

Thousands return home after Hezbollah-Israel cease-fire deal

International Desk

A cease-fire between Israel and Lebanese resistance group Hezbollah held on Wednesday after the two sides struck a deal brokered by the US and France.

The agreement ended the deadliest confrontation between the Israeli regime and the resistance group in years and paved the way for the return of tens of thousands of displaced Lebanese to their devastated towns and villages.

Under the terms of the deal, the Lebanese Army started reinforcing its presence in the country's south, a region Israel heavily bombarded during its aggression.

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati said the army would shore up its presence in the south, while urging Israel to withdraw and respect the cease-fire. United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres also has said the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon, UNI-

FIL, will also help implement the agreement.

Israel's military said its forces were still on Lebanese territory and urged residents of southern Lebanese villages to delay returning home until further notice from the Israeli military. Israeli troops have pushed around 6 km into Lebanon in a series of ground incursions launched in September. Hezbollah lawmaker Hassan Fadlallah said the group was cooperating with the army's deployment to southern Lebanon, insisting that, "There will be no problem there."

'Secret resistance'

Fadlallah went on to say that Hezbollah had "no visible weapons or bases" in the south, but at the same time, noted the group "is a secret resistance... not a regular army." "Hezbollah's fighters are the people of these villages and towns, and most of the dead are from these villages," he said.



A woman looks at debris in Beirut's southern suburbs on November 27, 2024, as people returned to the area after a cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah took effect.

AFP

"Nobody can make residents leave their villages."

US President Joe Biden said Israel will gradually withdraw its forces over 60 days as Lebanon's Army takes control of the territory.

Biden said his administration was also pushing for an elusive cease-fire in the Gaza Strip where more than 44,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's onslaught on the Palestinians territory since October 2023.

Sami Abu Zuhri, an official for the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas, said the group "appreciates" Lebanon's right to reach an agreement that protects its people, and hopes for a deal to end the Gaza war. Iran also welcomed the cease-fire.



Iranian Foreign Ministry's spokesman Esmail Baghaei in a statement welcomed the cease-fire agreement, reaffirming the Islamic Republic's unwavering support for the Lebanese government, nation and its resistance

movement. Lebanon says at least 3,823 people have been killed in Israel's strikes since October 2023 when Hezbollah began to target Israel's military positions in support of Hamas fighters in Gaza.

Prof. Ardakani acclaimed by president as scientific asset

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President Masoud Pezeshkian honored Reza Davari Ardakani, who is one of Iran's most prominent professors of philosophy and sociology, as the country's scientific asset.

During a meeting on Wednesday, Pezeshkian told Ardakani that his measures will always be lasting in the Iranian so-

ciety. Referring to his government's approach towards the country's education system, Pezeshkian said, "We have plans to improve the quality of the education system, which we hope we would implement it."

Ardakani, for her part, emphasized the importance of the education system in the country. He also talked about his



cooperation with Pezeshkian during his tenure as the chief of Tabriz University of Medical Sciences.

At the end of the meeting, Ardakani presented three volumes of his books to the Iranian president.

Leader calls for boosting Iran's deterrent power

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei called for more work to enhance the combat and deterrent capabilities of the Iranian Armed Forces.

During a meeting with commanders of the Iranian Navy on the National Navy Day, Ayatollah Khamenei regarded the naval force as a vital and decisive element of the Armed Forces, Press TV

reported. The Leader commended the Navy for its operational capabilities, intelligence achievements, and innovation activities.

"It is imperative that the Armed Forces, particularly the Navy, focus on enhancing preparedness and bolstering combat capabilities."

"The primary task of the Armed Forces is to deter attacks. Therefore, you

should act in a way that showcases the country's combat power to the adversaries, making them aware that any confrontation will incur significant costs."

In recent years, Iranian military experts and engineers have achieved significant advancements in producing a wide range of homegrown equipment, making the Armed Forces self-sufficient.

Iran starts feeding gas into new centrifuges after IAEA resolution: *Eslami*

The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) said the country has started injecting uranium gas into its advanced centrifuges following a recent anti-Tehran resolution by the UN nuclear agency's Board of Governors. "We have started feeding gas into several thousand advanced centrifuges and put them into operation as part of plans aimed at the development of the nuclear program," Mohammad Eslami told reporters on the sidelines of a weekly cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Press TV reported.

He, however, stressed that the country's peaceful nuclear program is transparent and under the supervision of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). "The Islamic Republic of Iran has always shown that it favors interaction but it will never back down in the face of force, pressure, [and] illegal and unlawful conduct of the other side," Eslami said.

