

With Lebanon Front Already Red Hot, The Assassination of Hamas Leader Ismail Haniyeh, Hezbollah Commander Fuad Shukr

Two Attacks on Top Militia Leaders Aggravate the Middle East Crisis Further

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In the early hours of 31 July, Ismail Haniyeh, the political chief of Hamas was assassinated in Iran (see [AP report of 31 July](#), 'Hamas leader Ismael Haniyeh is killed in Iran by an alleged Israeli strike, threatening escalation').

Till the time of writing this, Israel has not said anything regarding its involvement in this, but both Iran and Hamas have blamed Israel.

Haniyeh had gone to Iran to attend the inauguration ceremony of the newly elected moderate President of Iran Dr. Masoud Pezeshkian, and had met the President hours before.

An official statement of Iran stated, "the criminal and terrorist Zionist regime martyred our dearest guest in our house." A statement of Hamas said that Haniyeh died in a "treacherous Zionist raid." The military wing of Hamas has stated that this takes the battle to new dimensions.

Only hours earlier, on the evening of 30 July, Israel claimed to have killed a top commander of Hezbollah named Fuad Shukr in an air strike on Beirut (see BBC report of 31 July titled ['Israel claims it killed senior Hezbollah commander in strike on Beirut'](#)).

While both sides have confirmed the attack on the building where Shukr was staying, at the time of writing this Hezbollah has not yet confirmed his death, saying that as the rubble of the building is still to be cleared there remains the possibility that he may be alive.

Israel has stated that Shukr was targeted due to his alleged involvement in the attack on Golan Heights on July 27.

Much earlier the US authorities had announced an award of 5 million dollars for information relating to Shukr as he was accused by them of involvement in terrorist attacks on US assets.

These two attacks have come at a time when the Lebanon front had already become very tense and there was much speculation of a wider war on this front breaking out.

On the plus side peace negotiations for a settlement in Gaza were also continuing and the USA had stated that these were making progress.

What is clear is that the peace negotiations have received a big setback. At the same time the Lebanon front has become even more tense. Above all the chances of Iran being dragged against its wishes into direct confrontation with Israel have increased once again, as earlier this year in April.

Clearly the attack on Haniyeh was very provocative in terms of its timing and event—attacked just around the inauguration ceremony of the newly elected President. So talk of avenging this was only to be expected and Iran has already spoken of ‘harsh punishment’ and of ‘revenge as duty’.

Now the world waits precariously, as in April, to see what exactly this retaliatory action of Iran will be and what will be the further response of Israel.

On the other front, if Hezbollah and Israel get involved in a bigger fight, again in that case also Iran cannot remain aloof. Further if there are steps towards direct confrontation between Iran and Israel, then the USA and some close allies may be only a step away from direct involvement.

Hence just now there appear to be all the signs of a further escalation of Middle East conflict. This will be disastrous for world peace and so diplomats and all forces of peace need to work overtime and make the best possible efforts for preventing the further deterioration of an already deeply worrying situation.

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