

**Middle East war**

## Israeli strikes hit 'specific component' in Iran's nuclear programme in October

Benjamin Netanyahu reveals details in parliament despite US pressure to avoid targeting nuclear sites



Benjamin Netanyahu: 'President Biden told me that if we go in, we will be alone' © Abir Sultan/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

**Mehul Srivastava** in London, **Chloe Cornish** and **Malaika Kanaaneh Tapper** in Beirut and **Felicia Schwartz** in Washington 10 HOURS AGO

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Israel struck a “specific component” related to Iran’s nuclear programme last month, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said, despite pleas from the US to contain its retaliatory air strikes on the Islamic republic.

Israeli warplanes also destroyed several batteries of Iran’s S-300, an older model of the Russian air defence system, Netanyahu told the Israeli parliament.

“It’s not a secret — there is a specific component in their nuclear programme that was hit,” he told the Knesset on Monday, according to Israeli media.

Playing into his political persona as the only Israeli leader able to defy the White House, Netanyahu said he had repeatedly acted against the advice of US President Joe Biden on both Gaza and Iran.

“We co-operate as much as we can with our friend the United States. I say ‘yes’ when possible, and I say ‘no’ when necessary — and that’s how we manage it,” Netanyahu added.

The October strikes were the latest in a series of [tit-for-tat attacks](#) between Israel and Iran that have pushed the Middle East close to a full-blown conflict.

Iranian foreign minister Abbas Araghchi said a response to last month’s Israeli strikes

Iranian foreign minister Abbas Araghchi said a response to last month's Israeli strikes was unavoidable, warning that a passive stance could embolden Israel to carry out further attacks.

"We have not and will not abandon our right to retaliate, which will occur at a time and in a manner we deem appropriate," Araghchi said during a meeting with senior commanders of the Revolutionary Guards. A video of the meeting, held this week, was made public on Tuesday.

US officials had spent weeks urging Israel to calibrate its October response to an Iranian barrage of about 200 missiles three weeks earlier by limiting it to military targets, and avoiding Iran's oil and nuclear infrastructure ahead of US elections.

While Netanyahu offered few details, [Axios](#) last week reported the Israeli strikes had included a specific site for the creation of the plastic explosives that are required to initiate the detonation of a nuclear device.

A nuclear weapon usually requires a sophisticated and carefully designed cage of plastic explosives to simultaneously explode and compress the nuclear material at a specific moment.

After the Israeli strikes, Iran's armed forces said a "significant" number of Israeli missiles were intercepted, while those that did reach their targets caused only "limited damage" to radar systems, some of which had since been repaired.

Iran insists its nuclear programme is for peaceful civilian purposes, but it is enriching uranium close to weapons-grade levels.

Israel has never publicly acknowledged its own nuclear weapons arsenal, widely believed to number in the dozens of sophisticated devices, according to the nuclear watchdog Federation of American Scientists.

Netanyahu also criticised Biden for his attempts to contain Israel's offensive in Gaza, as well as its retaliation with Iran, telling parliament he defied the US president by launching an offensive into southern Gaza in May.

"President Biden told me that if we go in, we will be alone," Netanyahu said.

Netanyahu's public criticism of the outgoing US administration comes as he prepares for a friendlier relationship with president-elect Donald Trump, who has made several [pro-Israeli nominations](#) to senior posts.

His comments to parliament came ahead of a visit by US envoy Amos Hochstein, who

was set to arrive in Beirut on Tuesday as Washington pushed for a ceasefire deal, said a Lebanese official and a person familiar with the matter.

Ahead of his trip, Israel continued to launch waves of air strikes across Lebanon on Monday, including an attack on a building in central Beirut that killed five people. The strike hit the ground floor of a building in a neighbourhood close to the Lebanese parliament and multiple embassies.

The Israeli military has stepped up its aerial campaign on south Lebanon, where it is also fighting [Hizbollah militants](#) on the ground.

Lebanon's government on Monday evening said 35 people had been killed in the past 24 hours, and it had recorded 300 Israeli strikes in the past two days, the majority in the south.

One person was killed and several injured when a Hizbollah rocket struck the northern Israeli Arab town of Shfaram on Monday.

In parliament, Netanyahu repeated his demand that Israel must retain the right to retaliate against Hizbollah in a "systematic" manner even if there was a ceasefire, an assertion that reportedly would allow the Israeli air force to keep violating Lebanese airspace.

Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati and its long-serving parliamentary speaker Nabih Berri have been considering a US-drafted [ceasefire proposal](#) over the weekend. Berri is acting as interlocutor for Hizbollah.

A Lebanese government official said the draft agreement was for a 60-day ceasefire and was based on UN Security Council Resolution 1701. It ended the previous Israel-Hizbollah war in 2006 and calls for Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon and for Hizbollah to remove its arms and militants north of the Litani river, some 30km from the border.

The official said the Lebanese side had some "technical clarifications" that would be discussed with Hochstein.

*Additional reporting by Najmeh Bozorgmehr in Tehran and Neri Zilber in Tel Aviv*

