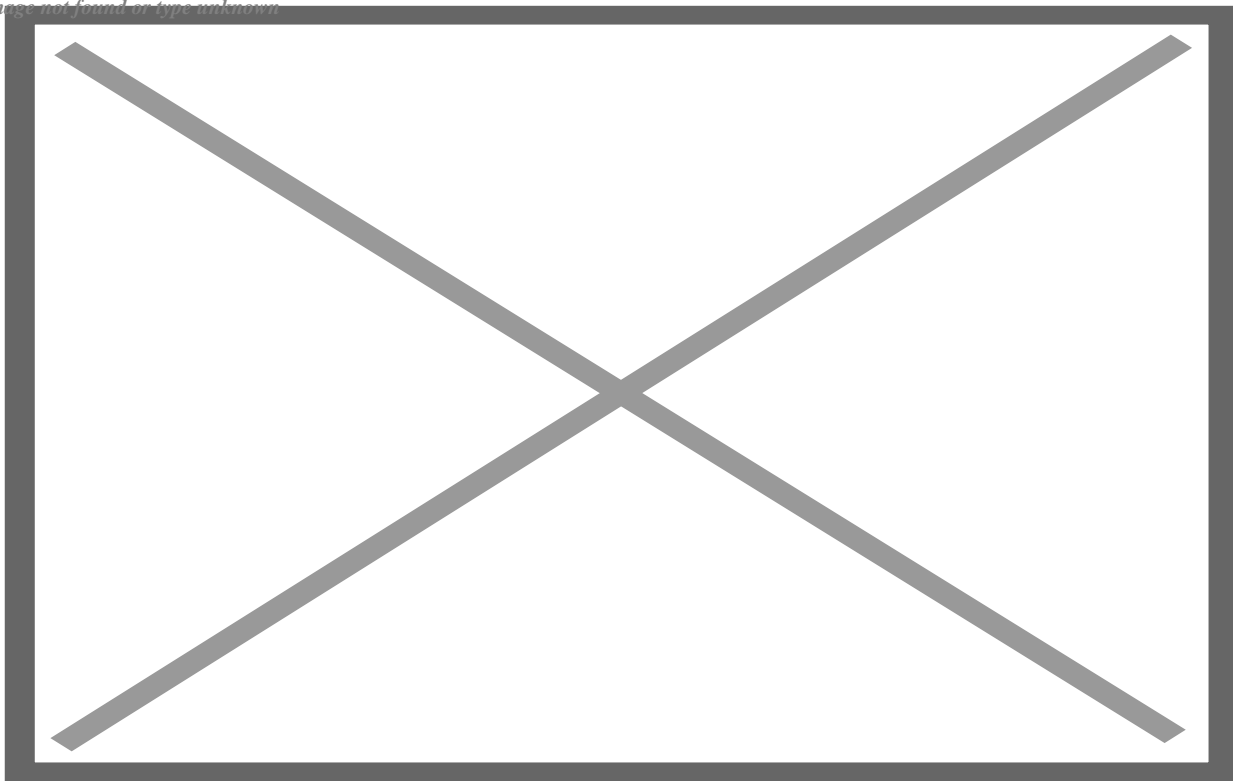


Pentagon warns Israel that conflict with Hezbollah could spark regional war

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Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, right, and his U.S. counterpart Lloyd Austin shake hands in binding friendship

Washington, June 27 (RHC)-- U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has warned Israel's minister of military affairs Yoav Gallant about "terrible consequences" of a conflict between the regime and Hezbollah, which, he said could easily spark a regional war.

Speaking at a meeting at the Pentagon, Austin said, "Diplomacy is by far the best way to prevent more escalation." "Another war between Israel and Hezbollah could easily become a regional war, with terrible consequences for the Middle East."

The Pentagon chief accused the Lebanese resistance movement of "provocations," which, he said, "threaten to drag the Israeli and Lebanese people into a war that they do not want." "Such a war would be a catastrophe for Lebanon and it would be devastating for innocent Israeli and Lebanese civilians."

Austin also said Washington is urgently working towards a diplomatic agreement that would allow Israeli and Lebanese civilians to return to their homes on both sides of the border.

Israel has threatened Lebanon with an "all-out war" with the military saying "operational plans for an offensive in Lebanon were approved and validated."

Benjamin Netanyahu, prime minister of Israel, also said on Monday that the regime's forces are winding up the most intense part of offensive in the Gaza Strip and will redeploy to the border with Lebanon.

Hezbollah Secretary-General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah has previously said that "no place" in the occupied territories would be spared in case of a full-blown war.

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