

FROM GAZA TO BEIRUT: THE INTENSIFICATION OF THE ISRAEL- LEBANON CONFLICT

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



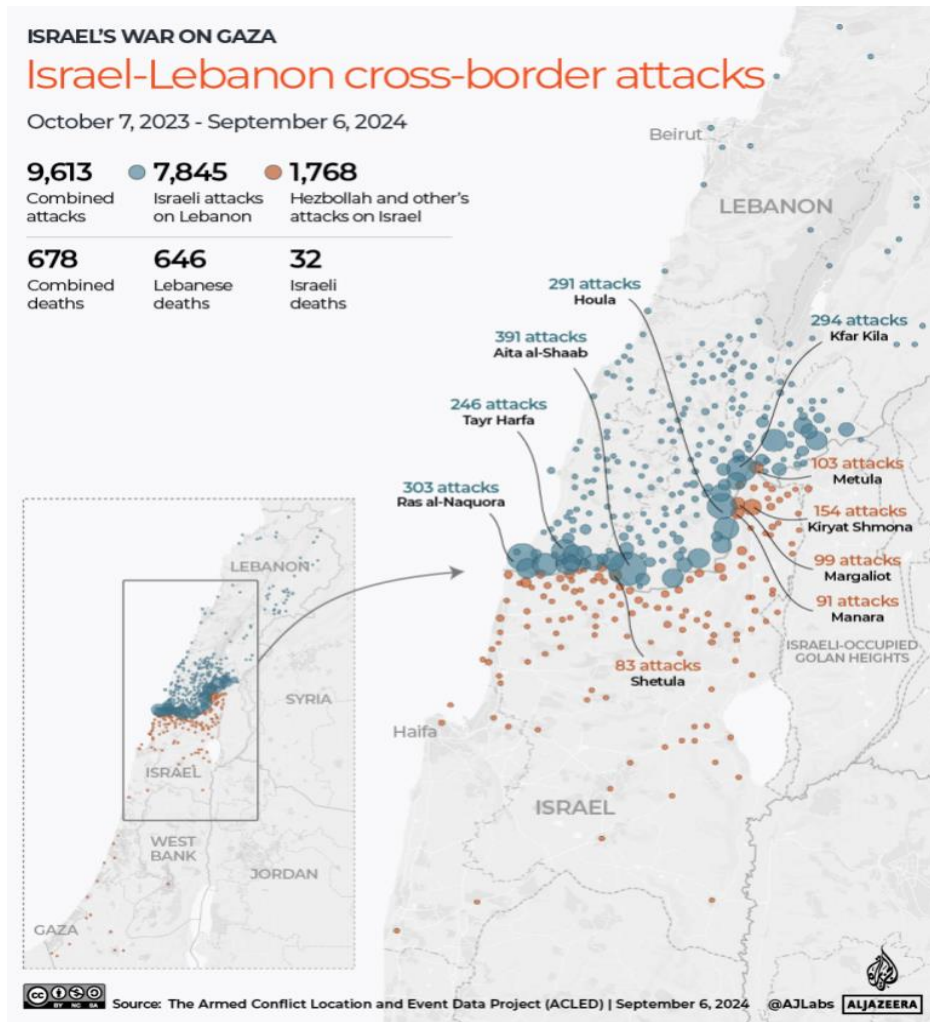
A year ago, on October 7, 2023, the Middle East region saw the resurgence of intense conflict. An unexpected attack by Hamas on Israel prompted large-scale retaliatory bombardment of Gaza, marking a potential turning point in the prolonged Israel-Palestine dispute.

Currently, the situation has dramatically worsened and escalated security calculus in the region. In the aftermath of the 7 October 2023 attack, the Houthis in Yemen joined in, attacking Israeli, and allied ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, targeting vessels, suspected of heading toward Israeli ports. The region stands on the verge of one of its most severe conflicts in decades. Israel's military campaign in Gaza has expanded to Lebanon, resulting in a ground invasion. Prior to this, airstrikes targeted Hezbollah's communication networks, killing its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, and several key commanders.¹ Direct hostilities between Israel and Iran have now commenced. The hostilities have continued over the past year. Hezbollah and other Iran-backed groups within the "axis of resistance" have targeted Israeli and U.S. military positions in support of Hamas and Palestinian cause.

On October 1, 2024, Israel launched a ground offensive in southern Lebanon, shifting its strategy from containment to a full-scale effort to neutralize Hezbollah. Iran responded by firing over 180 missiles at Israel; some were intercepted, but satellite images confirmed damage to at least two air

¹ Graig R. Klein, Counter-Terrorism Targeted Killing of Hassan Nasrallah. Is Hezbollah Weaker?, *International Center For Counter Terrorism, ICCT*, 01 Oct 2024, <https://www.icct.nl/publication/counter-terrorism-targeted-killing-hassan-nasrallah-hezbollah-weaker>

bases.² The conflict's expansion into Lebanon has further destabilized Lebanon's already crisis-ridden economy; banking crisis since its 2019, financial failure,³ soaring inflation, while political, deadlock and corruption have left the interim government largely ineffective.



