

Israel, Iran, Hamas, and Lebanese Hezbollah: Various Strikes amid Regional Turmoil

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Since the [October 7, 2023, attacks](#) led by [Hamas](#) (a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization, or FTO), conflicts between Israel and Iran and/or its allies have spread across the Middle East. More than three months after Israel and Iran [exchanged direct fire](#) in April 2024, these conflicts face another potential inflection point following three late July incidents:

- **Civilians killed in Israeli-controlled Golan Heights.** On July 27, a rocket fired from Lebanon [reportedly killed 12 young people](#) in the [Druze](#) town of Majdal Shams in the [Golan Heights](#). U.S. and Israeli officials said [Lebanese Hezbollah](#) (another FTO) was responsible despite the group's [denial](#). Israeli leaders [said](#) the strike crossed a "red line."
- **Hezbollah military leader reportedly killed in Lebanon.** On July 30, Israeli authorities [said](#) that an Israeli drone strike in Beirut killed Hezbollah senior commander Fuad Shukr, whom Israel blamed for the Golan Heights attack. Shukr is on the U.S. government's ["Rewards for Justice" list](#) for playing a "central role" in the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine Corps Barracks in Beirut.
- **Top Hamas leader reportedly killed in Iran.** On July 31, [Ismail Haniyeh](#)—the top political leader of Hamas—was [reportedly assassinated](#) by a remotely detonated bomb in his guesthouse while visiting Tehran for the inauguration of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. Hamas and Iran [blamed](#) Israel for the strike; Israel [has not commented](#), and the White House has [said](#) it cannot independently confirm Haniyeh's death.

In blaming Israel for Haniyeh's death, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei [stated](#) that "it is our duty to take revenge." [According to one report](#), he has ordered direct retaliation against Israel, but further details are unclear. Iran's Permanent Mission to the United Nations [has said](#), "The response to an assassination will indeed be special operations—harder and intended to instill deep regret in the perpetrator," [and](#) the "responsibility of the United States, as the strategic ally and main supporter of the Israeli regime in the region, cannot be overlooked." Secretary of State Antony Blinken [asserted](#) that Haniyeh's reported killing "is something we were not aware of or involved in." In April 2024, Iranian leaders declared a ["new equation,"](#) stating that Iran would meet any Israeli attack against Iranian "interests, assets, figures, and citizens anywhere" with a counterattack.

Factors potentially influencing key actors' decisions going forward include the following:

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- **Israel.** What risks Israel might accept in an effort to counter and deter Iran and its allies, and to return [some 60,000 evacuees](#) to northern Israel. Such risks may affect Israel's ongoing war with Hamas and prospects for a cease-fire, as well as its overall military and self-defense capacity.
- **Iran.** How Iran perceives that its responses, including to the killing of a key allied leader in its capital just after its new president took office, may strengthen or weaken its capacity to deter future Israeli military operations against it or its partners.
- **Hamas.** What the implications are of Haniyeh's reported killing for Hamas's approach to cease-fire and hostage negotiations with Israel, and for Hamas's broader objectives in Gaza, the West Bank, and the wider region.
- **Hezbollah.** Whether Hezbollah's military options and capabilities would strengthen its deterrence of Israel or magnify the threat of escalation, when considered alongside the group's relations with Iran and its own future as a militia and political party in troubled [Lebanon](#).

Issues for Congress

In assessing potential legislative and oversight options, Congress may consider the following.

U.S. Support for Israel and Other Partners

Escalation could have political-military implications for Israel and other U.S. partners in the Middle East, and affect bilateral and multilateral U.S. coordination efforts regarding regional security. Israel may face challenges in maintaining military strength vis-à-vis [Gaza](#), [Lebanon](#), and the [West Bank](#), while also facing threats or potential threats from [Iran](#) and [Iran-backed actors](#) in [Yemen](#), Syria, and [Iraq](#). Hezbollah's [battle-tested militia](#), proximity to Israel, and [large arsenal](#) of drones, rockets, and missiles appears to pose a considerably [greater sustained threat](#) to Israel than Hamas does.

Congress and the Biden Administration may consider the nature of Israeli operations and any potential shortfalls in Israel's defense capacity and stockpiles when weighing future direct U.S. involvement in Israel's defense; the movement and use of military assets and personnel to and within the region; and/or the timing, nature, and volume of arms shipments. After the Golan Heights strike, the White House [said](#) that Israel had a right to respond, while also stating that the United States seeks to avoid broader regional war. On July 30, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin [said](#), "we've committed to helping Israel defend itself for whatever it takes."

Impact on U.S. Forces/Citizens

Heightened regional conflict may put at further risk thousands of U.S. military personnel deployed to and near the eastern Mediterranean and Persian Gulf, along with U.S. citizens residing in the region. Prior to the late July incidents, the U.S. Navy had deployed a [4,000-person Wasp Amphibious Ready Group](#) to the eastern Mediterranean.

Potential Israel-Hamas Cease-Fire and Gaza Transition

The [Biden Administration](#) and [some Members of Congress](#) have been actively pushing for an Israel-Hamas [cease-fire and hostage-prisoner exchange](#) (based on a proposal [endorsed](#) by the UN Security Council) that they assert could ultimately lead to the end of the war in Gaza, expedite a political and security transition there, and bolster humanitarian assistance.

It is unclear whether July 2024 strikes and attacks, including Israel's possible killing of top Hamas military leader [Muhammad Deif](#), and [reports of general attrition](#) to Hamas's fighting strength might affect the timing and terms of a cease-fire deal, and whether a deal (if reached) might help calm regional tensions more broadly. Egyptian and Qatari officials who help mediate talks [have suggested](#) that Haniyeh's killing could scuttle or delay the negotiations. A [senior Hamas official has remarked](#), "the absence of one comrade or another does not change the movement's compass on any issues."

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