

Summary

Tensions are rising at an alarming rate between Israel and Iran in light of the assassinations of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh. The attack on Haniyeh's took place in Tehran, which has prompted Iran to seek retaliation, with Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei voicing it. Potential scenarios for Iran's response include a direct high-impact strike on Israel, which could escalate into a direct confrontation between the two, a low-impact attack on an Israeli target, and a proxy coordinated attack by militant resistance groups led by Iran.

Recent events and developments

Conflicts between Israel and Iran, Hezbollah, and other associated resistance groups in the region are escalating at an alarming rate. On July 31, Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh was assassinated in Tehran. The residence where Haniyeh was staying targeted by an airstrike allegedly launched from outside Iran. This attack came hours after Israel carried out a targeted strike in Beirut in response to a rocket attack that killed 12 young people in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights. Hezbollah's most senior military commander, Fuad Shukur, was killed in the strike. Following Haniyeh's assassination, Iran and Hamas were both quick to attribute the blame to Israel. Thus far, Israel has made no comment on Haniyeh's death. Iran's president stated that Iran will defend its territorial integrity and make those responsible regret their actions. The Ayatollah Khamenei claimed he considers revenge the duty of the Islamic Republic. A symbolic red flag of revenge was raised above a major mosque. Additionally, a senior Hamas official vowed retaliation, referring to the assassination as a cowardly act that will not go unanswered. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated Israel "will exact a heavy price from any aggression against us on any front". On top of this, Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have resumed their campaign to expel US forces from Iraq and Syria. The US has retaliated on July 30 by conducting a strike on the militants who were preparing to launch a one-way attack drone, killing several members of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).

Impact assessment

Recent events raise concerns over Iran's response and a potential regional escalation. Given Iran's claims for retaliation, there are three potential scenarios. The first scenario would involve a direct high-impact retaliatory missile attack on Israeli soil. Potential targets critical infrastructure like Haifa's port, the largest in Israel. The probability of Iran pursuing this course of action is low as it could lead to a full-scale confrontation with Israel. An Israeli-Iranian war would be devastating for the latter, as Iran's military capabilities lag behind those of Israel. Secondly, it is possible that Iran limits its response to a low-impact attack in Israel. Drone and missile attacks could be carried out on military targets while attempting to avoid civilian targets and casualties. Although Iran may refrain from an attack of large proportions that may escalate into open conflict, to protect its reputation and as a symbolic act of revenge, it might consider an attack of less significance that would not necessarily warrant a harsh response from Israel. For instance, missiles might be sent in the proximity of Israeli towns, allowing them to be intercepted by the Iron Dome defense system and prevent civilian casualties. The third scenario would involve a coordinated attack by Iran's proxy groups, including Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria, similar to that in April. This appears to be the most likely scenario as Iranian officials and its proxy representatives from Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Houthis, Hezbollah and Iraqi militias are rumored to meet today in Tehran to discuss potential course of retaliation.

Advice from Forth Global

- For a thorough analysis of the potential impact on your operations in the implicated countries, please contact us.
- Avoid travel to Iran and Israel and strongly reconsider travelling to Lebanon, Iraq, and the wider Middle East.
- If travel is absolutely necessary, ensure that all employees receive a three-day HEAT training prior to deployment.
- Ensure contingency plans, shelter, transportation, and means of communication in case of an attack.

Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

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