(Source: Al Jazeera) ⁴

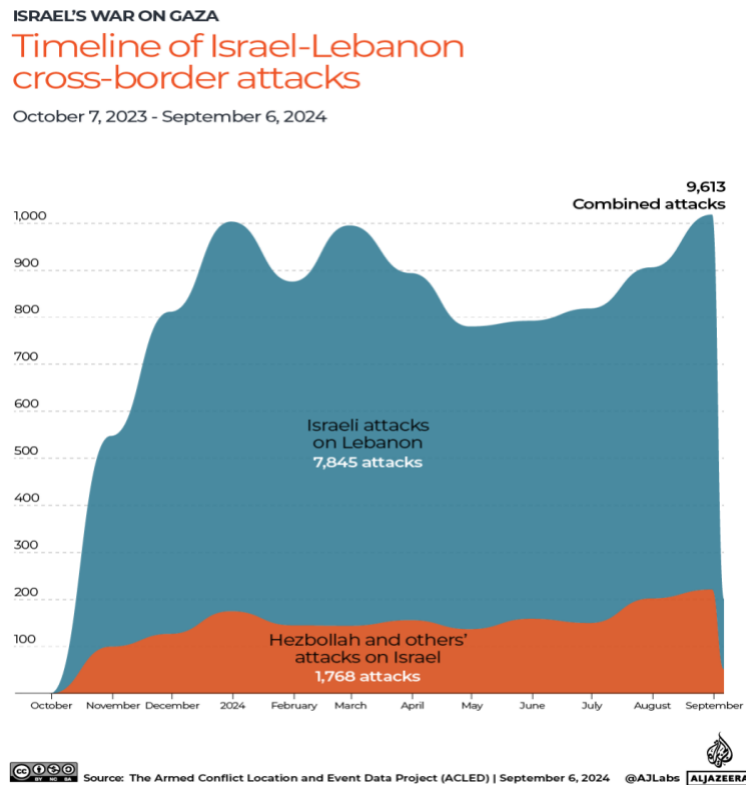
Lebanon quickly became the secondary battlefield, with Hezbollah launching attacks on the Shebaa Farms area on October 8, describing its operation as a “support front” for Hamas. Hezbollah, formed in 1982 to resist Israel’s invasion and occupation of southern Lebanon, has stated that it will cease its attacks if Israel halts its assault on Gaza. The group’s former leader, Hassan Nasrallah, emphasized that while Hezbollah does not seek to escalate the conflict further, it is prepared to respond proportionally to any continued Israeli aggression. Israeli retaliation followed, and the

² David Gritten, Iran launches more than 180 ballistic missiles at Israel, *BBC*, 2 October 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9dyxxgv1jo>

³ Bassem Snaije, Lebanon: Financial crisis or national collapse?, *Barcelona Center for International Affairs*, 06/2022, <https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/lebanon-financial-crisis-or-national-collapse>

⁴ “Mapping 11 months of Israel-Lebanon cross-border attacks,” *Al Jazeera*, September 11, 2024 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/11/mapping-11-months-if-israel-lebanon-cross-border-attacks>

conflict intensified. By mid-September 2024, Israel expanded its operations with targeted attacks on Hezbollah's communication networks, resulting in deaths among Hezbollah operatives and nearby civilians. Airstrikes continued, primarily in Shia-majority areas, aiming to dismantle Hezbollah's arsenal and infrastructure, which Israel alleges are hidden in residential zones.



(Source: Al Jazeera) ⁵

Israeli attacks have killed over 2448 people in Lebanon since October 8, 2023.⁶ The most recent bombardment took place on October 19, when Israel carried out several airstrikes on Beirut's southern suburbs. These airstrikes followed a series of rocket launches by Hezbollah targeting northern Israel, along with a reported drone strike directed at the area near Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's holiday residence. The bombardment of southern Lebanon, particularly its agricultural areas, has severely impacted residents' livelihoods. Israel has also targeted UN peacekeepers, claiming Hezbollah uses United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) positions for attacks. The UN Security Council deployed peacekeepers to Lebanon in 2006 to stabilize the region after the last Israel-Hezbollah war. Earlier this month, Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz

⁵ "Mapping 11 months of Israel-Lebanon cross-border attacks," Al Jazeera, September 11, 2024
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/11/mapping-11-months-if-israel-lebanon-cross-border-attacks>

⁶ "Hezbollah rockets target Israel's north as Israel pounds Beirut suburbs," Al Jazeera, 19 October, 2024.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/19/drone-hits-netanyahus-home-as-hezbollah-rockets-target-northern-israel>

declared UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, *persona non-grata*, accusing him of supporting terrorism after he called for a ceasefire in Gaza.⁷

Countries in the region have voiced concerns about potential Palestinian displacement into their territories, raising security risks. As the war in Gaza continues unabated, with fears of a larger regional conflict growing in both Lebanon and Gaza, Israel's pursuit of "total victory" has caused extensive civilian casualties and widespread damage. World leaders have expressed serious concerns over the escalation and potential for a "full-fledged" war following Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon. UN Secretary-General António Guterres voiced alarm over violence along the Blue Line and increasing civilian casualties. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other Gulf states called for restraint and decried actions that undermine state sovereignty. Qatar condemned Israel's actions in the "strongest terms," while Pakistan strongly condemned the aggression as a grave violation of international law and a threat to regional stability.⁸ The United States, while supplying military aid to Israel, emphasized efforts to de-escalate, with President Joe Biden highlighting ongoing mediation efforts. China reiterated its support for Lebanon's sovereignty and condemned attacks on civilians.

Furthermore, since Tel Aviv views Tehran as the primary supporter of Hezbollah and Hamas, Israel has been targeting Iranian sites and assassinating Iranian allies in Lebanon, Syria, and Iran itself, pushing the Middle East closer to a broader regional conflict. The potential for a wider conflict could strain Israel's resources, especially with its ongoing operations against Hamas in Gaza. However, Israel's significant military support from the United States continues to bolster its position amid escalating regional tensions.

⁷ Samuel Berhanu Woldemariam, Israel has banned the UN secretary-general. Is this legal – or right?, *The Conversation*, October 10, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/israel-has-banned-the-un-secretary-general-is-this-legal-or-right-240674>

⁸ "Pakistan condemns Israel's aggression against Lebanon," Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, September 24, 2024. <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/pakistan-condemns-israels-aggression-against-lebanon>