



Israel Carried Out Two Assassinations with the Intention of Dragging the U.S. into a Regional War in the Middle East

On the heels of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's highly-criticized address to Congress, news broke earlier this week of dual assassinations carried out by Israel against leaders from both Hamas and Hezbollah – Ismail Haniyeh, a political chief of the former who was killed in Iran, and Fuad Shukr, a senior official and commander of the latter killed in Lebanon. For many fair-minded analysts and commentators, these actions prove that Israeli officials have no real intention of initiating a ceasefire in Gaza and putting an end to hostilities there. On the contrary, the two assassinations represent bellicose behavior seeking to plunge the region into further conflict and all-out war. The actions are also consistent with longstanding contentions that Israeli officials have been deliberately sabotaging and derailing mediated efforts aimed at reaching a ceasefire agreement in Gaza, showing instead a desire to perpetuate hostilities in Gaza and the entire region at-large. Observers have pointed to the fact that Netanyahu is facing high levels of global condemnation and domestic discontent, not to mention impending criminal charges at home and abroad, and thus his government is cognizant that a cessation of hostilities would spell trouble for their political prospects. As a result, they have seemingly made the calculation that purposefully escalating the situation further is in their best interests. The two targeted assassinations risk spurring an all-out regional war and triggering expected retaliations, and U.S. President Joe Biden even recently acknowledged that the actions are not helpful to ceasefire talks and the quelling of tensions in the region.

Initiating a ceasefire in Gaza is the only way to halt hostilities in the Middle East, as all of the ongoing tensions on multiple fronts are tied to the damaging and longstanding conflict. The assassinations this week only serve to further stoke animosities and are harmful to the prospects for a deal. They did not come as a surprise to some experts, who have for months, been seeking to draw attention to Netanyahu's blatant attempts to undermine the ceasefire negotiations since an end to the conflict would likely result in the collapse of his far-right coalition government and trigger an election. With regards to the manner in which the targeted assassinations were carried out, initially there were a variety of reports that came out detailing what was thought to be the cause of death of Ismail Haniyeh, however as time went on, a clearer picture was painted. Haniyeh was killed in the guest house that he had been staying at in Neshat, a neighborhood in Tehran. The cause of death was a bomb that had been stored there almost two months ago, remotely detonated once it was confirmed that Haniyeh was in the room. The security of the building is run by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, the same people who own the compound.

On the other hand, in Beirut, Fuad Shukr, a senior official and advisor of Hezbollah was killed. Shukr served crucially in the military wing of the organization, being specifically responsible for acquiring a variety of weapons such as specialized missiles, rockets, and UAVs. Among other things, Shukr was a close friend and strategic ally of the late Imad Mughniyeh, Hezbollah's former military commander. The assassination of Mughniyeh back in 2008 led to Shukr's rise in popularity and prominence within the group. Shukr was in the Haret Hreik district of Daniya, a suburb in southern Beirut on Wednesday morning when an airstrike took place on the building he was in. The Lebanese health ministry confirmed that there were three casualties, two of which were children, along with over 70 wounded, all being civilians. The blast also caused extensive damage to the suburban neighborhood, sending rubble and debris onto the streets below and around.

As the world continues to process these two assassinations, one thought has continually run through the minds of peace advocates and human rights activists: how do these killings do anything to help the prospects for a ceasefire deal and put an end to regional hostilities? The clear answer is that they do not, and conversely, the only role that they play is to further inflame tensions and increase the likelihood of wider-scale conflict in the Middle East. In the aftermath, the assassinations make the prospects for a ceasefire a much harder possibility than it already was, especially considering that Ismail Haniyeh himself had been a key figure that was engaged in the ceasefire negotiations being mediated by Qatar alongside Egypt and the United States. As pointed out by Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani in response to Israel's targeted assassination, "How can mediation succeed when one party assassinates the negotiator on the other side?" Hezbollah's response to the assassination of Shukr emphasized the essential role that Israel's actions in Gaza are playing in stoking regional tensions and hostilities, with the group stating that "There will be no solution except via stopping the aggression on Gaza." Ultimately, the two targeted assassinations this week do not invoke a tone of peace, but rather, one of war and belligerence. This has prompted many impartial analysts to question whether Israeli officials possess any intent of initiating a ceasefire in Gaza, or whether the further stoking of tensions and hostilities is their only objective.

The assassinations of Ismail Haniyeh and Fuad Shukr have undeniably escalated tensions in the region, casting a dark light on the prospects of a much-needed and essential ceasefire deal in Gaza. With Hamas and Hezbollah both vowing retaliation and condemning Israel's actions, the hope for a peaceful resolution seems to be becoming more and more of a distant thought. These killings have not only intensified hostilities, but have also raised significant doubts about Israel's commitment to peace.