



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# Hezbollah will have a challenging time surviving an accident with pagers, but will pagers survive it?



Hezbollah viewed the technological time machine as an ingenious strategy to evade the powerful Israeli intelligence services' surveillance of their communications.

Although not original, this kind of strategic thinking has worked very effectively for thousands of members of the pro-Iranian, extremist organisation in its protracted, low-intensity war against Israel.

It will turn out, however, that the technological step backward, from smartphones to pagers, was **fatal** for thousands of Hezbollah members and commanders.

It is possible that the simultaneous explosion of thousands of pagers in Hezbollah operatives' hands or on their belts will even determine the final outcome of the conflict with Israel.

At the beginning of the year, Israel's targeted attacks on dozens of Hezbollah commanders led their leader, Hassan Nasrallah, to order them to throw away their smart phones, believing them to be "guilty" of revealing the locations of the victims.

As a solution and, as expected, an unsolvable conundrum for Israel's rivals, Hezbollah has introduced forgotten pagers as its main means of combat communication.

## Typewriters instead of emails

Pro-Iranian extremists in Lebanon were not pioneers in technological counter-evolution when it could mean a step towards secure communication.

In the middle of the last decade, frightened by the leaks of protected electronic communications through WikiLeaks and Edward Snowden, diplomats around the world **advocated** a return to typewriters.

Russia and India then even ordered typewriters to equip some of their important diplomatic centres as a precaution against

leaking sensitive diplomatic communications.

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Apart from the fact that the failure of Hezbollah's strategy with the use of pagers in internal communication reminded many that this device still exists, it also opened the question of how alive communication is in general with this forerunner of mobile phones.

Although the small, once popular communication device has long been out of the focus of technological development, it is still very much alive on the international market.

## Market growth

Last year, global pager sales amounted to an enviable \$1.6 billion, with very even shares of sales (about one third each) in North America, Europe, and Asia Pacific.

Moreover, trends indicate that this market will grow by 5 to 9% over the next seven years.

"The Pagers market is a persistent demand for reliable and instant communication solutions, especially in critical sectors such as healthcare, emergency services, and industrial environments," **according** to Cognitive Market Research's pager market study.

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One could argue that the pager has weathered the harsh waves of technological advancement and managed to secure a position in the global market. And indeed, some of its qualities remain irreplaceable, even in the age of smart phones or smart watches.

About 2 million pagers are still in operation in the United States, and their users are not people who refuse to use smart phones. They continue to carry a pager in their bag or on their belt, despite also carrying a smart phone. This is primarily due to the features that a pager offers, which a mobile phone does not.

Using a pager implies one-way communication; unlike established mobile phone communication, messages received through it do not require a response.

## Should users be afraid?

Simply put, there are still many people who need a pager for work, and its reliability is almost irreplaceable in critical situations. Doctors and medical personnel, who receive calls for emergency interventions via pagers, are the biggest users (up to 80%). Around 130,000 pagers are still **in use** in the UK NHS.

There are, for example, professionals from the mining sector who often cannot be reached by a mobile phone signal, or first responders, for whom a fast and reliable emergency alarm is crucial for their timely reaction.



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With the increasing ban on mobile phones in schools, pagers have gained popularity and may become even more popular, and, therefore, parents want to maintain a permitted communication channel with their children for emergencies, even if it is one-way.

There is no doubt that the criminal underworld (especially drug dealers) remains a significant user of pagers. They exchange and send messages about delivery and reception via a channel that has no GPS, making it difficult or impossible to locate.

Although the size of this group of pager users is unknown, they should consider whether they will continue to use them after Hezbollah's network is breached.

Videos of pagers exploding across Lebanon, where Hezbollah operatives were killed, will undoubtedly make some users around the world give them up forever. But that will be an irrational reaction.

Anyone who uses a pager for legal purposes has no reason to forego its services and features, and some of them have proven to be so resilient that they survived the mobile phone revolution.