Background
Iran has been a major adversary of Israel since the Islamic Republic came to power in 1979. Militant anti-Zionism and staunch opposition to the U.S. are key components of the regime’s ideology and drive Tehran’s foreign policy and military endeavors. Iran’s leaders regularly call for wiping Israel off the map while weaponizing the Palestinian issue and resentment toward Israel across the Arab world to serve their quest for regional hegemony. Over the past few decades, Iran has invested substantially in proxy militias and terror organizations across the Arab world, known as the Axis of Resistance. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps’ Quds Force operates on the ground in Syria, Iraq, and other countries alongside Iran-backed local proxies. Jerusalem, Washington, and others also see Iran’s efforts to acquire nuclear weapons as a key strategic threat; despite attempts to curb Iran’s nuclear program through sanctions and, at times, negotiations, Iran is now considered a nuclear threshold state.

Terror groups like Hamas and Hizballah arose in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and use popular grievances against Israel—some legitimate—to feed their genocidal ideologies. Iran funds and supports these groups, but Israel’s need to confront conventional military threats posed by Iran and its proxies does not negate Israel’s need to address the Palestinian issue. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict exists irrespective of Iran’s quest to eradicate Israel, and progress in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would not lessen the Iranian regime’s anti-Zionism.

Since October 7
While Iran provides financial, operational, and diplomatic support to Hamas, Iran does not appear to have had a direct role in the Hamas attacks on October 7. There is no evidence to suggest that Iran’s leaders had prior knowledge of the specifics of Hamas’ plan to invade Israel. In the weeks since October 7, the fight between Israel and Hamas in Gaza remains the only arena that has devolved into a proper war. Iranian proxies across the region have stepped up their attacks on Israeli civilians and Israeli and U.S. military targets, but we are not yet witnessing a full-scale effort by Iran and its network of proxies to destroy Israel. A true multi-front assault on Israel by Iranian proxies in Lebanon and Syria could very well devolve into a regional war, or even a war between Iran and the U.S. The regional environment remains ripe for such an escalation, even though one has not yet occurred.

Since October 7
Hamas is Israel’s primary adversary in the ongoing war in Gaza. Even as Israel succeeds in dismantling Hamas’ regime and military capabilities in Gaza, the organization has refused to surrender and has vowed to carry out future attacks that resemble October 7. With Israel in the process of taking control over the northern and parts of southern Gaza Strip, most key Hamas leaders are believed to have fled to southern Gaza. In addition to its base of power in the Strip, Hamas has terror cells in the West Bank, a military presence in southern Lebanon, and political offices abroad, including in Doha, Istanbul, and Beirut. Even if the war manages to eradicate the immediate Hamas threat in Gaza, the organization and its ideology will not disappear and plans for Gaza’s political future will have to consider how to prevent the terror group’s resurgence.
Hizballah

Background
Hizballah is a Lebanese Shi’ite political party and terror organization. Founded during the Lebanese Civil War in the wake of Israel’s 1982 invasion, the organization frames itself as a champion of armed resistance against the West and against Israel. It is closely aligned with and backed by Iran and shares the Islamic Republic’s long-term goal of destroying Israel. Hizballah wields significant political and military power within Lebanon and is thought to be stronger than the Lebanese army, with a substantial fighting force and a rocket arsenal of over 100,000. According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Hizballah is the most heavily armed non-state actor in the world.

Since October 7
Since the Hamas attack from Gaza, Hizballah and other militant groups in southern Lebanon have been periodically launching anti-tank missiles and rockets at Israel and shooting at Israeli military and civilian positions across the border, to which the IDF has been responding with force. Amid this escalation, Israel has evacuated 42 communities close to the border with Lebanon. Hizballah has not yet launched a full-scale assault on Israel, possibly due to U.S. deterrence or Iran wanting to preserve Hizballah’s capabilities. The organization apparently had no prior knowledge of the October 7 attack. But there is still time for Hizballah to meaningfully escalate the conflict. Given that October 7 discredited Israelis’ faith in deterring hostile non-state actors, Israel may ultimately feel it has no choice but to invade Lebanon to curb or eliminate the threat Hizballah poses in order to allow Israelis in the north to return home.

The Houthis

Background
The Houthis are a Zaydi Shiite group in Yemen that makes up about 35% of the country’s population. Houthi militants aligned with Iran have been fighting a civil war against the internationally recognized Yemeni government since 2014 and control the capital city of Sana’a. While not a major player in the Israeli-Palestinian arena, the Houthis have previously threatened to attack Israel and hatred for the Jewish state forms a key component of their ideology.

Since October 7
Since October 7, Houthi militants have launched several drone and missile attacks at Israel, which have been intercepted by Israel, the U.S., and Saudi Arabia. The Houthis have also regularly attacked vessels in the Red Sea, disrupting vital shipping routes and international trade. These attacks represent an effort on behalf of the Houthis to show solidarity with Hamas and the Palestinians and highlight how the war in Gaza has drawn in more distant Iranian-backed adversaries.

Militias in Iraq & Syria

Background
Over the past decade, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps has invested heavily in recruiting and funding a network of Shi’ite proxy militias in Iraq and Syria. Iran’s largest Syrian proxies, the Afghan Fatemiyoun and the Pakistani Zainabiyoun, were formed after the start of the Syrian civil war to fight Western-backed forces and support Assad. Following the ouster of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and the rise and fall of the Islamic State in the 2010s, Iran has also expanded its network of Shi’ite militias in Iraq, including Kataib Hizballah and Asaib Ahl al-Haqq. As part of Iran’s so-called Axis of Resistance, these armed groups seek to challenge U.S. interests in the region. Antisemitism and opposition to Israel serve as key components of these organizations’ religious ideologies.

Since October 7
While they have not directly targeted Israel due to their relatively limited capabilities, Iranian militias in Iraq and Syria have stepped up attacks on U.S. military targets. The U.S, which is believed to have about 2,500 troops in Iraq and 900 in Syria, has responded to these attacks by targeting militant infrastructure and command centers. This arena of the conflict remains relatively limited in scope, but is clearly tied to the war in Gaza.