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### Iran

## Iran executes four people on charges of spying for Israel

Israel warns of wider war after killing of Iranian commander in Syria and attacks from Tehran-backed militants



People attend the funeral of Razi Mousavi, a senior Iranian commander, who was killed in an air strike in Syria. Tehran has blamed Israel for the assassination © Atta Kenare/AFP/Getty Images

**Neri Zilber** in Tel Aviv and **Najmeh Bozorgmehr** in Tehran YESTERDAY

Iran hanged three men and one woman on Friday on allegations of co-operating with Israel's intelligence services, as regional tensions escalate amid the backdrop of the war between Israel and Hamas.

Mizan news agency, affiliated with the Iranian judiciary, said the people executed were charged with "waging war" against the Islamic republic and were "guided directly by Mossad espionage officers".

The executions come after an air strike hit a suburb of the Syrian capital Damascus on Monday, killing a senior Iranian commander, Razi Mousavi. Iranian officials, who said the slain militant was an "adviser" in the Arab state, blamed [Israel](#) for the assassination and said they reserved the right to respond in kind.

Israel and [Iran](#) have been engaged in an increasingly overt shadow war across the Middle East over the past decade. Syria, where Iranian forces intervened to support President Bashar al-Assad during the country's civil war, has emerged as a constant battleground. Syrian state media reported late on Thursday that Damascus International Airport had been hit by alleged Israeli air strikes, after only recently resuming operations following prior attacks.

Israeli officials usually refrain from claiming responsibility for operations against Iranian assets, but Naftali Bennett, who served as prime minister in 2021 and 2022, said in an opinion article in the Wall Street Journal on Friday that the Jewish state struck a UAV base and assassinated a senior militant commander on Iranian soil in early 2022, under his government.

“The Iranian regime is at the centre of most of the Middle East’s problems and much of global terror. Yet inexplicably, almost nobody is touching it,” Bennett wrote, arguing for the US and other international actors to take harsher measures against Tehran.

Iran is a longtime supporter of Hamas in Gaza, and backs militant groups across the region that have launched attacks against Israel and US forces in the region since the Palestinian group launched its October 7 assault on the Jewish state. Its most powerful proxy, Hizbollah, the Lebanese militant group, has exchanged daily fire with Israeli forces across Lebanon’s border with Israel, fuelling concerns that the war in Gaza could [trigger a broader conflagration](#).

The Iran-backed Houthi rebel group in Yemen has launched drones and ballistic missiles at Israel since the outbreak of hostilities in Gaza. It has also [targeted commercial vessels](#) in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden since mid-November.

The US earlier this month formed an international naval task force to address the Houthi attacks, amid concerns about significant disruptions to global trade as ships divert around the Horn of Africa.

The US military’s Central Command said that since Tuesday, its forces in the southern Red Sea had intercepted 13 attack drones and six missiles fired by Houthis at vessels in the area. The US also announced on December 25 that it had struck three facilities in Iraq used by Iran-backed militias, after a drone strike on a US military base earlier in the day critically injured one American service member.

Iran has denied any involvement in Hamas’s deadly October 7 attack, a claim western officials have backed. Hamas’s assault on southern Israel killed 1,200 people, according to Israeli authorities, and led to a retaliatory offensive into Gaza which has killed more than 21,100 people, according to Palestinian health officials.

Tehran also insists that any operations by its proxy forces in the region, including Hizbollah and the Houthis, are engineered on their own, a claim that Israel rejects.

On Tuesday, Yoav Gallant, Israel’s defence minister, told a parliamentary committee that the Jewish state was being attacked in a “multi-arena war” from seven areas

that the Jewish state was being attacked in a multi-arena war from seven areas, which he identified as Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Iran.

“We have already responded and acted in six of these arenas and I say here in the most explicit way — anyone who acts against us is a potential target, there is no immunity for anyone,” he added.

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