

**Israel-Hamas war**

## Hiszbollah fires 200 rockets at Israel to avenge killing of top commander

Israeli military retaliates with strikes in Lebanon as tension between the two sides escalates sharply



Smoke rises after a rocket fired from Lebanon lands close to a military base in northern Israel © Amir Levy/Getty Images

**James Shotter** in Jerusalem and **Raya Jalabi** in Beirut YESTERDAY

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Hizbollah said it had fired more than 200 rockets at northern Israel in retaliation for an Israeli air strike that killed one of its senior commanders, as tensions between the two sides escalated sharply on Thursday.

The barrage, one of the largest launched by the Lebanese militant group since the outbreak of the Hamas-Gaza war last October, came amid fears that long-simmering hostilities between Israel and Hizbollah, one of the world's most heavily armed non-state actors, could boil over into a full-blown war.

Hizbollah said its rockets had targeted several military bases in Israel in response to Israel's killing on Wednesday of Mohammad Naameh Nasser, who led one of the militant group's three regional divisions in southern Lebanon.

The [Iran-backed](#) group had also launched an initial salvo of rockets with heavy warheads into northern Israel and the occupied Golan Heights in the immediate aftermath of Nasser's killing.

The Israeli military said on Thursday that "approximately 200 projectiles" and more than 20 drones had been launched at Israel and that it had responded with strikes on military structures in Ramyeh and Houla in southern Lebanon.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said that the strike in Houla had killed at least one person. Israel's military said that one soldier had been killed in Hizbollah's barrage.



Mohammad Naameh Nasser is among several Hizbollah officers reported killed since hostilities between Israel and the militant group intensified last October © HEZBOLLAH MILITARY MEDIA OFFICE/AFP/Getty Images

Hizbollah and Israeli forces have been trading near-daily fire since the eruption of the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza on October 7, with Hizbollah first firing rockets the following day in support of Hamas.

Despite the intensifying exchanges, which have displaced tens of thousands of people and caused casualties in both Lebanon and Israel, the two sides have so far not been drawn into a full-blown war. The US has been leading a [diplomatic push](#) for them to de-escalate the situation.

However, Israeli officials have repeatedly said they are prepared to take military action in the absence of a diplomatic resolution, and the Israel Defense Forces said two weeks ago that it had approved “operational plans for an offensive in Lebanon”.

Israel's defence minister Yoav Gallant said on Wednesday that Israel would “reach a state of full readiness to take any action required in Lebanon, or to reach an arrangement from a position of strength”.

He added: “We prefer an arrangement, but if reality forces us, we will know how to fight.”

Hizbollah has lost more than 320 fighters since the start of hostilities last October, according to an FT tally. They include a few dozen mid- to high-ranking officers, a person familiar with the group's operations told the FT [last month](#).

More than 90 Lebanese civilians have also been killed, according to FT calculations, while in northern Israel, at least 18 soldiers and 11 civilians have died in cross-border fire.

Hizbollah officials have repeatedly said they were not seeking an all-out war with Israel. But they have insisted they will not stop firing until there is a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

In an effort to break the deadlock in Gaza, US President Joe Biden in May [set out a three-stage plan](#) for ending the war, which has become the deadliest in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and fuelled a humanitarian catastrophe in the territory.

Talks brokered by Qatar, Egypt and the US on a deal to free the roughly 120 Israeli hostages still held by Hamas and end the fighting in Gaza have been deadlocked for months, with Israel resisting demands from Hamas that any deal lead to a permanent ceasefire.

But in a sign of a renewed effort to break the impasse, Israel said on Thursday that it would send negotiators to resume talks, after it received Hamas's latest response to Biden's proposal.

An Israeli official said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had approved the move, but reiterated that the war would not end until Israel's war goals — which include freeing the hostages and destroying Hamas — had been met.

