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## Lebanon Reaffirms Sovereignty as Talks Begin Amid Renewed Strikes



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BEIRUT, Dec. 5 — Lebanese President Joseph Aoun reaffirmed on Thursday that Lebanon will not compromise on its sovereignty as direct talks with Israel get underway, even as Israeli airstrikes intensified in southern Lebanon. His remarks followed the opening round of negotiations in Naqoura — the first direct engagement between Lebanese and Israeli officials in decades — during

which Lebanon highlighted ongoing Israeli violations of the ceasefire and UN Resolution 1701.

Speaking at a cabinet session in Baabda Palace, Aoun outlined Lebanon's priorities, noting that he has instructed Simon Karam, former Lebanese ambassador to the United States and head of the Lebanese delegation, to focus on halting Israeli incursions, completing border delineation, and securing the release of prisoners. He stressed that economic cooperation or peace-related arrangements fall outside the mandate of the ceasefire monitoring committee, which includes representatives from the United States, France, Lebanon, Israel, and the United Nations.

Aoun acknowledged that the first session produced no major breakthroughs but said it "set the stage for progress" ahead of the next round set for Dec. 19. He emphasized the talks are technical and not intended to serve any particular political group.

Meanwhile, Israeli airstrikes struck four towns in southern Lebanon on Thursday, destroying four buildings and damaging about 20 homes, according to Lebanese security sources. The Israeli military said it targeted several Hezbollah weapons storage sites following earlier evacuation warnings.

These developments came despite the U.S.- and French-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah that has remained in effect since November 2024.

