

Israel-Hamas war

Israel launches strikes in Lebanon

Military says assault was intended to foil 'extensive attack' by the militant group Hizbollah



Smoke and fire on the Lebanese side of the border with Israel, viewed from southern Lebanon © Reuters

James Shotter in Jerusalem, **Raya Jalabi** in Beirut and **Steff Chávez** in Washington 2 HOURS AGO

Israel's military launched a wave of air strikes in southern Lebanon in the early hours of Sunday, in what it said was an attempt to foil an "extensive attack" on Israel by the militant group Hizbollah.

[Israel](#) began its attack shortly before 5am local time, deploying around 100 jets to target thousands of rocket launchers at around 40 sites in Lebanon, after identifying what the military said were preparations by Iranian-backed Hizbollah "to fire missiles and rockets" at Israel.

Soon afterwards, Hizbollah said it had launched more than 300 Katyusha rockets and a large number of drones. It was the biggest exchange of fire between the militant group and Israel since they fought a 34-day war in 2006.

[Hizbollah](#) said its barrage was a retaliation for Israel's assassination last month of Fuad Shukr, one of its most senior commanders, in an air strike in Beirut.

The killing of Shukr was followed the next day by the assassination in Tehran of Ismail Haniyeh, political leader of the Palestinian militant group Hamas. It prompted both Hizbollah and Iran to pledge retaliation against Israel, fuelling fears the region could be sliding towards an all-out conflict.

Hizbollah said its barrage had been directed at 11 military targets in Israel's north and the occupied Golan Heights, with the projectiles triggering air raid sirens across the area.

It later added that its military operation for today was complete. It said "Israeli claims about their pre-emptive actions, their successful targets, and their disruption of the attack are empty allegations and contradict the facts on the ground" and would be refuted in a speech by the group's leader Hassan Nasrallah, which would be announced later today.

Lebanon's national news agency said the Israeli strikes had hit a large number of targets in the south of the country, mostly in areas close to the border, but some struck deeper inland.

Later on Sunday morning, Israel said it had carried out further strikes on Hizbollah launchers in southern Lebanon "to remove threats".

Images circulated in local media showed smoke rising above various wooded areas and villages along the border, with some outlets reporting between 35 and 40 Israeli air strikes.

In Israel, Ben Gurion international airport in Tel Aviv briefly suspended flights before reopening. Israel's paramedic service raised its alert status to its highest level across the country, but said that it had not received immediate reports of casualties.

A military official said that according to initial assessments there had been "very little" damage in Israel. Most of the rockets had targeted northern Israel, but some had been aimed at central areas, he added.

The exchange of fire came as Egypt was due to host the latest round of talks aimed at ending the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. The US and Arab states see the talks as the best chance of preventing a full-on regional war.

US President Joe Biden was "closely monitoring events in Israel and Lebanon", according to the White House.

Biden's defence secretary, Lloyd Austin, spoke with his Israeli counterpart Yoav Gallant late on Saturday night "to discuss Israel's defence against Lebanese Hizbollah attacks", the Pentagon said.

Washington has deployed additional warships and fighter jets to the region in recent weeks both as a deterrent to Hizbollah and Iran, and to help defend Israel.

Gallant declared a “special situation” across Israel, which gives him powers to restrict gatherings and limit access to certain areas, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu convened a security cabinet meeting at 7am.

“We are determined to do everything to defend our country, to return the residents of the north securely to their homes and to continue upholding a simple rule: Whoever harms us — we will harm them,” Netanyahu said.

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