



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

Wednesday, September 25

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- Biden Says Israel and Hamas Must 'End This War'
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News Excerpts

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Associated Press

Israel Bombards Hezbollah, Killing a Top Commander

Israel killed a top [Hezbollah](#) commander as part of a two-day bombing campaign that has left more than 560 people dead and prompted thousands in southern Lebanon to seek refuge from the widening conflict. With the two sides on the brink of all-out war, Hezbollah launched dozens of rockets into Israel, targeting an explosives factory and sending families into bomb shelters. Families that fled southern Lebanon flocked to Beirut and the coastal city of Sidon, sleeping in schools turned into shelters, as well as in cars, parks and along the beach. Some sought to leave the country, causing a traffic jam at the border with Syria. Israel said that fighter jets carried out “extensive strikes” on Hezbollah weapons and rocket launchers across southern Lebanon and in the Bekaa region to the north. The United Nations Security Council scheduled an emergency meeting on Lebanon for today at the request of France. [Dig Deeper “Lebanon Sees Deadliest Day since 2006 after Israeli Strikes” \(Associated Press\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Netanyahu: IDF to Continue Striking Hezbollah

Israel will continue its military campaign of targeting Hezbollah in Lebanon, Netanyahu said amid global calls on Israel to seek a diplomatic resolution to the year-long constrained IDF-Hezbollah war along its northern border. “We will continue striking Hezbollah,” Netanyahu said after visiting an IDF intelligence base. He spoke more than a week after Israel ratcheted up its military campaign against the Iranian proxy group in an attempt to push Hezbollah back to the Litani River. Hezbollah, which had entrenched itself in southern Lebanon well before the October 7 Hamas invasion, has argued that it would only end the hostilities if there is a Gaza ceasefire. In the absence of an end to the Gaza war, there is a push to separate the two military fronts and to restore calm to the northern border even if the Gaza war continues.

Axios

Officials Say: Hezbollah Asked Iran to Attack Israel

Hezbollah urged Iran in recent days to launch an attack against Israel as fighting between the Lebanese militant group and the Israeli military dramatically escalated, but Iran has so far refrained. A direct Iranian attack against Israel would dramatically destabilize the region even further and likely draw the US into more active fighting. Two Israeli officials said Iranian officials told their Hezbollah counterparts that “the timing isn’t right” for launching an attack against Israel because the Iranian president Masoud Pezeshkian is in New York for the UN General Assembly. Pezeshkian said Israel is the party seeking a wider war in the region and stressed that Iran doesn’t want to fall into this “trap.” A senior Israeli official said the security cabinet directive to IDF is to avoid steps that would give Iran a reason or a pretext to join the fighting.

US Seeks Off-Ramp to Israel-Hezbollah Conflict

As the annual UN General Assembly got underway, the Biden administration was mounting a full-court diplomatic press on its margins to avert a full-scale war in the Middle East. President Joe Biden insisted a “diplomatic solution is still possible” in his address to world leaders. A senior State Department official said the administration has “concrete ideas” to break “the cycle of strike-counterstrike” between Israel and Hezbollah that it will be discussing with allies and partners gathered in New York this week. The official did not elaborate on those ideas. The escalation has renewed fears that Israel will mount a ground invasion of southern Lebanon, potentially unleashing a far more deadly confrontation that could draw its ally, the United States, into direct conflict with Hezbollah’s patron, Iran.

Biden Says Israel and Hamas Must ‘End This War’

Biden's UN speech follows stalled Gaza cease-fire talks, diplomatic challenges with Hezbollah, and the Pentagon's decision to send more troops to the Middle East for precaution. In his speech, Biden reflected about becoming a senator in 1972 at the age of 29, describing it as "an inflection point, a moment of tension and uncertainty. The world was divided by the Cold War. The Middle East was headed toward war." He added, "Israel and Egypt went to war but then forged a historic peace. Things can get better; we should never forget that." Addressing the Israel-Hamas war, the president stated, "We're working to bring a greater measure of peace and stability to the Middle East. The world must not flinch from the horrors of October 7. Any country – any country – would have the right and responsibility to ensure such an attack would never happen again." "Innocent civilians in Gaza are also going through hell. Thousands and thousands have been killed, including aid workers. Too many families are displaced, crowding into tents and facing a dire humanitarian situation. They didn't ask for this war that Hamas started," Biden said.

