Israel vows to intensify onslaught on Lebanon as danger of region-wide war grows

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One day after its devastating bombardment of Lebanon that killed over 550 people, Israel struck the capital Beirut as the imperialist-backed onslaught in the Middle East continues to escalate. The third strike on the Lebanese capital since Friday, coming as the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) pledged to "accelerate" its attacks, claimed at least six lives and injured 15.

At a situation briefing Tuesday morning, IDF head Herzi Halevi emphasised that Monday's bloody attack was the opening shot in an expanding war, declaring, "We must not give Hezbollah a break. We will continue to operate at full strength. We will accelerate offensive actions today and reinforce all units. The current situation requires continued intensive operations across all fronts."

Subsequent hours saw "waves" of strikes on southern Lebanon and the Beqaa Valley, as well as the Beirut bombing. An airstrike on the southern suburbs killed Hezbollah rocket commander Ibrahim Muhammad Kabisi.

The death toll in Lebanon since Monday has risen to 569, with over 1,800 reported injured. Hezbollah responded by firing over 300 rockets into northern Israel Tuesday and launching drones targeting military sites.

A senior Israeli Air Force officer stated that the bombardment of Lebanon since Monday was the most extensive ever carried out in the air force's history, according to the *Times of Israel*. Over 1,600 sites were struck using over 2,000 munitions.

The scale of Israel's indiscriminate assault, which also targeted vehicles carrying fleeing residents, and rescue and emergency services teams, demonstrates that Israel has the full backing of the United States. The huge shipments of weaponry dispatched by the Biden administration to Israel since the onset of the genocide in Gaza have not only allowed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government to lay waste to the enclave, but bring the entire Middle East to the brink of a region-wide war. US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin spoke to his Israeli counterpart Yoav Gallant twice within 24 hours between Saturday and Sunday to make clear Washington's backing for Israel to "defend itself."

Nevertheless, the imperialist powers are seeking with sickening hypocrisy to present themselves as a stabilizing force in the region working for "deescalation" and "peace." US President Joseph Biden asserted at the UN General Assembly that he was "determined to prevent a wider war that engulfs the entire region," while German Foreign Minister Analena Baerbock commented, "We must not slide into another war, we must rather do everything to bring about deescalation, especially with regard to the situation in Lebanon."

Coming from the two imperialist powers that have supplied Israel with the most weapons, while clamping down ruthlessly on all forms of domestic opposition to the Gaza genocide, such statements ring hollow. Their aim is to cover up the fact that American imperialism and its European allies backed the genocide, which has officially claimed the lives of more than 41,000 Palestinians, as a means to prepare for a region-wide war with Iran. This war has moved significantly closer to becoming reality following the events of the past week.

On September 17, Israel launched a criminal terror attack by blowing up sabotaged pagers and other electronic devices across Lebanon, killing 37 people and injuring thousands, including many children. Then on Friday, it used a high-powered bomb to strike a suburb in southern Beirut, killing over 50 people, including high-ranking Hezbollah commander Ibrahim Aqil. There followed the ongoing onslaught, which has in two days claimed more than half the number of lives lost during Israel's month-long war on Lebanon in 2006. Some 27,000 people have fled their homes, with at least 500 fleeing across Lebanon's eastern border into war-torn Syria.

The imminent danger of a further spread of the war throughout the region, drawing in regional powers like Iran and the imperialist powers together with their rivals Russia and China, cannot be overstated. In Syria, Russia maintains a large contingent of troops, air capabilities, and ships at its naval base in Tartus on the Mediterranean. Late Tuesday, Reuters reported that Syria's air defence system was activated after Israeli missiles targeted locations in Tartus, with eye witnesses reporting loud explosions.

The US and Turkey also have a military presence in Syria. Additionally, thousands of American troops are located at bases in Iraq and throughout the Gulf sheikdoms, and a large armada of American warships are either already in the Gulf, or standing by in the eastern Mediterranean.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov said of Israel's attack on Lebanon at a press briefing Tuesday, "This is an event that is potentially extremely dangerous when it comes to the expansion of the conflict, to the complete destabilisation of the region. Of course, this is of extreme concern to us."

China, which cut across US interests in the region by brokering a deal in early 2023 aimed at easing tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, has clearly positioned itself alongside Lebanon in the face of Israel's bombardment.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi, following a meeting with his Lebanese counterpart on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, commented, "We pay close attention to developments in the region, especially the recent explosion of communications equipment in Lebanon, and firmly oppose indiscriminate attacks against civilians."

Tensions were already high throughout the Middle East prior to this week's onslaught. In April, Israel bombed Iran's consulate in Syria, killing seven high-ranking Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps members. Iran responded by firing hundreds of missiles and drones at Israel, but provided advanced notice to avoid a major escalation. Israel intensified its provocations in July, when it carried out the targeted assassination of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh while he was in Tehran attending the inauguration of Iranian President Mesoud Pezeshkian.

Israel is determined to intensify the war in Lebanon, even at the risk of a region-wide bloodbath. Netanyahu could well launch a ground invasion to enforce Israel's demand that Hezbollah forces retreat north of the Litani River.

Speaking at a military drill Tuesday simulating a ground incursion into Lebanon, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said that the IDF has "additional blows already prepared" against Hezbollah. Referring to the troops' experience exterminating Palestinians in Gaza, Gallant added, "Any Hezbollah force that encounters you will be destroyed, they are troubled by the experience you have gained in combat."

National Unity leader Benny Gantz, who was part of Netanyahu's war cabinet until his withdrawal in June, declared his support for the onslaught on Lebanon Tuesday and called for troops to be sent in if necessary. "If [Hezbollah leader Hassan] Nasrallah does not stop the fire, we will also have to enter [Lebanese] territory to allow the return of our residents."

The Zionist regime is continuing its genocide in Gaza as the war in Lebanon intensifies. At least 37 people were killed in air raids across Gaza Tuesday, including a family of five in Rafah. The *Guardian* reported Monday that Netanyahu, who has delayed his departure to New York where he is due to address the General Assembly, is considering a plan proposed by members of his Likud party to forcibly expel civilians north of the Gaza River to create a "closed military zone" where the IDF can kill anyone who remains. If the plan is implemented, it would entail the expulsion of between 300,000 and 500,000 people, almost all of whom have already been displaced multiple times.

Israel's unrestrained lawlessness also continues in the West Bank. On Sunday, IDF soldiers raided the Ramallah offices of *Al Jazeera*, seizing documents and ordering the Qatar-funded broadcaster to suspend its operations in the occupied West Bank for 45 days. The soldiers tore down a banner on a balcony displaying an image of Shireen Abu Akleh, the Palestinian-American journalist shot dead by Israeli soldiers in May 2022.

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