

# Israeli regime preparing for all-out war with Hezbollah in Lebanon

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A drastic escalation of tensions between Israel and the Hezbollah militia in Lebanon over the past week has brought the prospect of an expansion of war across the Middle East ever closer. Following Israel's assassination of a senior Hezbollah commander and a retaliatory rocket barrage fired on northern Israel, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) released a statement Tuesday declaring that operational plans for a war in Lebanon have been approved.

Since the beginning of its genocidal onslaught on Gaza, Israel has exchanged almost daily fire with Hezbollah across the border. To date, Israeli air strikes and shelling have killed over 340 Hezbollah members and dozens of civilians in southern Lebanon, while Hezbollah rockets have killed 10 Israeli civilians and 15 IDF soldiers.

But the exchanges intensified markedly last week after Israel assassinated Taleb Abdullah, the most senior Hezbollah commander to be killed since October. Hezbollah responded by striking the Mount Meron air traffic control base in northern Israel on Saturday, prompting the IDF to insist that "no harm to the unit's capabilities" was caused by the attack.

On Tuesday, Hezbollah released drone footage of military sites and civilian infrastructure in Haifa in what was seen as an exposure of the limits of Israel's much-vaunted air defences in the north. Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz responded in a statement:

We are getting very close to the moment of deciding on changing the rules of the game against Hezbollah and Lebanon. In an all-out war, Hezbollah will be destroyed and Lebanon will be severely beaten.

Later in the day, the IDF issued a statement indicating that an offensive into Lebanon is looming. It declared:

As part of the assessment of the situation, operational plans for the attack in Lebanon were approved and implemented and decisions were made to continue accelerating the readiness of the forces in the field.

The Biden administration dispatched its special envoy for the Middle East, Amos Hochstein, to the region, where he held talks Monday with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant and President Isaac Herzog, before travelling on to Lebanon on Tuesday. Herzog reportedly discussed with Hochstein "the urgent need to restore security to the northern border," a euphemism for destroying Hezbollah.

While media reports presented Hochstein's trip as an attempt to "deescalate" the conflict, the reality is that American imperialism is playing the most provocative role in propelling the Middle East towards a catastrophic region-wide war. Washington appears to be temporarily applying the brakes on its Israeli ally above all because it would prefer to have more time to cobble together an anti-Iranian alliance that includes the Arab Gulf states for war against Tehran. If its attack dog launches a war in Lebanon, however, American imperialism will undoubtedly back it to the hilt.

The entire Israeli political establishment wants war in Lebanon. The Zionist agenda of a greater Israel, to be realised through the genocide in Gaza and further expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, also necessitates the crushing of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Netanyahu and his far-right government are determined to continue the genocide in Gaza and at the same time unleash a war on the northern front.

Giving his fascist allies Bezalil Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir free reign, Netanyahu has overseen an explosion in settler vigilante violence in the West Bank and a military dragnet of raids and arrests that have claimed the lives of over 500 Palestinians and led to the detention of thousands.

National Unity leader Benny Gantz, who quit Netanyahu's war cabinet June 9, favours concluding an agreement with Hamas to facilitate the waging of war in Lebanon. Chili Tropper, another National Unity member who quit the war cabinet with Gantz, recently told the *New Yorker*:

We want to strengthen the Palestinian Authority in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank] and not destroy it like the government is doing. In Gaza, we propose to work with local Gazan forces. We have proposed the most far-reaching deal to bring the hostages home, not only because that is the right thing to do but so that we can then shift the focus of the war away from Gaza to the north.

Netanyahu, who requires the continued support of his fascist allies to remain in power and avoid being criminally prosecuted, aims to cut the ground from under his rivals by expanding the war. By creating "facts on the ground," he hopes to strengthen his political position.

Gantz, who was a war criminal long before he joined Netanyahu's gang of genocidal murderers last October, fully endorses the ethnic cleansing of Gaza. The National Unity members of the war cabinet backed last month's offensive on Rafah, which displaced over 700,000 people. His faction has never criticised the horrific death toll among the Palestinians, more than 37,000 of whom have been massacred by the IDF. AS Tropper's comments make clear, they are no less enthusiastic about a war in Lebanon.

American imperialism has fully endorsed and been complicit in the genocide from the outset. It views Israel's "final solution" of the Palestinian question as a key component of the preparation of a region-wide war targeting Iran.

This is why the Biden administration approved Israel's provocative strike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus in early April, which claimed the lives of senior Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps members and forced the Islamic Republic to retaliate with a drone attack on Israeli bases, which Tehran telegraphed to avoid an uncontrolled escalation. Washington hopes with this war to secure its hegemony over the energy-rich Middle East and strike a blow against its geostrategic rivals, including Russia, but above all China.

Under both Trump and Biden, Washington has worked to bring together an anti-Tehran axis of states in the region, including Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This broader strategy is complicated by Netanyahu and his fascist allies, whose refusal to accept

even a token role for the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and strike an agreement with Hamas to free the hostages makes it much harder for Washington to persuade Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other Gulf Sheikdoms to join its anti-Iran alliance.

The Biden administration is therefore keeping its options open. During his visit to Israel, Hochstein met not only with Netanyahu and other government officials, but also with Gantz and opposition leader Yair Lapid, who has remained outside the war cabinet but also backs the genocide.

While it remains to be seen how the factional disputes over the best tactics for waging war in the Middle East will play out, there is no doubt about US imperialism's push towards a region-wide conflagration—one that may erupt sooner rather than later if its Israeli attack dog invades Lebanon. While Hochstein was in the region being briefed on how Israel intends to "restore security" on its northern border, by launching a bloody onslaught, the Democrats in Congress gave their approval for the dispatch of \$18 billion worth of military equipment to the Zionist regime. The package includes 50 F-15 fighter jets.

Rep. Gregory Meeks, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, explained his support for the agreement that he had previously held up by saying he is "supportive of Israel's right to defend itself against the real threats posed by Iran and Hezbollah."

The looming danger of war spreading to Lebanon and across the Middle East underscores the urgency of the fight to unify the working class throughout the region, across all religious, ethnic, and national lines, with workers in the imperialist centres of North America and Europe to stop the warmongers.

The barbarism displayed by Israel and its imperialist backers in Gaza and the reckless fuelling of war in Lebanon and against Iran are expressions of a crisis-ridden social order. World capitalism is driving the major powers to engage in a redivision of the world for control over key resources and geostrategic influence. A global anti-war movement led by the working class must be built to counterpose the programme of world socialist revolution to the capitalists' resort to war and fascism.



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