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Israel launches major attack on southern Lebanon

Israel launched its largest attack on southern Lebanon since 2006 on Sunday, involving over 100 air force fighter jets. The Israel Defence Forces claimed that the attacks involved over 40 targets.



Israeli soldiers fire a mobile howitzer in the north of Israel, near the border with Lebanon, Monday, Jan. 15, 2024. [AP Photo/Ohad Zwigenberg]

Shortly afterward, the Hezbollah militia in Lebanon announced that it was beginning an attack on Israeli military positions in retaliation for the assassination of Fuad Shukr, its senior military commander, in an attack on Beirut last month.

Israel's strikes on Lebanon are part of a US-backed military escalation throughout the Middle East, with the central target being Iran. The US is simultaneously sponsoring Israel's genocide in Gaza, which has resulted in the deaths of over 40,000 people.

Three people were killed in the strikes in Lebanon, while no deaths were reported inside Israel. One Israeli soldier was killed on an Israeli warship after an Israeli air defense missile exploded over it. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed that they “intercepted all of the drones that Hezbollah launched at a strategic target in the center of the country.”

The Israeli attack was the most serious since Israel’s 34-day invasion of southern Lebanon in 2006.

US and Israeli officials had made it clear that they were in close coordination over the attacks, with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin speaking with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant twice over the weekend “to discuss Israeli actions to defend against attacks by Lebanese Hezbollah.” Israeli officials said they had briefed the US before carrying out the attack on Lebanon.

On Sunday, the Pentagon reported that US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin had ordered two US aircraft carriers to remain in the Middle East, reversing a plan that would have sent one of them home.

US National Security Council spokesperson Sean Savett endorsed Israel’s attack on Lebanon, declaring: “We will keep supporting Israel’s right to defend itself.”

In an interview on Sunday, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan added that “there was continuous communication, and we have been tracking the threat of Hezbollah attacks against Israel for some time now.”

In a statement on Sunday afternoon, Netanyahu threatened to continue attacks on Lebanon, declaring the strike was “not the end of the story.” He threatened: “We are determined to do everything we can to defend our country... whoever harms us—we harm him.”

In April, an Israeli strike killed a group of Iranian military officers meeting in Damascus, to which Iran responded with a strike on Israel with 300 missiles and drones, nearly all of which were intercepted.

In July, Israel assassinated Fuad Shukr with a strike in Beirut, followed by the assassination of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh at a military guesthouse in Iran.

Israel is the largest annual recipient of US foreign aid and has received \$12.5 billion in weapons since October 2023. The US has provided it with dozens of advanced fighter jets, including F-35s. Earlier this month, the US approved a \$20 billion arms sale to Israel, including 50 F-15 fighter jets, Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles, or

AMRAAMs, 120 mm tank ammunition, high explosive mortars and tactical vehicles. Israel is also the only state in the Middle East that possesses nuclear weapons.

Since October, Israel has killed nearly 500 people in southern Lebanon, more than the number of people killed in the 2006 invasion of Lebanon, alongside strikes against Iran, Syria and Yemen. During the same time, nearly 50 Israeli soldiers and civilians have been killed by attacks from Hezbollah.

Against the backdrop of Israel's strikes, negotiations over a possible exchange of hostages between Hamas and Israeli officials broke off on Sunday with no agreement. The discussions reportedly included CIA Director William Burns and David Barnea, the head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency.

Israel's attack on Lebanon takes place in the context of its genocide in Gaza, which the *Lancet* has estimated may have killed as many as 200,000 Palestinians.

Israel's escalation against Lebanon follows the July 24 address by Netanyahu before the US Congress. Netanyahu's remarks were not merely a justification and defense of the Gaza genocide, but an argument for US intervention targeting Lebanon, Yemen and Iran.

Following the address, US Vice President Kamala Harris stated: "I will always ensure that Israel is able to defend itself, including from Iran and Iran-backed militias, such as Hamas and Hezbollah"—an effective green light to expand the war beyond Gaza.

Israel and the United States have seized upon the events of October 7 to carry out long-held plans to reorganize the Middle East under US domination targeting Iran.

The escalating Middle East war is part of a global offensive of US imperialism throughout the world whose main targets are Russia and China, with the aim of restoring imperialist domination of the former colonies.

While the Biden administration is widely reviled for its sponsorship of the Gaza genocide, Harris, the Democratic candidate for president, has made it clear that she would only continue this policy, rejecting any limits on US support for Israel.

In her speech last week at the Democratic National Convention, Harris declared: "Let me be clear, I will always stand up for Israel's right to defend itself and I will always ensure Israel has the ability to defend itself."

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