Palestinian Medics Say 22 Killed in Gaza

Israeli military strikes across the Gaza Strip killed at least 22 Palestinians, medics said, as Israeli forces battled Hamas-led fighters in Rafah, near the border with Egypt. The violence in Gaza came as fighting intensified between Israel and the Iran-backed forces of Hezbollah across Israel's border with Lebanon - a parallel conflict that had stoked fears of an all-out war in the Middle East. Israeli tanks advanced in the northern and western areas of Rafah, battling fighters from Hamas and Islamic Jihad, according to residents and a statement published by the two Palestinian militant groups. Residents said the Israeli army blew up several homes in eastern and central areas of the city. The armed wings of Hamas and Islamic Jihad said fighters attacked the invading forces with anti-tank rockets, detonated already planted bombs and mortar fire.

Erdogan Tells ICC Prosecutor Israel Planning 'New Massacres' in Gaza

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused Israel of genocide and urged International Criminal Court Prosecutor Karim Khan to continue pursuing war crimes charges against Israeli leaders in a meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. Erdogan, who has been a vociferous critic of Israel since war broke out following the shock October 7 attack by Hamas, accused Israel of planning to “add new massacres to their list,” presenting Khan with a book of news photos Turkey claims shows evidence of Israeli war crimes. Israel “committed a genocide in Gaza,” Erdogan told Khan, according to the Turkish president’s spokesperson, charging that Prime Minister Netanyahu’s government had violated international law and human rights with impunity. “It is extremely important for the genocide case filed against Israel at the International Criminal Court to be concluded and for the perpetrators of genocide to receive the punishment they deserve,” Erdogan’s spokesperson said he told Khan. Turkey maintains strong financial ties with Israel, yet Erdogan has repeatedly engaged in inflammatory anti-Israel rhetoric, includes comparing the country and its leaders to Nazis, while supporting Hamas and attempting to lead an Islamic alliance against the Jewish state.

Associated Press

Sepsis and Malnutrition Stalk the New Mothers and Babies of South Darfur

Mothers and children in the Sudanese region of South Darfur are experiencing one of the “worst” health emergencies in the world, humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders said, one of the consequences of the violence that has engulfed the country since April 2023. Doctors Without Borders, also known as MSF, said in its latest report that 114 maternal deaths occurred during the period from January to mid-August 2024. More than 50% of maternal deaths happened in medical settings, with sepsis being the most common cause of death in MSF-supported facilities. Between January and June, 48 newborns died from sepsis at two MSF-backed medical facilities, the organization said. Malnutrition among children in South Darfur also exceeded emergency thresholds, the group said, adding that demands for medical attention “far exceed what MSF can respond to.” Sudan has been engulfed by violence since April of last year, when tensions between leaders of the Sudanese military and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces erupted into intense fighting and spread across the country, including to Darfur. The amount of critical aid reaching South Darfur rose slightly in June when the UN World Food Program delivered life-saving food and nutrition to some families. In August, 30,000 children under the age of two were screened for malnutrition, including nearly 33% who are acutely malnourished and 8.1% who are severely and acutely malnourished, MSF said.

