

August 6, 2024



# Executive Summary Report

Since the Hamas terrorist attacks against Israeli citizens and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) on Oct. 7, 2023, Israeli security doctrine vis-à-vis terrorist organizations and state sponsors of terror (Iran and Syria) is displayed in full form. For example, the complete and total siege of the Gaza strip that went into effect the day after the horrific attacks of Oct. 7. Also observed was the denial of humanitarian aid and basic services (water, electricity, sanitation, etc.) to punish the Palestinians of Gaza with the intent to compel the Gaza population – albeit unsuccessfully – to not resist the IDF's operations in Gaza to eliminate Hamas.

The Palestinian population in the West Bank (WB) underwent and continues to experience extreme population control measures and, for the most part, allows unhindered attacks by extremist settlers. The IDF air and ground campaign in Gaza and its Special Operations by the military and Israeli Intelligence Services in both Gaza and the West Bank are relentlessly targeting the terrorists responsible for Oct. 7, individuals and groups associated with Hamas, as well as the Iranian-backed terrorist organizations threatening Israel on its borders and further abroad.

The ongoing war in Gaza and the West Bank has resulted in the elimination of an estimated 35,500 Palestinians of which, an estimated 15-20,000 are Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorists. Unfortunately, the IDF targeting methodology and employment of lethal force resulted in the death and injury of tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians within the Gaza strip including children, women, and the elderly. The exorbitant loss of innocent life in Gaza had the potential to create unrest – but the Gaza conflict has not resulted in uprisings by Palestinians in the West Bank.

That said, from Oct. 8 to the present, the Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) continue to mount sustained attacks on Israel with rockets, artillery, drones, and limited attempts of ground incursions. The IDF continues to retaliate with strikes on LH. Yet, the war has not developed into a broader, regional conflict.

The United States, Arab states in the region, and the broader international community remain concerned that there will be a tipping point for Iran and its regional proxies, which will result in a broader war that will include LH, the Houthis in Yemen, Syria, and the Shia militia groups that dominate the security and political landscape in Iraq.

## **Targeted Assassinations – A Possible Tipping Point:**

A key line of operation within Israeli security doctrine as part of the continuing war is the targeting of terrorist leaders that were responsible for the strategy, planning, and operational direction of the Oct. 7 attacks. Prime Minister Netanyahu and his government have clearly stated that Israel will bring to justice the terrorists responsible for the Oct. 7 atrocities. Like U.S. security policy following the Sept. 11 (9/11) attacks, Israel does not distinguish between the terrorist leadership who planned and directed the attacks and the States that harbor or sponsor them.



[GEOIntelligence@bancroft4vets.com](mailto:GEOIntelligence@bancroft4vets.com)

## Summary of Key Terrorist Leaders Successfully Targeted by Israel since Oct. 7, 2023:

- **Strikes Inside the Gaza Strip:**
  - From October 2023 to present, Israel has successfully targeted 70-90% of Hamas Brigade and Battalion commanders of its military arm.
  - July 2024: The most consequential strike was the targeting of Hamas “military” leader Mohammed Deif and his deputy Rafa’a Salameh. Marwan Issa, another deputy with Deif and Sinwar’s inner circle, was reported killed by the IDF in March 2024.
  - However, Yahya Sinwar, the senior Hamas leader inside Gaza, remains alive and it is assessed that he continues to direct Hamas’ tactical operations against the IDF in Gaza.
- **Lebanon Strikes:**
  - January 2024: Saleh al-Arouri, the deputy political head of Hamas and a founder of the group’s military wing, was killed in the capital of Lebanon.
  - May 2024: Hamas’ commander, Sharhabil Sayed, was killed – he was responsible for directing Hamas’ operations from southern Lebanon.
  - July 2024: Hezbollah senior military commander, Mushin Shukr, was killed in a targeted Israeli strike in Beirut.
- **Syria Strikes:**
  - April 2024: Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) General Mohammad Reza Zahedi (the leader of the elite Quds Force in Lebanon and Syria until 2016) and his deputy, General Mohammad Hadi Hajriahimi, were targeted in an Israeli strike in Damascus along with five other officers.
  - July 2024: Yasser Nemr Qranbish was killed – he was a former high-ranking bodyguard in Hezbollah.
- **Yemen Strikes:**
  - On July 20, 2024, the IDF launched airstrikes targeting military sites of the Iranian-backed Houthi militant group near the Hudaydah Port in Al Hudaydah, Yemen. This attack was in response to a Houthi drone strike within Israel a week earlier.
- **Strikes into Iran:**
  - July 2024: Israel eliminated Hamas’ political leader, Ismail Haniyeh.

## Iran's Attacks on Israel:

In mid-April Iran attacked Israel with more than 300 drones, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles in the first full-scale military attack on Israel by Tehran. Around 99 percent of the projectiles were intercepted, according to Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the Israel Defense Forces spokesman. Though it cannot be stated for certain, Iran likely did not want to create great havoc in Israel with this massed attack for fear of further escalation. And, in this vein, Iran provided notification in advance of the attack while also using many weapons that were either obsolete and/or easy for Israeli defenses to intercept and shoot down.

