video, the size of the detonation is similar to that caused by an electric detonator alone or one that incorporates an extremely small, high-explosive charge," said Sean Moorhouse, a former British Army officer and explosive ordinance disposal expert. He estimated the amount of explosive required could be as little as 1.5 grams to 2 grams -- roughly the size of an eraser on the end of a pencil.

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Moorhouse explains that the tiny explosives and the method for detonating them would have had to have been built into the pagers prior to delivery, signaling the likely involvement of a state actor. He adds that Israel's foreign intelligence agency, the Mossad, is the most obvious suspect to have the resources to carry out such an attack.

N.R. Jenzen-Jones, an expert in military arms who is director of the Australian-based Armament Research Services, agreed that the scale and sophistication of the attack "almost certainly points to a state actor," and that Israel had been accused of carrying out such operations in the past. Last year, AP reported that Iran accused Israel of trying to sabotage its ballistic missile program through faulty foreign parts that could explode, damaging or destroying the weapons before they could be used.

Another possibility is that malware could have been inserted into the operating system of the pagers -- and that somehow caused the device batteries to all overload at a specific time, causing them to burst into flame.

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