A War of No-Choice

By Avi Issacharoff

- The painful truth needs to be said: Hizbullah, even after the series of painful blows that the organization has taken, does not intend to raise a white flag of surrender. To the contrary, Hizbullah will be determined now to prove that it is still standing on its own two feet and is capable of inflicting pain on the Israeli enemy, even after thousands of its operatives were killed and wounded and after its two most recent chiefs of staff were killed along with the top brass in the Radwan Force. Not only is Hassan Nasrallah brimming with desire for revenge but, more importantly, he is intent on salvaging his lost honor. As we have all learned, honor is important in the Middle East. Hence, the attacks on Israel will not stop. In fact, they are likely to increase, certainly after more than 350 people reportedly were killed yesterday in Lebanon.
- The attacks are also likely to gradually spread further to the south, in the direction of central Israel. But this is precisely the place where Nasrallah, a man who boasts about his keen understanding of Israel, is playing a very dangerous game, and he knows it: Hizbullah's leader does not want a full-scale war now, a war that would roil all of Lebanon, including Beirut; a war that would cost Tehran its most important deterrent against Israel to prevent it from attacking Iran's nuclear facilities. He knows that any rocket fire that results in excessively high casualties could prompt Israel to launch a ground invasion. No one knows how that invasion might end, including the Israelis.
- Nasrallah would like to see Israel come to an agreement with Hamas and end the fighting in Gaza. But Israel's leaders have decided to inform Hizbullah that it is going to pay a very high price—possibly too high a price—for its decision to tether Hizbullah's fate to Yahya Sinwar. The domestic Lebanese pressure on Nasrallah and Hizbullah to refrain from leading the country into an Israeli occupation is massive. Like everyone else in the Middle East, the Lebanese public has also seen the footage out of Gaza documenting the scope of devastation that has been wrought by the war—and they wish to avoid suffering similar devastation. The State of Lebanon has been on the verge of economic collapse for many years already. Another painful war, and particularly one that began on account of “our brothers, Hamas,” is not viewed by the Lebanese public as being legitimate. Hundreds of thousands of Lebanese began to flee from southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley. But public opinion in Lebanon is not that important to Nasrallah. He needs to prove to the Shiites around the world and the Shiites in Lebanon that he is prepared to fight Israel to the death.
- The only people who might get him to back down are the Iranians, and they, too, realize that they can't ask him to withdraw to the Litani River, as Israel has demanded. The conclusion from the range of the most recent developments is that barring any major surprises—which happen all the time in the Middle East—Israel will have to launch a ground operation in Lebanon and conquer a large swath of territory if it wants to force Hizbullah to withdraw to north of the Litani River and to stop shooting at residents of northern Israel.

- **Even an operation of that kind might not necessarily bring about a full end to Hizbullah's fire, but it could persuade Nasrallah to consider coming to a political settlement of one kind or another. A ground operation will cost Israel dearly in terms of casualties among the fighting troops and on the Israeli home front, since Nasrallah is likely to continue to attack as long as he can. A war of that kind could bog Israel down in the Lebanese mud for many months without achieving any solution. But Israel currently does not appear to have any other choice, except for possibly one: Nasrallah, who has repeatedly said he is fighting for the Palestinians' sake, might be prepared to consider a withdrawal to the Litani River if Israel reaches a ceasefire agreement in the south that would create a new equation. Nasrallah's concession would supposedly lead to a ceasefire in the south and/or to a halt to the Gaza "Nakba." There is no guarantee the formula will work, but it might be the last exit ramp before we get into a long and painful ground war.**

