

# Hamas deputy leader assassinated in Lebanon

**International Desk**

The deputy leader of the Palestinian resistance group Hamas Saleh al-Arouri was assassinated in a drone attack in Lebanon's capital, which is widely assumed to be carried out by Israel. Israel has neither confirmed nor denied that it killed Saleh

al-Arouri on Tuesday, who was the political number two of Hamas and one of the founders of the resistance group's military wing. Israel kept bombing Gaza on Wednesday after the army warned it is ready for "any scenario" following the assassination of Arouri and six other fighters.

Amid the almost three-month-old war, Israel has traded almost daily cross-border fire with the Lebanese resistance group Hezbollah while so far avoiding a full-scale war. Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi in a statement said the Israel's terrorist act is a clear sign of regime's desperate and ignominious failure in the Hamas's

Operation Al-Aqsa Storm. Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian also condemned the "cowardly" Beirut strike and said it proved that Israel "has not achieved any of its goals after weeks of war crimes, genocide and destruction in Gaza and the West Bank of Palestine, despite the direct support of the White House".



Saleh al-Arouri  
AFP



Municipal workers clean the street by the building that was hit by a strike blaming on Israel targeting Hamas deputy leader Saleh al-Arouri in the southern suburb of Beirut on January 3, 2024.  
ANWAR AMRO /AFP

**UN worries**

Following Arouri's killing, the UN peacekeeping mission in Lebanon said it was deeply concerned about the possibility of an escalation "that could have devastating consequences for people on both sides of the border". Saleh al-Arouri played a key

role in building up the Palestinian group's military capabilities and its links with regional allies. Arouri, 57, was one of the founders of the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, in the early 1990s.

**Living in exile**

Born in the village of Arura, near Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, Arouri joined the Muslim Brotherhood movement as a young man. He became a member of Hamas when the group was founded in 1987 by the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood. He was detained several times in the early 1990s, and in 1992 was sentenced to 15 years in jail on charges of forming the first cells of the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades in the West Bank. He was released in 2007, but detained again three months

later until 2010 when he was freed on condition that he go into exile. Arouri was then sent to Syria, where he remained for three years before relocating to Lebanon. Following his release in 2010, Arouri was appointed as a member of Hamas's political arm and was on the negotiating team that secured a prisoner exchange involving French-Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in 2011, along with Egyptian mediators. On October 9, 2017, Hamas announced the election of Arouri as deputy head of its political arm.

**Israel's terror machine**

Amir-Abdollahian stressed that the regime's terror machine is a "real threat" to regional peace and security. Hezbollah vowed Arouri's killing would not go unpunished and labelled it "a serious assault on Lebanon... and a dangerous development". Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati charged that the killing "aims to draw Lebanon" deeper into the war, while French President Emmanuel Macron urged Israel to "avoid any escalatory attitude, particularly in Lebanon".

In the West Bank - the Palestinian territory where Arouri was born - the Palestinian Authority called a general strike to mourn his death. Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh also condemned the killing and warned of its "risks and consequences". French President Emmanuel Macron called on Israel to avoid escalation, "particularly in Lebanon", the Elysee Palace said Tuesday. Macron, who spoke by telephone with Israeli minister and war cabinet member Benny

Gantz, said "it was essential to avoid any escalatory attitude, particularly in Lebanon, and that France would continue to pass on these messages to all players directly or indirectly involved in the area", the presidency said. Israel regularly carries out strikes against the Hezbollah movement along Lebanon border, but Arouri's killing was the first time since the start of the war in Gaza that it has targeted the Lebanese capital. The assassination was a further sign that the war in Gaza was spreading across the region,

drawing in the occupied West Bank, Hezbollah forces on the Lebanon border, and even Red Sea shipping lanes. Hamas politburo member Hosam Badran said in a eulogy for Arouri: "We say to the criminal occupation (Israel) that the battle between us is open." Israel had long accused him of orchestrating attacks on its citizens. But a Hamas official said he was also "at the heart of negotiations" conducted by Qatar and Egypt over the outcome of the Gaza war and the release of Hamas-held Israeli captives.

## EU's Borrell urges world to impose solution to Gaza conflict

**Social Desk**

Israel kept bombing Gaza on Wednesday, killing more Palestinians in the Palestinian territory as EU's Borrell urged world to 'impose' solution to the conflict. The Israeli armed forces again bombed Gaza targets overnight, including in the crowded south-

ern city of Rafah where eyewitnesses said survivors flocked to Al-Najjar Hospital to mourn the dead, including a child. The health ministry in Gaza said Wednesday at least 22,313 people have been killed in nearly three months of Israel's onslaught. The toll includes 128 people

killed over the past 24 hours, a ministry statement said, while the fighting since October 7 has also wounded 57,296. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the international community had to "impose" a solution to the conflict. "What we have learned over the last 30 years, and what we are

learning now with the tragedy experienced in Gaza, is that the solution must be imposed from outside," Borrell told diplomats in Portugal. "Peace will only be achieved in a lasting manner if the international community gets involved intensely to achieve it and imposes a solution," he said. Borrell warned that a strike in Beirut on Tuesday that killed a senior Hamas leader was "an additional factor that can cause an escalation of the conflict".



AFP

care must be protected, at all times, under international humanitarian law," Tedros said. "Today's bombardments are unconscionable. Gaza's health system is already on its knees, with health and aid workers continuously stymied in their efforts to save lives due to the hostilities."

**'Provocative' comments**

Meanwhile, France on Wednesday described as "provocative" comments made by far-right Israeli ministers calling for Palestinians to emigrate from Gaza and Jewish settlers to return to the besieged territory. "France condemns the comments of Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir," the French foreign ministry said in a statement. Ben-Gvir on Monday called for promoting "a solution to encourage the emigration of Gaza's

residents" and the re-establishment of Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip. His comments came the day after Smotrich also called for the return of settlers to Gaza, adding that Israel should "encourage" the territory's approximately 2.4 million Palestinians to leave. The United States on Tuesday also denounced the ministers' controversial comments as "inflammatory and irresponsible". The Israeli minister Ben-Gvir hit back at the US over its criticism. "The United States is our best friend, but first of all we will do what is best for the State of Israel: the migration of hundreds of thousands from Gaza will allow the (Israeli) residents of the envelope to return home and live in security and will protect the IDF (Israeli) soldiers," the extreme-right minister posted on X late Tuesday.

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