

Israel-Hamas war

Senior Hizbollah and Hamas figures killed as fears grow of regional war

Israel's foreign minister appears to confirm responsibility for deaths



Smoke from an Israeli bombardment on southern Lebanon amid growing cross-border tensions © AFP via Getty Images

Raya Jalabi in Beirut, **James Shotter** in Jerusalem and **Neri Zilber** in Tel Aviv AN
HOUR AGO

Senior figures in the Hizbollah and Hamas militant groups were killed on Monday in separate incidents, the latest in a spate of deaths attributed to Israel that have fuelled fears of a wider conflagration in the Middle East.

Wissam Tawil, a senior commander in Lebanon's powerful [Hizbollah](#) paramilitary force, was killed in a strike in the south of the country, the group said in a statement, blaming Israel for the "assassination".

Israel Katz, Israel's foreign minister, appeared to confirm the claim in a television interview on Monday night, saying: "The attack in south Lebanon . . . we took responsibility . . . this is part of our war." Katz described Tawil as the "de facto commander" of Hizbollah's elite Radwan forces. Until Katz's comments, Israel had not taken responsibility for, nor officially commented on, the assassination.

Tawil is thought to be the most senior member of Hizbollah to be killed since Israel and the Lebanese militant group began trading fire across their shared border on October 8, one day after its ally Hamas carried out its deadly assault on Israel.

Meanwhile Israel said it had killed Hassan Hakashah in a strike in Beit Jinn in Syria, accusing him of being a "central figure" responsible for recent Hamas rocket launches directed from the country at Israel.

“We will not allow terrorism from Syrian territory and hold Syria responsible for all activity emanating from its territory,” the Israeli military said in a statement.

Neither Syria nor the Palestinian militant group have commented on Hakashah’s death.

The killings came as US secretary of state Antony Blinken was on his fourth visit to the Middle East since October, in an effort to prevent mounting tensions spilling over into a full-blown regional war.

Israel and Iran have been engaged in an increasingly overt confrontation across the Middle East over the past decade, which has sharpened since the start of the [conflict involving Hamas in Gaza](#).

Tawil’s death comes six days after Saleh Al-Arouri, Hamas’s deputy political leader, was [killed in a suspected drone strike in Beirut](#) that Lebanon and Hizbollah blamed on Israel. Israeli officials have declined to comment on Al-Arouri’s death.

Hizbollah released a detailed biography of 49-year-old Tawil, which they have not done for the 130 other fighters who have been killed in the past three months, suggesting he was a senior figure in the force.

Pro-Hizbollah media channels also disseminated pictures of Tawil alongside other prominent members of the so-called axis of resistance, backed by Iran, which opposes Israel.

Tawil joined Hizbollah in 1989 and had participated in most of the group’s major operations since then, including a cross-border raid that triggered the devastating 34-day war against Israel in 2006, the force said in its statement.

He had led “many” of Hizbollah’s operations in southern Lebanon since October 7, it added.

On Tuesday, Hizbollah drones launched from Lebanon targeted Israel’s northern command headquarters in Safed. According to the Israeli military, one of the drones “fell” at the base, causing no damage nor injuries, and the command centre was functioning normally. Hizbollah said the attack was retaliation for the assassinations of Arouri and Tawil.

In recent weeks, Israeli leaders have been clear they are no longer willing to tolerate the presence of Hizbollah fighters on their northern border, warning that they are

prepared to take military action to remove them if diplomacy fails to do so. “Our focus on Hezbollah’s Radwan forces in southern Lebanon is driving them away from the border,” Israeli military spokesman Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said.

“We are determined to continue creating a different security reality in the north, one that ensures safety for residents.”

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