

Middle East war

Israel sends thousands more troops into Lebanon

IDF says fourth division has joined offensive aimed at dislodging Hizbollah



Smoke rises following an Israeli air strike on a southern suburb of Beirut late on Monday © Wael Hamzeh/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

**Heba Saleh** in Beirut and **Neri Zilber** in Tel Aviv 8 MINUTES AGO

The Israeli military deployed thousands more troops in Lebanon and signalled an expanded ground offensive against Hizbollah, even as the militant group launched one of the largest rocket barrages into northern Israel since the conflict flared a year ago.

The Israel Defense Forces said on Tuesday it had sent a fourth combat division into the south of [Lebanon](#), in an indication it may now have more than 20,000 troops in the country, a significant rise on the initial force that invaded last week.

The Israeli military refuses to provide official figures on its force numbers but the divisions are not expected to be at their maximum estimated size of 10,000 apiece.

The increase in forces came as the IDF issued evacuation orders to more than two dozen villages in Lebanon's south-west and gave "urgent warnings" in Arabic to beachgoers and boats along the Lebanese coast up to the Awali river, north of the city of Sidon.

"For your safety, refrain from being in the sea or on the beach from now until further notice," Avichay Adraee, the IDF Arabic spokesperson, wrote on social media platform X.

Tuesday.

But despite the escalating air and ground offensive, Hizbollah fired one of the largest rocket barrages of the past year at northern [Israel](#) during the day.

The Israeli military said 85 rockets had targeted Haifa and other outlying areas in a single salvo, followed by a second of some 20 projectiles, after Hizbollah's deputy chief Naim Qassem gave a televised speech. Most were intercepted by air defences or fell in open areas, although one person was lightly injured by rocket shrapnel, according to Israeli authorities.

In his defiant address, Qassem vowed Hizbollah would fight on and replace Hassan Nasrallah, its long-standing leader, who was killed by an Israeli strike last month.

"I would like to reassure you: our capabilities are intact," he said, pointing to the Tehran-backed group's attacks on Israel in recent days as evidence. "This is a war of who cries out first, and we will not."

Qassem said Hizbollah supported diplomatic efforts to broker a ceasefire, but throughout the past year, the group has repeatedly said it would only stop fighting Israel when a ceasefire was reached in Gaza.

Hizbollah initiated fire against Israel after Hamas's October 7 assault on southern Israel last year in "solidarity" with the Gaza-based militants, raising fears of a wider regional conflict.

Those concerns have reached new heights after Iran bombarded Israel with around 180 missiles last week, leading Benjamin Netanyahu's government to vow retaliation.

Abbas Araghchi, Iran's foreign minister, said in a speech to foreign diplomats and Iranian officials in Tehran on Tuesday that any Israeli attack on Iran's infrastructure would "be answered with a stronger response, and they have already witnessed the precision and power of our missiles".

Ahead of a tour of Gulf states that will begin with Saudi Arabia, he added: "We are prepared for all scenarios, and our armed forces are fully ready . . . However, our priority is to [help] de-escalate tensions and achieve an acceptable ceasefire agreement [for Gaza and Lebanon]."

In a further move on Tuesday that indicated a possible expansion of military action, the IDF declared four villages next to the Lebanese border in north-western Israel as closed military zones.

Israel took similar steps in the eastern and central regions of its frontier with Lebanon over the past two weeks, before the launch of ground incursions.

About 60,000 Israelis living in the north have been forced to relocate because of Hizbollah projectiles. Netanyahu has said the offensive against Lebanon is aimed at securing the border area to permit their return.

The Lebanese government has said 1.2mn people have been displaced, most of them in the past two weeks. The displaced are predominantly Shia Muslims from southern Lebanon and Beirut's suburbs of Dahiyeh, where Hizbollah's headquarters were located.

Dahiyeh has been the [target of intense daily bombardment](#) by Israel over the past two weeks, including the huge strike that killed Nasrallah and many of the group's top commanders.

On Monday, as Israel marked the first anniversary of the October 7 attack, Hizbollah [shot about 135 rockets at Israel's north](#), according to Israel's military, and later fired projectiles at central Israel.

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