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Israel guns for war with Lebanon and Iran

Another 210 Palestinians were killed and 360 injured by Israeli forces in Gaza in the 24 hours to Thursday 3pm, according to the Gazan health ministry. More than 21,300 people have now been reported killed in the assault, and over 55,600 injured, with roughly 7,000 more missing, likely buried under rubble.

The United Nations reports that 85 percent of the population of the enclave has been displaced, and 40 percent face famine. UN shelters are at over four times capacity.



Smoke rises following an Israeli bombardment in the Gaza Strip, as seen from southern Israel, December 26, 2023 [AP Photo/Leo Correa]

While the genocide in Gaza continues, Israel and its allies are looking to expand the scope of the war. Defense Minister Yoav Gallant declared earlier this week, “We are in a multi-front war. We are being attacked from seven fronts—Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Judea and Samaria [the West Bank], Iraq, Yemen and Iran.”

He added Thursday, “This is the end of the era of limited conflicts,” continuing, “We operated for years under the assumption that limited conflicts could be managed, but that is a phenomenon that is disappearing. Today, there is a noticeable phenomenon of the convergence of the arenas.”

When Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu makes comments along the lines of Monday’s, “We are not stopping. The war will continue until the end, until we finish it, no less,” it is the wider Middle East more than the already ruined Gaza Strip he is referring to.

The West Bank is one focal point of an already expanded conflict, with Israel tightening its military dictatorship over the occupied Palestinian territories. On Wednesday night, Israel carried out its most intense raids of the war to date in the region, sending large numbers of troops and vehicles into ten cities, killing at least one person and injuring 15 others, while at least two dozen were detained, and seizing \$2.5 million from money exchanges.

Over 500 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) or settlers since October 7, and over 4,700 arrested—among them journalists and politicians.

Middle East Journalist Mouin Rabbani told *Al Jazeera*, “They are out to deliberately provoke the Palestinians to seek to create as much conflict as possible,” adding that this was part of a plan “to permanently consolidate” Israeli control of the West Bank.

The UN released a 22-page flash report Thursday on “The human rights situation in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem” up to November 20.

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The paper lists: “Increase in the use of unnecessary or disproportionate force by Israeli security forces (ISF), resulting in unlawful killings”; “Mass arbitrary arrests, detentions and reported torture and other ill-treatment by ISF, raising concerns of collective punishment”; “Exponential increased in attacks by armed settlers leading to displacement of Palestinian herding communities”; and “Ongoing discriminatory movement restrictions affecting daily life and choking the local economy.”

A line from the summary reads, “Palestinians live in constant terror of the discriminatory use of State force and settler violence against them and, while the situation is already dire, all indications are that it may further deteriorate.”

Conforming the threat of a wider war, to the north a full-scale conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon is on a hair trigger. Israel’s forces are in a “state of very high readiness” and escalating strikes on Lebanon’s southern territory, in a trade of fire with Hezbollah forces. More than 150 people have been killed on the Lebanese side of the border since October 7, including over a dozen civilians, three of them journalists. Three more, one a Hezbollah member, were killed Tuesday by an Israeli airstrike on Bint Jbeil. Nine soldiers and four civilians have been killed in Israel by return fire.

Al Jazeera journalist Ali Hashem, reporting from Bint Jbeil, explained, “Israeli warplanes are currently targeting towns that are even very far from the border. The fact is that this area is now becoming a complete warzone, it’s becoming very dangerous, very risky, to go around, with the fact that you’re always anticipating an Israeli drone.”

Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen used a visit to the Lebanese border to threaten Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, who Cohen said “must understand that he’s next. If he doesn’t want to be next in line he should immediately implement the U.N. Security Council’s resolution (1701) and keep Hezbollah away from the north of Litani.

“We will work to exhaust the political option, and if it does not work, all options are on the table in order to ensure the security of the State of Israel.”

Netanyahu’s spokesperson Eylon Levy added the same day, “We are now at a fork in the road. Either Hezbollah backs off from the Israeli border, in line with U.N. Resolution 1701, or we will push it away ourselves.”

War cabinet triumvirate member Benny Gantz was most explicit, saying Wednesday, “The situation in the northern border necessitates change. The time for a diplomatic solution is running out. If the world and the government of Lebanon don’t act to stop the fire toward northern communities and to push Hezbollah away from the border, the IDF will do that.”

The ultimate target is Iran, in service to the broader imperialist war aims of Israel’s US patron. Referring to the seven theatres in which the IDF is waging its war, Gallant declared, “Iran is the driving force in the convergence of the arenas. It transfers resources, ideology, knowledge and training to its proxies.”

Israel drastically escalated this confrontation on Monday by assassinating Iran’s Brigadier-General Seyed Razi Mousavi, a senior commander of the country’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, in Syria. Omar Rahman, fellow at the Middle East Council of Global

Affairs, told *Voice of America*, “Israel’s decision to assassinate a high-ranking member of the Iranian military in Damascus is a huge provocation.

“Iran has stayed out of direct involvement so far, but if its commanders are being targeted, it will have trouble continuing along a path of restraint.”

Senior Iranian officials, including President Ebrahim Raisi, have pledged to retaliate. It is only one week until the fourth anniversary of America’s assassination of General Qassem Suleimani, considered second only to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, which Iran has repeatedly threatened to avenge.

Any retaliation would serve as a pretext for Israel, whose government is seeking a war it otherwise could not seriously contemplate because it has been assured in advance of US support.

Washington has deployed two aircraft carrier strike groups to the Eastern Mediterranean, adding to the thousands of soldiers it already has stationed across the Middle East. Since October 7, US forces have carried out multiple strikes in Syria and Iraq against Iran-aligned militias, most recently Kataib Hezbollah, following a drone attack on America’s Erbil Air Base. US Central Command commented that the strike “destroyed the targeted facilities and likely killed a number of Kataib Hezbollah militants.”

The government in Baghdad condemned the “hostile act” and violation of its sovereignty. US and allied forces are also heavily engaged in the Red Sea, where Iran-aligned Houthi rebels have launched attacks on shipping in retaliation for the genocide in Gaza. Washington is attempting to form a coalition navy to police the waters and considering strikes on Houthi bases in Yemen, with Iran placed squarely in the crosshairs.

“We know that Iran was deeply involved in planning the operations against commercial vessels in the Red Sea,” US National Security Council spokeswoman Adrienne Watson said last Friday.

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