

# Israel's Killing of Hamas Leader in Tehran Sends a Clear Message to Iran

By Conrad Black

The assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh by the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad, while he was in the official guesthouse for important visitors of the Iranian government in Tehran, must be a stark warning to Israel's enemies of where the next level of escalation in those conflicts could be.



Hamas Leader Ismail Haniyeh (R) heads a delegation meeting with Iran's Foreign Minister in Tehran on March 26, 2024. (-/AFP via Getty Images)

The late Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ended the suicide bombings on buses in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in 2002 with [Operation Defensive Shield](#), which among other responses included the assassination of the leader of the terrorist

group responsible for those bombings, after each bombing. They soon ceased. Despite repeated claims from these terrorist leaders that their ambition was to die for the cause, Sharon's response revealed a distinct preference to have recruits die for the cause. The same conclusion could be made about the conduct of [Osama bin Laden](#) following the terror attacks that he masterminded on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001. Despite his professed desire to die in the line of action, he went to extraordinary lengths to hide and disguise his whereabouts until he was found and executed by American special forces nearly 10 years later in 2011.

It has been well established for a long time that there are gradations of offensive action in the conflict between Israel and some Arab entities and their supporters. It is understood that there are legitimate grounds for debate about the border between Israel and the ostensibly Palestinian entity that could be established next to it in the West Bank and Gaza, with some connection between them. Violence that constitutes border skirmishing begets an equivalent level of violence in return. Acts of outright terrorism directed by Israel's enemies at its civilian population have traditionally been construed by Israel as justifying the killing of the leader of the terrorist organization responsible for the attack.

Hamas acted under instructions from Iran in carrying out its terrorist invasion of Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. It was not a border skirmish, but an act of war accompanied by rhetorical flourishes that confirmed that Hamas does not and will never accept the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state. The Hamas leadership clearly knew that Israel would reply with a massive and sustained attack on Hamas in Gaza, and that the lives of the Hamas leaders were apt to be the subject of mortal attack from Israeli intelligence and special forces.

The day before its assassination of Haniyeh, Israel took out Hezbollah commander [Fuad Shukr in Beirut](#). It can reasonably be inferred that Hezbollah—an unwelcome guest in Lebanon though apparently supported by a substantial section of that country's Muslim population—is confining itself to heavy

transborder rocket attacks intermittently, in the knowledge that hundreds of thousands of [Israelis have been evacuated](#) from their homes in the north of the country to reduce the risk of being killed in those attacks. To this point, Israel has responded with comparable attacks on Hezbollah units and military targets, but the Israeli government [has made it clear](#) that Hezbollah has pushed them to the last point short of massive retaliation against all Hezbollah members and installations.

It is understandable that Hamas and Hezbollah are prepared to go a long way to doing whatever the Iranians demand, given that the Iranians are now effectively their sole source of supply. The radicalization of Iran and its [takeover in 1979](#) as a militant totalitarian theocracy by sectarian and anti-Jewish fanatics—and to a lesser extent, the resurrection of a professed Turkish interest in the Arab world, reviving a lengthy historic period of which the Arabs have distinctly unpleasant memories—have assisted in convincing the Arab powers of the desirability of having Israel as an ally and not a deadly antagonist.

It would be a mistake to underestimate the achievements of successive American presidents, starting with Richard Nixon and most recently Donald Trump with the [Abraham Accords](#), in normalizing Arab-Israeli relations. All of the Arab powers now appear prepared to enter a new era with Israel if some solution can be found to the Palestinian question. This problem essentially arose following the British promise in 1917 that the area would provide a homeland for the Jews without compromising the rights of the Arabs. Britain effectively sold the same real estate [twice to opposing parties](#), although it was in fact the property of Turkey at the time, and the world has been trying to work this out for more than a century.

For decades, the Arab powers purported to champion the Palestinians—for whom they have little affinity and whom they regard as commercial sharpers in the same category as the Jews and the Lebanese Christians—presumably in order to distract the Arab masses from the misgovernment that most of their leaders were inflicting upon them. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was the first Arab statesman to move decisively to [acknowledge the legitimacy of Israel](#) as long as reasonable

arrangements were made for the Palestinians. The government of Jordan followed, and there have since been others. It is generally recognized that the process will be practically complete when Saudi Arabia also normalizes relations with Israel, as it has indicated its preparedness to do. The attack on Israel by Hamas last October is generally thought to have been an attempt by Iran to forestall such an agreement.

The killing of the leader of Hamas is a clear message to the Iranians, supplemented by [the remarks of](#) Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the U.S. Congress on July 24, that those who attempt to destroy Israel will themselves be destroyed by Israel. In that address, although it has been little recognized, the Israeli leader explicitly referred to the possibility of Israel taking it upon itself to destroy the Iranian nuclear military program, and he said that if Israel did so, it would be acting on behalf of the United States and all other civilized states against "barbarism."

The Israeli campaign in Gaza, despite contrary propaganda, has a very low ratio of civilian-to-combatant deaths compared to other urban counter-guerrilla warfare. In these 10 months, Israel has [killed at least half](#) of the Hamas terrorist operators and has destroyed a great deal of the underground complex from which they have conducted their terrorist operations. There is no reason to doubt that Israel will complete that task, and it is clear that they will murder the leadership of anyone, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, who escalates hostilities against Israel.

It is a tense and difficult time. All wars are terribly destructive and cruel, but it is clear that Israel has both the ability and the will to eliminate Hamas as a terrorist organization. With or without the assistance of the United States and other powers, Israel will act to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear military power. Escalation of hostilities by Iran and through its proxies, which include the Houthis in Yemen, will attract the full destructiveness of Israeli air power as well as counter-terrorist activities against the lives of the leaders of Iran and its terrorist apparatus. The imponderable is the point at which the long-suffering masses of Iran, who rightly detest their government, can undermine the loyalty of the forces of repression in that country.

The clear pattern is that Israel, as the Jews have had to do so often, is carrying the burden for civilization, made more onerous by the wafflings and evasions of Washington, but the end of the road is not far off. The end is the undisputed acceptance of the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state and in a condition of civilized coexistence with its neighbours.

The assassination of Ismail Haniyeh was a very positive development, and so will be its sequels if they are provoked and needed. Israel has made the point that no target of the justified wrath of Israel is safe.

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