The Iranian nuclear chief warned that any anti-Tehran accusations would backfire. "Iran's nuclear program has utterly

transparent and peaceful goals, and if they want to disregard the JCPOA-related goals and their own obligations, and unilaterally put pressure on the country by making excuses and leveling accusations, they will receive a response" that will backfire on them, Eslami told reporters.

"Our goals are clear, our quantitative and qualitative goals are completely transparent, and we are moving in this direction, and we have increasingly benefited from the expected results, and its effects will also be felt in the

lives of the people."

Eslami also underlined that Iran's nuclear program is under the supervision of the IAEA and in conformity with Safeguards Agreement as well as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The AEOI chief said some of the accusations against Iran date back 20 years and were leveled with the complicity of anti-Iran groups and services to mount pressure on the Islamic Republic but were later proven to be unsubstantiated and fabricated.

The remarks came a day after Foreign

Minister Abbas Araghchi said that Iran is to activate several thousands of its domestically manufactured advanced centrifuges in response to the United Nations nuclear agency's recent Western-backed resolution against the country.

Araghchi said the retaliatory measure was to come in reaction to the UK, France, and Germany's forwarding the United States-backed resolution to the IAEA's Board of Governors and the body's adoption of the resolution, which took place on Friday.

Hezbollah's growing clout...

Furthermore, the inefficiency and inability of international organizations, institutions, regimes, and legal frameworks to manage crises have become glaringly apparent. One of the pillars of the global order has been its institutional and rule-based framework, which goes beyond mere power structures. If this order cannot be sustained through its existing institutions and rules, it suffers a critical blow. For instance, we now see the UN secretary general being barred from entering the occupied territories—a situation akin to barring a judge from entering a courtroom.

Another significant development is the enhanced strategic importance of the Middle East

in the global order. As previously mentioned, this is of great importance. Indirectly, this has also bolstered China's position. Strategic balancing often involves two approaches: strengthening one's own power or weakening the opponent. Currently, China is employing both positive and negative balancing strategies. It is enhancing its own capabilities while also keeping the United States occupied and incurring costs in both the Middle East and Ukraine. The preoccupation of the U.S.—China's principal rival—in such a critical region is to China's advantage. Every blow to the United States equates to a gain for China. Thus, China has reaped the greatest benefits from the Middle Eastern crises, while

Russia has also gained some respite and relief from international pressures.

Another outcome of these developments is the increasing difficulty in establishing and maintaining an indigenous regional order in the Middle East. Contrary to the designs of both the United States and Iran, which emphasize the importance of such an order, it appears that major powers, including the U.S., will remain present in the region for a few more years. Even if unwillingly, they will inevitably play a role in shaping the regional order. Israel's "peripheral defense" strategy is another critical aspect of this situation. During the Arab-Israeli wars, Israel's defense perimeter was oriented around

Arab territories. However, this defense belt has now shifted to encircle Iran. This new defense perimeter encompasses the southern Persian Gulf, Kurdistan, Azerbaijan, and even India, which maintains positive relations with Iran. If Israel manages to establish a presence east of Iran, it will undoubtedly do so to reinforce its defense perimeter. This policy reflects a concerted effort to contain, limit, and weaken Iran's power, a development for which Iran must be prepared.

Ultimately, Iran is witnessing the formation of a new order. Nasrallah's martyrdom may not have an immediate impact, but this period represents an opportunity for negotiations, political maneuvering, and consolidating

Hezbollah's position in Lebanon as a political force. Figures like Samir Geagea naturally oppose Hezbollah's influence, but Iran must emphasize the importance of Hezbollah maintaining its standing. Meanwhile, the United States and Israel are striving to transform their temporary military gains into strategic and political achievements.

There is no doubt that if Nasrallah had not been martyred, the management of political, diplomatic, and military affairs would have been different. Even the Lebanese prime minister noted that there was readiness for a ceasefire and an agreement before Nasrallah's martyrdom. This indicates that part of the objective behind his assassination was

linked to shaping the future of Hezbollah.

Beyond rebuilding Hezbollah's military strength, preserving and enhancing its diplomatic and political strategies are of paramount importance—a field where Iran can play a pivotal role. Just as Nasrallah succeeded Sayyed Abbas Mousawi and elevated Hezbollah to an unprecedented level, it is hoped that Hezbollah will continue to grow such that, thirty years from now, it remains a stronger and more influential force. Indeed, Hezbollah is still the most significant non-state actor in the region, and many regional countries cannot replicate the role Hezbollah has played on the regional and global stage.