

Leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah holds talks with senior Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad figures

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Online Desk: The leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah group held talks on Wednesday with senior Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad figures in a key meeting of three top anti-Israel militant groups amid the war raging in Gaza.

A brief statement following the meeting said that Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah agreed with Hamas' Saleh al-Arouri and Islamic Jihad's leader Ziad al-Nakhleh on the next steps that the three — along with other Iran-backed militants — should take at this “sensitive stage.”

Their goal, according to the statement that was carried on Hezbollah-run and Lebanese state media, was to achieve “a real victory for the resistance in Gaza and Palestine” and halt Israel's “treacherous and brutal aggression against our oppressed and steadfast people in Gaza and the West Bank”.

No other details were provided. The discussions in Beirut came as the war between Israel and Hamas, the Palestinian militant group that rules the Gaza Strip, is now in its third week. The fighting, triggered by Hamas' deadly incursion into Israel on Oct. 7 that killed more than 1,400 people in Israel, has killed more than 5,700 Palestinians in Gaza.

As the Gaza death toll spirals, tensions have also been rising along the tense Lebanon-Israel border, where Hezbollah members have been exchanging fire with Israeli troops since the day after Hamas' rampage into Israel.

For now, those exchanges remain limited to a handful of border towns and Hezbollah and Israeli military positions on both sides. Lebanese army soldiers and United Nations peacekeeping forces have deployed in large numbers.

Dozens of Hezbollah fighters have been killed in the clashes so far, the group says, while the Israeli military has also announced some deaths among its ranks.

Nasrallah has yet to publicly speak about the war in Gaza and clashes along the Lebanon-Israel border. However, other Hezbollah top officials have warned Israel against its planned ground invasion into the besieged territory.

Israeli officials have said they would retaliate aggressively in case of a cross-border attack by Hezbollah from Lebanon.

“We will cripple it with a force it cannot even imagine, and the consequences for it and the Lebanese state (will be) devastating,” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said while visiting Israeli troops along the border with Lebanon on Sunday.

Lebanon's cash-strapped caretaker government, along regional and international figures, has been scrambling to keep the country out of the war.

Hezbollah and Israel fought a monthlong war in 2006 that ended in a tense stalemate. Israel sees Iran-backed Hezbollah as its most serious threat, estimating it has some 150,000 rockets and missiles aimed at Israel.