

Middle East conflict

Netanyahu's far-right allies attack ceasefire proposal with Hizbollah

US hopes for response to call for truce between Israel and militant group 'in the coming hours'



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, right, with finance minister Bezalel Smotrich © Ronen Zvulun/AFP/Getty Images

James Shotter in Jerusalem and **Raya Jalabi** in Beirut 21 MINUTES AGO

Far-right members of Benjamin Netanyahu's government lashed out at a US-French proposal for a 21-day ceasefire between Israel and Hizbollah on Thursday, urging the prime minister not to accept the deal.

[The proposal](#) put forward by US President Joe Biden and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday was a last-ditch attempt to stop hostilities between Israel and the Lebanese militant group — which have escalated dramatically over the past two weeks — from erupting into a full-blown war.

US officials hope that the truce will allow time to negotiate a more durable ceasefire between Israel and [Hizbollah](#), and also put pressure on Hamas to accept the terms of a ceasefire-for-hostages deal with Israel in Gaza.

In a brief statement issued as he headed to New York to address the UN General Assembly later on Thursday, Netanyahu said he had not yet responded to the proposal and ordered the Israeli military to keep fighting “at full force”.

But in a sign of the hostility to a deal, Israel's foreign minister Israel Katz said there would be no ceasefire until Israelis displaced by the fighting had returned home. Bezalel Smotrich, Israel's ultranationalist finance minister, said Israel's campaign should “end in one scenario: crushing Hizbollah and removing its ability to harm the

should end in one scenario: crushing Hizbollah and removing its ability to harm the residents of the north”.

“The enemy must not be given time to recover from the heavy blows he received and to reorganise for the continuation of the war in 21 days’ time,” he wrote on X on Thursday morning.

“The surrender of Hizbollah, or war, are the only ways to bring the residents and security back to the north, and the country.”

Their comments were echoed by a string of other far-right members of Israel’s government, with settlements minister Orit Strook saying there was “no moral mandate for a ceasefire, not for 21 days and not for 21 hours”.

Ministers from Netanyahu’s Likud party also spoke out, with culture minister Miki Zohar saying he hoped reports of a ceasefire plan were not true. Diaspora minister

Amichai Chikli said it was “impossible to complete the campaign in the north without a ground manoeuvre whose purpose is to create a buffer zone”.

While the US-French proposal, which was backed by the G7, EU, Australia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Qatar, did not set a deadline for the two sides to respond, US officials said that they expected the Israeli and Lebanese governments to do so “in the coming hours”.

“We have had this conversation with the parties and felt this was the right moment . . . based on our discussion, they are familiar with the text,” a senior administration official said. “We’ll let them speak to their actions of accepting the deal in the coming hours.”



Emmanuel Macron, left, and Joe Biden at a meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on Wednesday © Ludovic Marin/ AFP/Getty Images

The burst of diplomatic activity follows a major Israeli offensive against Hizbollah. The militant group initiated the hostilities when it began firing rockets at Israel on October 8 in support of [Hamas](#), which had launched its attack on Israel the previous day.

But over the past week, Israel has [assassinated a string of senior Hizbollah commanders](#), and on Monday it launched a massive bombing campaign targeting what it said were the militant group’s weapons stores in Lebanon, killing more than 600 people. On Wednesday, the head of Israel’s army told troops to prepare for a

possible ground operation in Lebanon.

The military said on Thursday morning that it had conducted further strikes overnight, hitting 75 Hizbollah targets in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley.

At least 23 Syrians were killed when an Israeli air strike levelled a building in the village of Younine in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon's National News Agency reported.

Until this week Israel had rarely targeted the Bekaa Valley, a Hizbollah stronghold along Lebanon's eastern border with Syria, previously concentrating most strikes in the south.

The Israel Defense Forces said it had also struck targets on Lebanon's border with Syria relating to Hizbollah weapons transfers, while a Lebanese minister said at least one of the strikes landed on the Syrian side of a bridge connecting the two countries.

Hizbollah has also begun firing deeper into Israel. On Wednesday, it fired a ballistic missile at Tel Aviv, Israel's commercial hub, for the first time, which was shot down by air defences. On Thursday, it fired a barrage of about 45 rockets at Israel, according to the Israeli army, most of which were intercepted.

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