

Middle East war

Israel says it will hold Lebanon responsible if ceasefire collapses

Minister's vow to 'go deeper' if hostilities resume comes after deadly Israeli air strikes severely test truce



Israeli troops move between destroyed houses in the village of Meiss El-Jabal as they leave Lebanon on Tuesday © Atef Safadi/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

Mehul Srivastava in London, **James Shotter** in Jerusalem and **Raya Jalabi** and **Richard Salame** in Beirut YESTERDAY

The Israeli military will hold Lebanon responsible for any failures to enforce a shaky ceasefire with Hizbollah, defence minister Israel Katz said as he threatened to widen any ensuing offensive to include parts of the country untouched by the conflict.

“If we return to war, we will act forcefully, we will go deeper, and the most important thing they need to know: that there will be no more exemption for the State of Lebanon,” he told the 146th division of the Israel Defense Forces, which is involved in operations in southern Lebanon, on Tuesday.


“If [until] now we separated between the State of Lebanon and Hizbollah, and between the whole of Beirut from Dahiyeh [Hizbollah’s southern stronghold in the capital], which took very severe blows — that will no longer be the case.”


Katz was speaking hours after Israeli warplanes carried out a wide-ranging assault across southern Lebanon, its latest in a barely week-old truce that has already been marked by dozens of Israeli violations, according to Lebanese officials. Ten people were killed in Monday night’s strikes, Lebanon’s health ministry said.


The IDF said it was responding to a pair of mortars fired by Hizbollah at a military position in Shebaa Farms, a sliver of disputed territory.

Latest strikes in Lebanon and Israel

LIVE Strikes reported in past 24 hours*

 Attacks by Israel

 Attacks by Hizbollah

 Israel 5km evacuation zone



Source: [LiveUA](#) • Map updated 10:58, 04 Dec 2024 * Attacks can include bombs, planes, drones, rockets, artillery, destructions and explosions **Seized by Israel from Syria in 1967 and annexed in 1981 in a move not recognised by most of the international community

Israel's open conflict with Hizbollah, which followed months of limited exchanges of fire after Palestinian militant group Hamas's attack on the country on October 7 2023, had mostly focused on Hizbollah strongholds in southern and eastern Lebanon, and in Beirut's southern suburbs of Dahiyeh, which the group largely controls.

The truce appeared to be holding on Tuesday, despite an Israeli response that included dozens of air strikes, some stretching as deep as 50km into Lebanon, and multiple drones flying over Beirut. Israel said it was responding to the projectiles fired by Hizbollah into the disputed strip of land, while the Lebanese militants described the limited fire as a warning shot after "repeated violations" by Israel.

The comments by the newly appointed Israeli defence minister, who is seen as particularly hawkish in [Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's rightwing coalition](#), appear intended to push the weak and underfunded Lebanese Armed Forces to more comprehensively root out Hizbollah's presence from the area immediately north of Israel's border.

This is "a message to the Lebanese government that it needs to make a decision to authorise the Lebanese army to enforce their part, to keep Hizbollah away from [areas south of the Litani river] and to dismantle all the infrastructure," he said.

Under the terms of the ceasefire, Israeli forces are meant to withdraw from Lebanon over a 60-day period and be replaced by the Lebanese army.





Israel Katz: 'If we return to war, we will act forcefully, we will go deeper . . . there will be no more exemption for the State of Lebanon'
© Abir Sultan/EPA/Shutterstock

Hizbollah is required to withdraw beyond the Litani, which runs up to 30km north of the contested border between Israel and Lebanon.

But complicating the ceasefire is the fact that Israel insists it reserves the right to unilaterally enforce the agreement through military action. That's led to multiple instances of Israeli fire, either by artillery, drone or air strikes, in response to what the IDF described as violations, such as Hizbollah moving weapons back into southern Lebanon.

Despite its recent strikes in Lebanon, Israel's military chief of staff, Herzi Halevi, insisted that "IDF forces are very careful about maintaining the ceasefire", according to a video released on Tuesday of him joining a patrol in southern Lebanon.

Israeli warplanes also struck a site in Damascus on Tuesday, killing a "senior" Hizbollah operative the IDF described as a liaison between the militant group and Syria's military. The IDF rarely takes credit for strikes in Syria, but has recently been vocal about trying to prevent transfers of weapons and cash into Lebanon to Hizbollah.

Nabih Berri, speaker of Lebanon's parliament, said Lebanon had logged at least 54 Israeli violations since the ceasefire took effect and called on the committee due to oversee its implementation to begin work "urgently".

Officials from the US, France, Lebanon, Israel and the UN's peacekeeping forces sit on the committee, but it has yet to meet, underscoring the inherent complications of the fragile truce.

The US committee chair is in Beirut, with France's representative General Guillaume Ponchin expected to arrive ahead of the committee's first meeting on Thursday, Lebanese officials and a European diplomatic source said.

Amos Hochstein, the Biden administration's envoy who played a crucial role in brokering the truce and co-chairs the committee, has also passed on concerns about Israel's violations of the deal to Israeli officials.

"Diplomatic contacts are ongoing and intensified yesterday to stop Israeli violations of the ceasefire decision and withdrawal from Lebanese border towns," said a spokesperson for Najib Mikati, Lebanon's caretaker prime minister.

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