

Israeli government rejects calls for ceasefire in war on Lebanon

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Israeli government officials delivered a uniform, savage rebuttal Thursday to the ceasefire proposal for the war with Lebanon proposed by 12 of Tel Aviv's close allies, including the United States, UK and the European Union.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office announced bluntly: "The news about a ceasefire—not true. This is an American-French proposal, to which the prime minister did not even respond. The news about the supposed directive to moderate the fighting in the north is also the opposite of the truth.

"The prime minister instructed the IDF to continue the fighting with full force, and according to the plans presented to him. Also, the fighting in Gaza will continue until all the goals of the war are achieved."

Touching down in the US, where he will speak at the United Nations, Netanyahu said, "We are continuing to strike Hezbollah with full force. And we will not stop until we reach all our goals," which he claimed was the return of evacuated Israeli residents to the north of the country.

No effort was made to suggest that Israel would consider future proposals. The line from the prime minister on down was that the war would continue as long as they wished.

Far-right national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir threatened, as he has over Gaza, to lead his Jewish Power party out of coalition with Netanyahu and collapse the government if a ceasefire were agreed. He said, according to *Haaretz*, "Every day that this ceasefire is in effect and Israel does not fight in the north—Otzma Yehudit [Jewish Power] is not committed to the coalition."

His close political ally, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich commented, "The campaign in the north should end in one scenario—crushing Hezbollah...

Surrender of Hezbollah or war, that's the only way".

The sentiment of these two most openly fascist members of the Israeli cabinet is shared by them all.

Foreign Minister Israel Katz declared, "There will be no ceasefire in the north. We will continue to fight against the terrorist organization Hezbollah with all our might until victory and the safe return of the residents of the north to their homes."

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant confirmed that the Israeli military would "continue throwing Hezbollah off balance and deepening their loss," including by "eliminating Hezbollah terrorists, dismantling Hezbollah's offensive infrastructure and destroying rockets and missiles".

Chief of the General Staff Herzi Halevi was even more bloodthirsty: "We need to continue attacking Hezbollah, we have been waiting for this opportunity for years."

After Halevi said Wednesday that the Israel Defense Forces were preparing for a ground invasion of Lebanon, the IDF announced Thursday that it had carried out exercises simulating "combat in thicketed, mountainous terrain," adding, "During the exercise, the troops enhanced their operational and logistical readiness for various combat scenarios in enemy territory on the northern front."

The belligerence of the Israeli government comes in the face of an extremely muted response from its target in Lebanon, Hezbollah. The organisation released a video Wednesday stating, "We can escalate, but we are choosing to de-escalate at the moment."

Israeli negotiators strung along the idea of de-escalation in pantomime ceasefire talks over the last few days. Jacob Magid, US bureau chief for the *Times of Israel*, wrote after speaking with a senior Western diplomat, "Netanyahu's conduct is extension of how he

handled the Gaza hostage talks where he has privately agreed to show flexibility only to make public statement immediately afterward... thwarting progress.”

Karine Jean-Pierre, the White House press secretary, told reporters that the statement endorsing the ceasefire US President Joe Biden had released with French President Emmanuel Macron “was indeed coordinated with the Israeli side.”

Nevertheless, over Wednesday night and into Thursday, IDF airstrikes continued on scores of targets across Lebanon, and over the border with Syria. The worst was on a three-storey building in the Lebanese town of Younine, where 23 Syrians were killed—mostly women and children.

Sixty people were killed in total in the latest 24-hour period reported by the Lebanese authorities, and 81 injured, taking the total killed since Monday to more than 600, roughly a quarter of them women and children. These deaths bring the number slain in Lebanon since the genocide in Gaza and cross-border hostilities with Israel began to more than 1,500 people, plus over 5,400 injured.

A new round of strikes began Thursday night.

At least 200,000 people are now displaced in Lebanon, with more than 70,000 living in over 500 shelters around the country. Its interior minister, Bassam Mawlawi estimated that the real number of displaced is approaching half a million, in a country which hosts 1.5 million displaced Syrians and the largest number of refugees per capita and square kilometre anywhere in the world.

Over 15,000 Syrian citizens have now fled back to Syria, alongside more than 16,000 Lebanese.

Luna Hammad, medical coordinator in Lebanon for Doctors Without Borders, explained that the injuries and displacements were placing “immense pressure on an already fragile health system,” adding that “Health facilities are operating with extremely limited capacity due to the shortages of fuel, supplies and staff... People here are already facing immense hardship due to the economic crisis and this has deepened their suffering.”

The response from Israel’s imperialist backers has been to issue new ineffectual calls for a ceasefire. Lloyd Austin, the US secretary of defence, told reporters, “A full-scale war between LH [Lebanese Hezbollah] and Israel could be devastating for both parties and it could lead to a larger conflict throughout

the region. That’s not in the best interests of anyone.”

Asked if the US would withhold military support to Israel if the country refused a ceasefire and proceeded to a ground invasion, however, he answered that Washington had been “committed from the very beginning” to providing Israel with “things that are necessary for them to be able to protect their sovereign territory—and that hasn’t changed and won’t change”.

Underscoring the point, Israel announced that it had secured an \$8.7 billion military aid package from the US, including, according to Reuters, “\$3.5 billion for essential wartime procurement, which has already been received and earmarked for critical military purchases, and \$5.2 billion designated for air defense systems.”

Reuters added that Israel’s Defense Ministry “said the deal underscores the ‘strong and enduring strategic partnership between Israel and the United States and the ironclad commitment to Israel’s security’, particularly in addressing regional security threats from Iran and Iranian-backed militias.”

Confirming this ultimate target of US-backed Israeli aggression, the *Jerusalem Post*, sure of a warm audience, editorialised Thursday that “the West and the US” should not “fall for” new Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, who spoke at the UN that day, “and grant any kind of relief to the country that is the source of so much of what ails the region”.



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