

Middle East war

Hiszbollah warns of escalation in Israel conflict after Yahya Sinwar killing

Threat from Lebanese militant group follows death of Hamas leader in firefight in Gaza



A poster of Yahya Sinwar in a Palestinian camp in Beirut in August © Getty Images

Raya Jalabi in Beirut and Neri Zilber in Tel Aviv 4 HOURS AGO

Lebanon's Hizbollah militant group said it was entering a "new and escalating phase" in its battle with Israel on its northern border, hours after Israel announced the death of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar in Gaza to the south.

In a defiant statement early on Friday, [Hizbollah](#) boasted of its military achievements against the Israel Defense Forces in southern Lebanon and said it was transitioning to "a new and escalating phase in its confrontation" with Israel, which would become apparent in the coming days.

Hizbollah began launching rockets towards Israel from Lebanon the day after Hamas's deadly October 7 2023 assault on southern Israel "in solidarity" with Gaza.

For much of the past year, the conflict was confined to tit-for-tat exchanges along Israel's northern border with Lebanon, which displaced tens of thousands of people on both sides.

But late last month, after crushing most resistance from Hamas in Gaza, Israel began [intensifying its campaign](#) against Hizbollah in Lebanon.

Israel said it had [killed Sinwar in Gaza](#) when he was spotted by chance on Wednesday by its forces in the Rafah area in the south of the enclave.

Sinwar was the architect of last year's October 7 attack, when Hamas militants killed 1,200 people in Israel and captured more than 250 hostages, according to Israeli authorities. The assault triggered the deadliest war in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Hamas has yet to comment on Sinwar's death.

His death marked a pivotal moment in the year of fighting, delivering a severe blow to the Palestinian militant group and a [symbolic victory](#) to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu hailed Sinwar's killing as a "victory of good over evil" and "the beginning of the day after Hamas" rule in Gaza, adding that militants still holding the 101 remaining Israeli hostages now had an opportunity to release them and be allowed to live.

"Hamas will no longer rule Gaza . . . The return of our hostages is an opportunity to achieve all our goals and it brings the end of the war closer," Netanyahu said.

"To the dear hostage families, I say: This is an important moment in the war. We will continue full force until all your loved ones, our loved ones, are home."

Western leaders also saw it as an opening to push forward stalled efforts to end the conflict, which has killed more than 42,000 Palestinians according to Gaza's health authorities.

US President Joe Biden said news of Sinwar's death had brought a "good day" for Israel, and there was now an opportunity for a political settlement that provides "a better future for Israelis and Palestinians alike".

French President Emmanuel Macron called for a ceasefire in Gaza following Sinwar's death. He

Iran's president Ebrahim Raisi called for a ceasefire in Gaza following Sinwar's death. He also demanded that Israel end its military offensive in Lebanon.

Israel intensified its campaign against Hizbollah late last month, launching thousands of air strikes which have destroyed swathes of southern Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs and killed much of the group's senior leadership, including [leader Hassan Nasrallah](#).

It also launched a ground invasion, sending troops into southern Lebanon more than two weeks ago, who continue to clash with Hizbollah fighters along the frontier.

On Thursday, Israel confirmed the death of five of its soldiers who were killed in a firefight with Hizbollah in southern Lebanon, bringing the Israeli military death toll there to 16 since the start of ground invasion. An additional eight IDF troops have been severely injured since Wednesday in south Lebanon.

Hundreds of Hizbollah fighters have been killed throughout the past year of fighting, but the group stopped issuing death notices in late September.

Israel has also yet to retaliate for an October 1 ballistic missile attack by Iran, which backs both Hamas and Hizbollah, with Israeli leaders vowing a "severe" response directly against the Islamic republic. Iran's mission to the UN said the "spirit of resistance will be strengthened", following Sinwar's death.

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