

Netanyahu says Israel is prepared for “intense operation” against Lebanon

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While Israel is expanding its ground assault against Palestinians in Rafah, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Wednesday that the Israeli military is “prepared for a very intense operation” along the border with Lebanon.

Israeli attacks on Lebanon have intensified over the past two weeks, including strikes targeting medical workers. On May 27, a motorcycle was targeted in the southern town of Bint Jbeil that was hit next to a hospital entrance, killing both the motorcyclist and a hospital security guard, wounding several civilians nearby and causing significant damage to the hospital.

Israel claimed the motorcyclist was a member of Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shia militia, that has recently said it launched a drone missile attack against Israel’s air defense system called the “Iron Dome.” In all, Israeli strikes have killed more than 400 people in Lebanon, including 70 civilians and noncombatants.

On Wednesday, Human Rights Watch said that Israeli forces have used white phosphorus munitions, which “inflict death or cruel injuries that result in lifelong suffering,” in 17 areas of southern Lebanon since October 2023. This includes “5 municipalities where airburst munitions were unlawfully used [above] populated residential areas.” The use of white phosphorus against “concentrations of civilians” is illegal and violates the UN’s Protocol III of the Convention on Conventional Weapons.

Expanding its criminal war operations into Lebanon has been on the agenda for Israel since its campaign of genocide against Palestinians in Gaza began on October 7. The latest statements from Netanyahu that a major offensive is being planned and that “One way or another, we will restore security to the north,” indicate that an Israeli offensive against Lebanon is imminent.

On Monday, the Israeli military announced that its reservists had in recent weeks “conducted a division-level

and brigade-level exercise that simulated ground operations in Lebanon.” Meanwhile, on Tuesday, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi said a decision point is being approached, “We are prepared after a very good process of training—up to the level of a military exercise—to move to an attack in the north.”

Echoing statements about Hamas that have been used to justify the Gaza genocide, on Wednesday, far-right Israeli Minister of National Security Itamar Ben Gvir said it was the IDF’s job “simply to destroy Hezbollah.” Posting on Telegram, the fascist Ben Gvir said, “It cannot be that our land is being targeted and harmed, and people here have evacuated. All Hezbollah strongholds must be burned and destroyed. War!”

Responding to the Israeli threats, deputy Hezbollah leader Sheikh Naim Qassem told Al Jazeera on Tuesday that the militia did not seek a wider war, but it would fight one if it was imposed on it. He said an Israeli move to expand the conflict would be met with “devastation, destruction, and displacement” in Israel. Qassem also said the Lebanon front would not stop until the Gaza war stops.

With the backing of Iran, Hezbollah is one of the most powerful paramilitaries in the Middle East. Some military experts say that Hezbollah possesses 150,000 rockets that could overwhelm Israel’s air defenses in an all-out conflict. This possibility brings with it the direct involvement of the US and raises the possibility of direct military conflict between Tehran and Washington D.C., further pushing toward a third world war.

Karim Bitar, associate research fellow with the Institute for International and Strategic Affairs in Paris, told Al Jazeera that the risk of an escalation between Israel and Hezbollah “has considerably increased.” Bitar said, “Even though it is in nobody’s interest to see a wider escalation, it appears that many actors are no longer rational,” adding, “Emotions are running extremely high,

and any miscalculation could lead to a wider conflagration.”

However, Bitar warned, “Hezbollah is considerably stronger than Hamas, and the events of the past few months have shown that Israel was unable to eradicate Hamas. If Israel attacks, it will be a devastating blow for Lebanon, but it will also prove to be very counterproductive for Israel.”

News sources reported on Wednesday that Israel expanded its ground invasion of Rafah, the city in Gaza on the border with Egypt, that has been under siege for a month. Anadolu reported, “The Israeli army on Wednesday expanded its incursion into Rafah in the southernmost [region] of the Gaza Strip, along with advancing toward the eastern areas of the Bureij and Maghazi refugee camps, central the strip.

“An Anadolu correspondent quoted eyewitnesses that confirmed the Israeli military vehicles’ advancement toward the ‘Eastern Garage’ area and in the vicinity of Al-Awda Mosque in central Rafah. The witnesses added that the Israeli army’s advancement comes amid heavy Israeli artillery shelling on Rafah.”

Both the imminent expansion of war between Israel and Lebanon and the intensification of the ground assault in Gaza further expose President Biden’s ceasefire plan as pure deception. That there is no agreement became clearer when neither the Israeli government nor Hamas has supported any ceasefire plan.

As White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters on Tuesday, mediators were still awaiting a response from Hamas.

Reuters quoted an unnamed US official who said Biden thought it was important to “lay out details publicly so that the whole world can see” what was in the proposal while no one had agreed to it.

As historian Thomas Alan Schwartz of Vanderbilt University told Reuters, “In doing so, Biden employed a tactic he has used previously in his decades as a politician: making a public announcement about a deal in hopes of moving the parties forward,” even though no agreement ever existed.



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