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Patrick Lawrence: The Murder of Ismail Haniyeh

As assiduously as Israel seeks war with Iran is precisely the extent to which it will seek to draw the U.S. into it. That is what made Congress' insanely intemperate recent reception of Netanyahu so dangerous.



Ismail Haniyeh, at left, on Dec. 8, 2012, during the 25th anniversary of Hamas celebration in Gaza. (Fars Media Corporation, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 4.0)

Some reflections, written urgently in response to the urgency of the moment, on the assassination early Tuesday of Ismail Haniyeh. The 62-year-old chairman of Hamas' Politburo, murdered during an official visit to Iran, was the organization's chief negotiator in

talks intended to produce a ceasefire in Gaza and the release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas and Palestinian prisoners held in Israel's jails.

These talks may now be definitively dead. This is news but not news: It has been apparent for some time that the Netanyahu regime — and the U.S., by obvious extension — has never been serious about an accord to bring the Israel Occupation Force's genocide in Gaza to an end. This is now beyond all question, the Biden regime's mealy-mouthed drivel to the contrary notwithstanding.

Important as this conclusion is, one must view Haniyeh's murder in its larger context. From this perspective we can come to some useful understandings. A few scales may now fall from the eyes of the determinedly illusioned.

Terrorist Israel has not acknowledged responsibility for this vastly consequential act, but it has often remained silent in its long history of assassinations of this kind, notably when these operations breach another nation's sovereignty. This is not important. Anyone who thinks the Israelis did not kill Haniyeh at this, a moment of heightened political and diplomatic significance, is either compulsively naïve or compulsively blind to the bottomlessly pernicious character of the Zionist regime.

Haniyeh had traveled to Tehran to attend the inauguration of Masoud Pezeshkian, a reformist recently elected Iran's president, and was bivouacked at a residence for army veterans in North Tehran, the fashionable quarter of the capital. IRNA, the Islamic Republic's state-run news agency, reported that a precision-guided missile killed Haniyeh and his bodyguard at the residence at 2 a.m. Tuesday.

In a story published later in the day, *Military Watch*, the independent online magazine, said if the attack was confirmed to be an air strike, it was likely an F-35 fighter jet, an aircraft capable of evading Iran's air-defense systems, that carried it out. The F-35 is a stealth fighter the U.S. has so far sold to 16 countries, including Israel, which, in 2018, became the first country to deploy the jet in combat.

The Israelis may have relied on U.S. intelligence and targeting assistance to execute an operation of this extraordinary exactitude, although this is not now confirmed. It nonetheless requires equal naïvete to assume the Biden regime, from the White House to the intelligence agencies and the Pentagon, had no foreknowledge of the Israelis' assassination plot.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu surrounded by supporters in U.S. Congress on July 24. (C-Span still)

Let us consider the timing of Haniyeh’s murder in this connection. It followed Benjamin Netanyahu’s aggressively warrior-like speech before a joint session of Congress by six days. It came hours after Israeli jets, by the Zionist regime’s own account, assassinated Fu’ad Shukr, Hezbollah’s top military commander, in a Beirut suburb. This was in response to a missile attack last Saturday on a soccer field in the Golan Heights that killed 12 people.

While Israel immediately blamed Hezbollah for the Golan Heights fatalities, it has presented no evidence to support this, Hezbollah has denied responsibility, the Lebanese group does not want to provoke a war with Israel, and it would make no discernible gain by targeting a sports field.

[See: *More BBC ‘News’ Channelling Israeli Propaganda*]

My take-it-or-leave-it read of the Golan Heights incident: While there are no grounds to draw conclusions absent evidence, it is entirely plausible this was a false-flag provocation on the Israelis’ part to bring a war with Lebanon one step closer. Please do not feign shock: The fatalities in the Golan were Syrian Druze, not Israeli Jews, and if you think the Israeli regime is incapable of killing non-Jewish civilians in the Zionist cause you have not been reading the news these past nine months — or 76 years, for that matter.

Further in the matter of timing, Haniyeh was not long earlier back from an all-parties conference in Beijing, where 14 Palestinian factions, Hamas and Fatah the most important, agreed to commit to the formation of a unity government after nearly two decades of rivalry and internecine conflict.

This may or may not bear fruit, as many analysts have pointed out. But we can measure the importance of the three days of talks by noting that Haniyeh got on a plane to attend them and Wang Yi, China’s all-business foreign minister, put his name on the proceedings. I doubt the

Israelis get so far as to consider such things, but in killing Haniyeh they spat in the face of a very influential statesman representing a very influential nation.

[See: *Palestinian Factions Sign Unity Deal in China*]

Last spring the Israelis murdered three of Haniyeh's sons and several of their children — this while the father and grandfather, who resided in Qatar so he could travel outside Gaza on behalf of Hamas' various diplomatic initiatives, was well into the Cairo negotiations toward a ceasefire. Haniyeh, whose grief I have difficulty imagining, kept on. We ought to put this in an historical context.