A broadening war between Israel, Iran, and its proxies is likely not in the interest of any of the parties. The leader of LH, Hassan Nasrallah, stated publicly after Oct. 7 that LH was attacking Israel and would continue to do so if Israel was fighting Hamas and occupying Gaza. The ongoing war along Israel's northern border with Lebanon has resulted in hundreds of LH militants killed and wounded, an unknown number of killed and injured noncombatants, and the displacement of 100,000 Lebanese from the country's southern border. On the Israeli side, in excess of 60,000 Israelis have been forced to evacuate northern Israel due to the continuing onslaught of rocket attacks in Israel's northern territory. Also, Israeli military and civilians have been killed and wounded in the northern war. As recently as last week, an LH missile killed 12 Israeli children and wounded dozens more. This strike, errant or not, prompted Israel to successfully target LH Mushin Shukr. While Nasrallah has condemned the targeted assassination of his lead military commander and sworn unprecedented retaliation, it is unlikely that LH will broaden the war with an extensive strike against Israel with thousands of missiles – a capability that LH is assessed to have by the international intelligence community.

As noted earlier, last week Israel successfully targeted Ismaiel Haniyah, Hamas' Political Leader. Haniyah was allegedly killed when an Israeli operative or asset detonated a prepositioned bomb in an Iranian guest quarter used by the IRGC to host prominent guests of the Iranian regime.

## Prominent Terrorist Leaders Remaining:

Palestinian Islamic Jihad leader Ziyad al-Nakhalah was also in Iran for the inauguration of the new Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and was reported to be in the guest quarters where Haniyah was killed. He remains alive, as does the Hamas deputy commander for the Gaza Strip, Khalil al-Hayya, who was also reportedly in Tehran at the time of the attack. Like Haniyah and Deif, these terrorists are among a shortening list of Israel-targeted assassinations to come.

The targeting of Haniyah, particularly during his visit to Iran, indicates that Israeli leaders assessed that Haniyah had outlived his usefulness as an interlocutor between Israel the other parties negotiating the release of Israeli hostages. Israeli leadership contends that Yahya Sinwar (or potentially other Hamas militant leaders inside Gaza), is leading Hamas negotiations and Haniyah had lost his influence over Sinwar and other terrorist and faction leaders holding the Israeli hostages.

The leaders of Iran and LH have vowed to respond in an unprecedented manner to the assassinations that have taken place over the past week in Iran and Lebanon. Like the orchestrated and telegraphed attack by Iran in April 2024 following Israel's targeting of the IRGC Generals in Syria, Israel and Lebanon will respond to save face with their respective constituencies. It is probably not in Iran's or LH's interest to broaden the conflict that would draw in the United States.

But there are three important points to consider in this instance. First, so far, Iranian leadership has not pre-announced the nature of their retaliation as they did last April in an attempt to not dramatically escalate the ongoing conflict. Second, Iran's leadership have stated that they do not care if their retaliation leads to escalation – time will tell if that is merely their characteristic rhetoric, or not. Third, even if logic dictates that it is probably not in Iran's interest to escalate, it still may decide to do so despite the risks – this conflict is loaded with unpredictable decisions and actions.

To hedge its bets, Israel's War Cabinet convened to discuss appropriate measures it should consider in addition to its already high alert status of its military and its defenses. Similarly, President Biden has directed additional U.S. Naval and Air Force assets to the region. This is first to defend U.S. forces already in the region, as well as to support Israel and other partners in the region against an Iranian and proxy response.

## Alternative Futures:

There is value in looking at different outcomes and worst-case scenarios when making assessments. Escalation, while problematic for Iran for the reasons stated previously, could occur with the latest targeted assassinations in Lebanon and Iran, and it could result in a broadening of the conflict. It bears noting that prior to this war, analysts made predictions with a high-level of confidence. However, this war has been characterized by miscalculations and unparalleled escalation, so estimates of what might happen next are less certain than they were before Oct 7.

Researchers at the Institute for the Study of War predict that Iran and its "Axis of Resistance" will most likely conduct a coordinated, large-scale drone and missile attack on Israel in response to Israel's killing of Haniyeh in Tehran.

If major conflict breaks out, here are potential big picture implications:

- We will see a significant increase of U.S. military forces, along with a growing coalition from other nations, deployed to the region. Like the onset of the conflict following Oct. 7, we will see an additional U.S. carrier strike group deploy to the region, additional air force long range precision strike capability, and a bolstering of land and maritime air defense systems deployed.
- The maritime coalition to counter Houthi interdictions of commercial shipping off the coast of Yemen and the Red Sea will certainly grow even though commercial maritime commerce will cease.
- Oil prices will rapidly increase given Iran's ability to threaten shipping in the Persian Gulf.
- We can expect Iran's proxies in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon to attack U.S. and coalition participating nations in the region to demonstrate unity with the Iranian regime.
- Global markets will reflect the strategic uncertainty associated with prior conflicts in the region, until such time that Iran and its proxies self-assess that they have demonstrated sufficient strength towards Israel and the United States, irrespective of the cost.
- Israel would need to reallocate additional labor and financial resources to a second war front, which would impact its economic position and potentially lower additional foreign direct investments in its technology and innovation sectors.

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