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## ***Israel escalates fighting with Lebanon, as ethnic cleansing of Palestinians continues***

Heavy fire was exchanged across the Israel-Lebanon border over the weekend and into Monday as the Netanyahu government presses for a wider war in the region.

In an article titled “Creeping escalation along Israel-Lebanon border brings risk of bigger war,” the *Washington Post* notes:

“Saturday saw Israeli jets strike an aluminum factory in the Lebanese town of Nabatieh, 12 miles north of the border—well beyond the traditional zone in which retaliatory fire has been considered acceptable by both sides.”

The article notes that “both sides have started using deadlier weapons,” with Israel “now regularly sending fighter jets to strike Hezbollah targets; Hezbollah is deploying drones and heavier caliber missiles.”

Last week, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) spokesperson Daniel Hagari threatened, “Lebanon’s citizens will bear the cost of this recklessness and of Hezbollah’s decision to be the defender of Hamas-ISIS. ... The IDF has operational plans for changing the security situation in the north.”

On Monday morning, Israel carried out another round of provocative shelling. Hezbollah returned fire against Arab al-Aramshe and Bar’am, as well as the Biranit army base. No injuries were suffered, though heavy damage was caused to the barracks.

Further exchanges of fire followed between IDF artillery, helicopters, fighter jets and tanks and Hezbollah missiles and drones.

Since October 7, nearly 100 have been killed in Lebanon, including 74 members of Hezbollah, and nine in Israel, including six IDF soldiers.

On Friday, Britain's leading foreign policy think tank Chatham House published, "The closer Israel gets to destroying Hamas, the more likely war with Hezbollah becomes." It noted, "There are those in the Israeli government, including Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, who want to more aggressively punish Hezbollah for its shelling of Israeli military positions along the border."

Gallant is leading the charge, telling US Secretary of State Antony Blinken of his desire to strike Hezbollah pre-emptively, which has until this point been overruled by his colleagues in Israel's war cabinet. But his view is widespread among senior officers, who "believe that a war in the north is inevitable."

Admitting Israel's plans for a wider war, Gallant said Sunday, "Iran is the root of hostility and aggression against the State of Israel. The war is multifront..."

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Yemen is another potential flashpoint for the eruption of a regional war. On Sunday, Iran-aligned Houthi fighters seized a cargo ship off the country's south coast. Spokesman Yahya Sare'e announced the vessel had been targeted for "being Israeli-owned," which it reportedly is not. Houthi forces have said they will "not hesitate to target any Israeli vessel in the Red Sea or any place we can reach."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu provocatively condemned the "Iranian" attack, while the United States National Security Council condemned the "flagrant violation of international law" and threatened to take "the appropriate next steps" with its allies.

The US already has substantial naval forces in the region and claims to have twice intercepted Houthi missiles and drones bound for Israel.

While the scope of the war expands, Israel is continuing its massacre and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in Gaza. The latest figures released by the Health Ministry show 13,300 have been killed, including close to 5,600 children and 3,550 women.

Attacks on hospitals, schools and refugee camps are continuous, with *Al Jazeera's* Hani Mahmoud commenting these strikes “seem to be a trend right now.” According to the UN, 176 people have been killed and 800 wounded while sheltering in its school buildings since October 7.

The latest focus is the Indonesian Hospital in the far north of Gaza. Shelling Sunday night through Monday morning killed 12 people, including patients, and injured scores. The Health Ministry warned that hundreds of civilian lives, including patients and medical staff, “are at the risk of death as a result of the direct and repeated bombardment of the Indonesian Hospital.” Tanks have surrounded the facility, and bomb damage to electricity generators has already caused one power outage.

More airstrikes were also carried out against the Jabaliya and Nuseirat refugee camps.

Preparations are being made to visit the same level of death and destruction on southern Gaza as has already devastated Gaza City and its surroundings in the north. Last week, the IDF told residents of the southern city of Khan Younis—the largest in southern Gaza—to leave. Roughly 1 million people are currently sheltering there having fled the north, nearly five times the city’s usual population.

Strikes have already been launched against the southern strip—roughly a third of all Palestinian deaths have been in this region—but are now set to escalate. Former head of Israel’s national security council Giora Eiland told Reuters of the planned operations, “There will probably be more civilian casualties. It is not going to deter us from moving forward.”

On Monday morning, Israeli airstrikes killed dozens in Hamad, northwest of Khan Yunis, most of them women and children. Separate IDF raids were carried out on the town of Bani Suhaila, east of the city.

Two-thirds of Gaza’s population is already displaced. As vast numbers of people are crowded into ever smaller spaces in the Gaza Strip, humanitarian conditions are getting even worse. According to the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, 90 percent of children are suffering health issues like malnutrition, anemia and weakened immunity. The organisation reported that the IDF has attacked agricultural land and facilities, flour silos, fishing boats and UN relief centres.

Not one bakery has been functional since November 7, with 11 destroyed and the others lacking flour, fuel and electricity.

According to the UN, 44,000 cases of diarrhoea and 70,000 acute respiratory infections have been registered in UN shelters—a fraction of the real total.

Gaza resident Renad al-Helou told *Al-Monitor*, “It’s like the apocalypse. We are tired. There’s no water, no food. ... There’s nothing left in Gaza. There’s only destruction, suffering and torture.”

Aided by its fascist settler allies, the IDF is also stepping up its assault in the West Bank. Around 200 Palestinians have been killed there since October 7—adding to the 250 killed previously in 2023—and over 1,000, including 450 children, displaced by violence or oppressive restrictions; six communities have been abandoned entirely, taking the total for the year to 11. Incidents of settler violence have more than doubled from three a day to seven.

The IDF has placed whole communities under siege. In Hebron, the H2 district home to 39,000 Palestinians and occupied by 900 Israeli settlers is under its harshest lockdown in 20 years, with Palestinians largely confined to their homes at gunpoint. A soldier who threw a stun grenade into a congregation at prayer in a mosque in Budrus, near Ramallah, was only suspended after video footage emerged of the attack.

Since October 7, roughly 2,800 Palestinians have been arrested in the West Bank, taking the total to 7,800, including 300 children and 72 women, according to the Palestinian Authority Commission for Prisoners’ Affairs. The organisation reports that at least four have died in custody in recent weeks and that hundreds show medical evidence of torture.

A video from earlier this month has been verified by Reuters, showing masked IDF soldiers in Hebron carrying out an arrest, beating a Palestinian man with their rifles in front of his family while streaming the assault on TikTok.

Military raids are being escalated. On Saturday, an Israeli warplane hit a target in Nablus, killing five people, for the first time since the Second Intifada.

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