

**Middle East war**

## Israeli forces to remain in Lebanon beyond 60-day ceasefire deadline

Government says Hizbollah has not fully withdrawn so military exit will not be complete by Sunday



Hizbollah was required to withdraw above the Litani river and the Israel military was to withdraw from southern Lebanon over a 60-day period © Reuters

**James Shotter** in Jerusalem YESTERDAY

Israeli forces will remain in southern Lebanon beyond the Sunday deadline set out in a ceasefire deal with the militant group Hizbollah, said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office on Friday.

The truce, which took effect in late November, halted the worst round of fighting between Israel and Hizbollah in almost two decades, with Israel invading southern Lebanon in a devastating offensive after months of cross-border fire between the two sides.

The ceasefire agreement stipulated that Hizbollah would withdraw above the Litani river, which runs up to 30km north of the border with [Israel](#), while the Israeli military would withdraw from southern Lebanon over a 60-day period, and be replaced by the Lebanese Armed Forces.

But Netanyahu's office said on Friday that Israeli forces would remain for longer as Hizbollah had not yet fully withdrawn from positions south of the Litani, and that the LAF was not yet in a position to enforce the deal.

"Since the ceasefire agreement has not yet been fully enforced by the State of Lebanon, the gradual withdrawal process will continue, in full co-ordination with the

United States,” said Netanyahu’s office.

Later on Friday, the Israeli military said that it had carried out strikes in southern Lebanon in recent days. It added that it was acting “in accordance with the ceasefire understandings” and would “operate against any threat”.

There was no immediate response from the Lebanese government or from [Hizbollah](#). This week, Hizbollah threatened “to react” if Israel did not withdraw by Sunday.

Lebanese officials have previously said that the presence of Israeli forces is preventing the LAF — who since the fall of Bashar al-Assad in Syria have also increased their numbers along the Syrian border — from properly deploying in the south.

People briefed on the situation said on Thursday that [talks were under way](#) to extend the ceasefire for another 30 days, after which it would be reviewed. During that

period, Israeli forces would remain on the high ground at five locations in southern Lebanon, one person said.

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IDF soldiers operating in Maroun al-Ras as Israeli forces remain in Lebanese territory © Reuters

The fighting between Israeli forces and Hizbollah began after the Lebanese militant group fired rockets towards Israel in solidarity with Hamas in the days after the Palestinian militant group's October 7 2023 attack on Israel.

After a year of exchanges of fire confined largely to a thin band of land either side of the Blue Line, the UN-demarcated border, Israel dramatically escalated hostilities, launching a ferocious bombing campaign before invading in October last year.

The fighting killed more than 4,000 Lebanese and more than 140 Israelis, and forced more than 1mn Lebanese and about 60,000 Israelis from their homes. It also left broad swaths of Lebanon's south and east in ruins.

*Cartography by Aditi Bhandari*

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