Terrified Lebanese Civilians Relive the 2006 Nightmare

By Sheren Falah Saab

- It is difficult to accurately describe the panic gripping Lebanese civilians following the recent escalation in the war. Dina, a 37-year-old jurist who lives in Beirut, told Haaretz that when her parents got the message to leave their home in Tyre, she felt something that could be translated into English as "deadly fear." "It began with a text message that some residents received in the early morning hours. Others received phone calls telling them to evacuate their homes. That made me very anxious," she says. The Al-Nahar daily published the message that residents of cities and villages in southern Lebanon received. "If you are in a structure in which there are Hezbollah armaments, move away from the village until further notice," the message read in Arabic.
- Imad Kreidieh, chairman of the Lebanese telecommunications company Ogero, reported that on Monday, residents of South Lebanon and Beirut received tens of thousands of calls, suspected to originate from Israel, urging them to leave their homes. Kreidieh believes that similar messages may continue to target Lebanese citizens in the coming days. "The aim is to create public anxiety," he said. These calls and messages, Dina says, were enough to make people understand that there was a serious escalation in the war. "Israel is threatening and terrorizing people directly," she says. "These calls make Lebanese people feel insecure, and they must decide whether or not to leave [their homes]."
- Dina says that thousands of civilians have nowhere to go. "Thousands of people are stranded... Some, like my parents and my brother's family, are fleeing to places like Beirut. But what will people with nowhere to go do?" In the city of Nabatieh in southern Lebanon, the situation is much more complicated. Jamal's family was woken up not just by phone calls but by the sounds of explosions. "I hear boom after boom and don't know what to do. We don't have a protected area. I froze, and it took me several minutes to gather my wits," he tells Haaretz.
- Jamal, 53, lives with his wife and his 80-year-old mother, who has diabetes and uses a wheelchair. "The first thing I thought about was my mother. Where will I take her? Up to now she didn't agree to leave and wants to remain at home. My children live in Beirut so we could have left earlier, but we stayed in order to protect her," he adds. At ten in the morning, he and his wife decided to pack up and take his mother to Beirut. "It's an extremely difficult dilemma. Like most Lebanese in the south, we don't have a shelter. When there are bombings, we sit in the living room." He explains that the intensity of Tuesday's attacks pushed him to make the decision to leave. "It reminded me of the nightmare we experienced during the Lebanon War in 2006. I lost my brother and two nieces. I'm afraid it will happen again. I'm a grandfather, and I have grandchildren; the worst scenario is that something happens to them," he says. When Jamal is asked to describe how people feel in Nabatieh, he falls silent. "The Lebanese people did not choose this war, and they are paying dearly for it. Uninvolved people are dying and getting injured; it hurts me to see my neighborhood emptying of its people."

- **Jamal says that he's afraid they won't be able to return home. "Many people deliberated, but there's no choice. A bomb doesn't distinguish between an innocent civilian and a Hezbollah target," he says. Maryam, a 26-year-old resident of Tyre and a Communications student at the American University in Beirut, tells Haaretz that the sound of planes she had been hearing for several days increased on Sunday. "It's one attack after another. Two nights ago, there were further attacks, as well as on Sunday morning. I feel paralyzed. I sit all day in front of my phone and read the news and follow where the bombs fall. I'm torn between leaving for Beirut and staying with my parents in Sidon," she says.**
- **Maryam says that on Sunday the city was congested and overcrowded due to the arrival of people from the south. "Many Lebanese say that the sight of the people displaced from the south is very reminiscent of the massive uprooting in 2006. But this time, many Lebanese do not support the 'resistance' (i.e. Hezbollah). People are broken, depressed and fatigued. No one in Lebanon can permit himself to support another war, and many don't want it." Dina stresses that "the Lebanese are contending with other crises. The latest one revolved around the electricity shortage. People see Hezbollah as a burden weighing down the country and its citizens."**
- **Ibrahim, a 60-year-old businessman from Baalbek, relates the sense of distress he has been experiencing in recent days. "We've grown tired," he says. "I've seen some tough wars in Lebanon. I've grown old and I see only wars. Five years ago I told my children not to stay in Lebanon, since it has no future. They left for France." Ibrahim says that his children want him to join them, but he and his wife have not decided yet whether they'll leave Lebanon. The Sidon district has already started receiving evacuees from the Nabatieh and Ghazieh areas, mainly families with children or the elderly. Marwan, a 40-year-old social worker from Sidon, tells of a local initiative in the town of Maghdoucheh, which has taken in over 200 displaced people. "They fled a hell," he says.**
- **The municipality, he adds, decided to house the evacuees in an elementary school and provide them with food, water, a bed, clothing and basic necessities. "We don't know how long it will be like this, or whether the attacks will expand. In the meantime, classes have been suspended throughout Lebanon, with preschools closed as well. The war is felt in every city in Lebanon." Marwan says that he's met some of the families who have had to evacuate the villages in southern Lebanon. "What I saw in their eyes was fear. They are living it every day and every hour."**
- **In response to a question by Haaretz on whether he knows anyone who was killed or hurt as a result of the airstrikes, Marwan says that so far there are no orderly lists and that this will be resolved in the next few days. "It's important to remember that our current government is a temporary one. You [on the Israeli side] get instructions all the time. On the Lebanese side, we're alone. There's no one truly looking after the citizens. All the emergency plans for war are only ink on paper. In the moment of truth, that elderly woman in Nabatieh is left to fend for herself. I only pray that this war will end."**