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## Israel threatens war following clashes with Hezbollah

By Thomas Gaist

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatened war in Lebanon and Syria on Wednesday, saying that Israel is prepared to act “on all fronts” following an attack that killed two Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers near Israel’s northern border.

Seven more were wounded in the attack, when anti-tank missiles struck an IDF military vehicle traveling near Har Dov. One Spanish soldier, attached to a UN peacekeeping force and deployed with the IDF troops, was also killed.

The incidents are only the latest in two days of intermittent fighting between the IDF and Hezbollah militants in the Golan Heights, which have seen the contending forces launch missile and artillery attacks across the Lebanese-Israeli border. The clashes are the most significant in the Golan Heights area since the 2006 Israeli-Lebanese war.

The 2006 war was preceded by similar cross-border flareups, which were then seized upon to implement pre-existing war plans. The invasion and air campaign killed at least 1,000 Lebanese, mostly civilians. In close coordination with US government and military, Israeli forces deliberately targeted working class residential areas and essential public infrastructure for destruction.

“To all those who try to challenge us on the north, I suggest you look at what happened in the Gaza Strip,” Netanyahu said on Wednesday, referring to the 2014 IDF onslaught that killed more

than 2,000 civilians in the course of two months of bombing and ground assaults targeting densely populated areas.

“We will know how to respond with force to whoever challenges us,” Netanyahu added.

Israel has already launched retaliatory air and ground missions against targets in southern Lebanon, according to IDF officials. IDF and Hezbollah forces continued to exchange rocket fire through Wednesday afternoon, according to Lebanese media, with some 10 Israeli shells slamming into targets near and just south of the town of Shebaa.

The Israeli prime minister threatened Iran as well, saying, “Iran—via Hezbollah—has been trying to establish an additional terrorist front against us from the Golan Heights.”

Israel must “respond very harshly and disproportionately to rocket fire on our sovereign territory,” said Avigdor Lieberman, Israel’s current foreign policy chief and the leading political rival of Netanyahu in upcoming elections.

In official statements Wednesday, US State Department spokespersons backed Israel, giving the standard lies about Israeli “self-defense.”

“The United States strongly condemns Hezbollah’s attack today on Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) near the border between Lebanon and Israel,” said State Department spokesman Edgar Vasquez.

“We support Israel’s legitimate right to self-defense,” State Department spokesman Jen Psaki added.

These statements come amidst indications of tactical divisions between the Obama administration and Israel, as well as divisions within the US ruling class, over policy in the Middle East. Obama has said that he will not meet with Netanyahu when the prime minister visits Washington in March, at the invitation of House Republicans, to seek more backing for new sanctions against Iran.

Whatever these conflicts, they take place amidst a determined campaign by American imperialism to reassert control over the Middle East, which threatens to erupt into a regional civil war, involving Iraq, Syria and Iran.

Tuesday and Wednesday’s clashes may well represent the opening stage of a regional escalation that includes new Israeli military and covert operations in Syria, according to Israeli military experts.

Former IDF general Israel Ziv described the situation as “very flammable,” during an international press conference conducted via conference call Wednesday. “It’s very clear that, very easily from events and retaliation, we will find ourselves in a war,” he said.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Ziv pointedly noted that Israel was close to full scale intervention in the “chaotic situation over there in Syria.”

On January 18, Israeli war planes attacked a convoy of vehicles traveling on the Syrian side of the border, killing several Hezbollah fighters and an Iranian military officer. The Iranian-backed Hezbollah force, apparently targeted for a precision assassination-style strike, was engaged in efforts to drive al-Nusra Front fighters out of the Golan Heights.

The al-Nusra militants are currently participating in the US-organized proxy war against the Syrian government, and enjoy close relations with powerful elements of the Israeli state, according to the Israeli paper *Haaretz*. In exchange for Israeli military training and weaponry, the al Qaeda-linked al-Nusra Front is providing Israel with intelligence and supporting Israeli efforts to establish a new proxy-army in southern Syria.

At the same time, in the aftermath of the seizure of Yemen's capital by Houthi Shia militants reportedly aligned with Iran, US and Israeli politicians, military chiefs and commentators have issued increasingly bellicose warnings about growing Iranian power in the Persian Gulf and the Levant, and demanded new US-led military escalations in Iraq, Syria and the Arabian peninsula.

Leading Republican Senator John McCain called on Sunday for fresh US "boots on the ground" in Yemen and a number of countries bordering Syria to meet the threat posed by Iran. McCain's comments were met with enthusiastic agreement from his Democratic counterpart, Senate Intelligence Committee head Diane Feinstein, who suggested that the Houthi coup in Sana'a was part of plans to establish a new "Iranian crescent" in the region.

In reality, it is the US elite and its junior partners in Israel who are engaged in an aggressive militarist agenda aimed at insuring total domination of the region. This agenda, rooted in the US drive for global dominance, has brought the entire region to the precipice of a generalized conflagration with incalculable consequences.