

Israel expands the war on Iran, ordering mass displacement in Lebanon

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The World Socialist Web Site is holding an emergency global webinar this Sunday, March 8, at 3:00 p.m. EDT to explain the origins of the US imperialist war against Iran, the social forces driving it and the strategy required to stop it. We urge all our readers to register to attend.

Within days of joining the US in an unprovoked and illegal bombardment of Iran, Israel has opened a second front, attacking Hezbollah in Lebanon, signalling the war's transformation into a region-wide conflagration.

Israeli jets have launched more than 250 strikes on Beirut's southern suburbs, eastern Lebanon, and the southern coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon. At least 75 people have been killed, including Mohammed Raad, the head of Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc, and some of Hezbollah's senior commanders. There are more than 400 wounded.

According to World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, three paramedics were killed and six injured in Tyre while rescuing people wounded in earlier explosions, in what appeared to be a "double-tap" strike by Israel.

Israel claims its aim is to eradicate Hezbollah, an Islamist group allied with Tehran, and thereby eliminate Iran's remaining influence in the Middle East. Hezbollah, backed by the Shi'ite Amal party and the impoverished Shi'ite masses, emerged in the 1980s as a mass movement amid the bloody convulsions of Lebanon's civil war, fuelled by US interference and Israel's brutal occupation of the south.

The Zionist state has long sought to expand its borders, including up to the Litani River—encompassing roughly a quarter of Lebanon—under the guise of establishing a "demilitarised zone" in the south of the country. A Lebanon subordinate to Israel would also give Tel Aviv leverage over developments in Syria.

Israeli officials have framed the latest aggression as retaliation for Hezbollah rocket fire into northern Israel

early Monday—fire Hezbollah said was a response to the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in Tehran on Saturday.

But Israel's Channel 12 reported that the government had already approved a strike on Lebanon the previous night, before any rockets were launched. According to this account, Israel waited for a token number of rockets to land to manufacture the necessary pretext for a full-scale assault. Officials have stated that Israel's attacks "will only intensify in the coming days, regardless of what Hezbollah chooses to do."

A leaked embassy cable provides indirect evidence of Israel's intentions. On the eve of the joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran, Israeli officials had told Washington that Hezbollah was rebuilding its military capabilities faster than the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) could degrade them and that neither Beirut nor Damascus could be trusted to contain the threat on Israel's northern border.

After Hezbollah fired a few rockets on Monday—the first time since the 2024 ceasefire—the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) instructed all residents south of the Litani River to evacuate to the north. This was far broader than any previous evacuation order, even during its 13-month war with Hezbollah in 2024, which displaced 300,000 people. Many of those targeted had already been displaced multiple times during earlier Israeli bombardments.

On Tuesday, the IDF launched a ground invasion, deploying troops "deeper into southern Lebanon" and moving into at least nine towns, beyond the five positions Israel has occupied since the November 2024 ceasefire. The LAF withdrew from its border posts. The IDF described the renewed offensive as part of an "enhanced forward defence posture."

Defence Minister Israel Katz threatened on X, "Hezbollah will pay a heavy price for the firing toward Israel. Whoever follows in Khamenei's path will soon find himself together with him in the depths of hell, along

with all those eliminated from the axis of evil.”

IDF Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir warned that the war would not end “before the threat from Lebanon is removed.” He vowed, “We will conclude the campaign when not only Iran is harmed, but Hezbollah also suffers a very heavy blow. We will continue to insist that Hezbollah be disarmed.” Over 100,000 IDF reserves have been called up for the planned operation.

On Thursday, the IDF dramatically expanded its assault, issuing an unprecedented evacuation order for vast areas of Beirut, including Dahiyeh, a Hezbollah stronghold, and three other predominantly Shia suburbs. While in the past the IDF has ordered specific buildings to evacuate, this was the first time the Israeli military demanded that entire areas decamp.

Furthermore, it dictated specific evacuation routes: residents of Bourj el-Barajneh and Hadath were told to move east toward Mount Lebanon on the Beirut–Damascus Road; residents of Haret Hreik and Shiyah were told to move north toward Tripoli on the Beirut–Tripoli road or east toward Mount Lebanon via the Metn Expressway.

“Save your lives and evacuate your homes immediately... We will notify you when it is safe to return to your homes,” warned IDF spokesperson Col. Avichay Adraee. “It is forbidden to move south.”

The IDF also ordered any “representatives of the Iranian terror ministry” to leave Lebanon within 24 hours or else face being targeted.

Hours later, Israel ordered the entire population of southern Beirut—around 500,000 people—to evacuate, despite the presence of several hospitals and government ministries. This has forced tens of thousands to sleep in shelters, on roadsides, in parks, and in their cars, with many unable to leave the city due to gridlock. Volunteers have set up food kitchens and shelters that are already overwhelmed.

Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem, speaking on television, denounced Israel’s actions as a “prepared aggression” and demanded a withdrawal from southern Lebanon. “We will not surrender no matter the sacrifices,” he said, insisting that Hezbollah’s response was “not connected to any other battle” and constituted retaliation for “15 months of violations.”

According to the UN and the Lebanese Health Ministry, in the twelve months since the November 2024 ceasefire with Israel, the IDF violated the ceasefire more than 10,000 times, killing more than 330 people, including 127 civilians, and injuring about 945, with no reported

instances of Hezbollah firing at Israel during that period.

Israel’s offensive has the backing of Lebanon’s Sunni political elite. On Monday, in a historic announcement, Prime Minister Nawaf Salam declared that Hezbollah’s military activity was illegal and ordered the LAF to prevent rocket fire into Israel and arrest anyone trying to do so.

His government also greenlit the army’s plan to disarm Hezbollah north of the Litani River in areas where the organization maintains its long-range missile stockpiles, ammunition depots, and production facilities. With the LAF lacking the resources or capabilities for such an operation, this is a nod to the IDF to take the lead in disarming Hezbollah.

Israel maintains that its military operations are coordinated with the United States and, through Washington, with the Lebanese government, which has the backing of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which pay some of the LAF’s salaries.

Salam has also announced a two-year postponement of elections—reportedly after consultation with Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, leader of the Shi’ite Amal movement and a longtime Hezbollah ally. Berri wants to see the state carry out reconstruction in the south, requiring Hezbollah to disarm, which the party refuses to do.

Salam claimed that the fighting and the displacement of so many people would make it impossible to hold proper elections. But crucially, he estimates that support for Hezbollah, whose funding and supply routes have been disrupted by the events in Iran and Syria, will have declined by then. Hezbollah is unlikely to be able to compensate Shi’ite residents of south Lebanon whose homes have been destroyed or damaged.

None of the major powers has condemned Israel’s mass displacement of Lebanese civilians or its bombardment of Beirut and Hezbollah strongholds. President Emmanuel Macron of France, the former colonial power, merely urged Israel and Iran not to embroil Lebanon in the conflict sweeping the Middle East. He said he had drawn up a plan to end hostilities, including providing military aid to the Lebanese army to disarm Hezbollah.



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