Historical Context

On Wednesday Mehdi Hasan, the journalist and co-founder of the media company Zeteo, put out an excellent history of Israel's practice of murdering senior Hamas negotiators just as they were advancing toward one or another peace agreement in one or another circumstance. "Israel Has a History of Killing Hamas Leaders Who Are Trying to Secure Ceasefires" is a sobering read. The only available conclusion is that the Israelis have never been serious about anything other than the extermination of the people with whom they pretend to negotiate.

March 2004: Sheik Ahmed Yassin, a prominent spiritual figure and co-founder of Hamas, is assassinated as he exited a mosque — in his wheelchair, as he was quadriplegic. Yassin had advanced, a few months earlier, a long-term peace agreement with Israel if — no heavy lift here, you wouldn't think — "a Palestinian state is established in the West Bank and Gaza Strip."



Poster of Yassin on the wall of a mosque in el-'Edwa, the Upper Egyptian province of el-Minya, April 2008. (Hossam el-Hamalawy, Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

April 2004: Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, Yassin's successor, is killed in a missile strike while attempting to keep Yassin's peace initiative alive.

November 2012: Ahmed Jabari, a top Hamas military commander, is assassinated, setting off the brief but deadly war the Israel Occupation Forces, the IOF, called — wouldn't you know it — Operation Pillar of Defense. Jabari was in covert talks with Gershon Baskin, a prominent Israeli peace activist, in an effort to draft an accord that would produce “a long-term truce,” which Jabari saw as in the best interest of the Palestinians.

And now Ismail Haniyeh joins the fallen, every one of them seeking a pragmatic settlement with the Zionist regime—and precisely because each was engaged in this endeavor.

It is time once again to remind ourselves: Hamas and its leaders have a long record of flexible deal-seeking, as various Western diplomats and intelligence officials have acknowledged over the years. Marking the group down as a “terrorist organization” such that nothing more need be understood has been, thus, cynically destructive nonsense ever since Hamas won control of Gaza in 2006.

This crudely false dismissal originated, let us never forget, with what is by far the most dangerous terrorist regime in the Middle East and is most assiduously promoted by the U.S., which, one could easily argue, has its own long history of terrorist activities in the region and beyond.

Some conclusions:

Terrorist Israel is absolutely unserious about peace or a negotiated settlement of any kind with the Palestinian people regardless of who they, the Palestinians, choose to represent them. It is time for the international community to stop pretending otherwise — especially, but not only, by insisting that a two-state solution remains a real-world prospect.

It follows that the Zionist regime is in fact, and until it demonstrates otherwise, dedicated to the extermination or expulsion of the Palestinian population in Gaza and the West Bank alike. Disbelief on this point is no longer excusable — if ever it has been.

Israel is single-mindedly in pursuit of a wider war in the region centered on the destruction of the Islamic Republic. It has no intention of moderating this obsession. Haniyeh's assassination, along with intensifying provocations of Iran, along Israel's border with Lebanon, and in the West Bank, indicate that it sees the present moment as its opportunity to make this war a reality.

Israel knows very well it cannot win the war it craves. As assiduously as it seeks this war is precisely the extent to which it will seek to draw the U.S. into it. This is what makes the insanely intemperate reception Netanyahu received in Congress on July 24 so dangerous.

[The Biden administration is weighing the redeployment of forces to the Middle East to defend Israel from a possible retaliation, [CNN reported](#) Friday.]

Finally and more broadly, it is time to recognize that Israel is incapable of serious statecraft because it has no interest in it and does not enjoy, in consequence, healthy, balanced diplomatic relations with other members of the community of nations. If this reality is not at this point self-evident, it will prove in time irrefutable.

Instead, in its region Israel relies on brutality or the threat of it in the name of Old Testament revenge. And American protection is key to the apartheid state's approach to its immediate circumstances. Even if, for instance, some accord is struck between Riyadh and Tel Aviv — and let us not hold our breath — Israel will not have got this done; it couldn't have. The U.S. will have coerced or bribed — or both — two client states.

In the wider world, Israel depends primarily on sympathy-mongering, eternal victimhood, and the manipulation of the guilty consciences of Europeans. Among Americans it adds to this the incessant bribery and barely concealed intimidations of the Israel lobby as applied to a decadent political class that is by turns greedy and petrified.

I have for decades considered Palestine the suppurating sore on humanity's flesh. The cause and the remedy just became more obvious.

Patrick Lawrence, a correspondent abroad for many years, chiefly for the *International Herald Tribune*, is a columnist, essayist, lecturer and author, most recently of *Journalists and Their Shadows*, available from Clarity Press or via Amazon. Other books include *Time No Longer: Americans After the American Century*. His Twitter account, @thefloutist, has been permanently censored.

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