

Was Hamas Leader Killed in Iran to Inflamm Sectarian Conflict?

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On July 31, Chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau Ismail Haniyeh attended the inauguration of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. Hours later, he was reported killed in an "Israeli strike" along with his bodyguard in Tehran.

Simultaneously, Israel claimed it had killed senior Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr in an airstrike in Lebanon's capital, Beirut, and that its intelligence had confirmed that another top Hamas leader Mohammed Deif was also killed in a July 13 Israeli strike in Khan Younis, Gaza.

The reason the manipulative Zionist regime cunningly plotted to assassinate Ismail Haniyeh during his visit to Iran is two-fold. Firstly, the Islamic Republic over the years has established the reputation of being the torchbearer of the Palestine cause, particularly in the Islamic World.

While the craven Arab autocracies, under the thumb of duplicitous American masters enabling the Zionist regime's atrocious genocide of unarmed Palestinians, were pondering over when would be the opportune moment to recognize Israel and establish diplomatic and trade ties, the Iran-led resistance axis, comprising Iraq, Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Ansarallah in Yemen, has claimed stellar victories in battlefields against Israel.

It's worth pointing out, however, that Hamas' main patrons are private donors in oil-rich Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and Egypt, not Iran, as frequently alleged by the mainstream disinformation campaign. In fact, Hamas as a political movement is the Palestinian offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. And by mainstream media's [own accounts](#), the Shiite leadership of Iran and Hezbollah weren't even aware of the Sunni Palestinian liberation movement Hamas' October 7 assault.

Secondly, the treacherous murder of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran was clearly designed to inflame the sectarian conflict. Lately, it has become a customary propensity of Orientalist apologists of Western imperialism to offer reductive historical and theological explanations of Sunni-Shi'a conflict in the Middle East region in order to cover up the blowback of ill-conceived Western military interventions and proxy wars that have ignited the flames of internecine conflict in the Islamic world.

Image: Calligraphic panel bearing Ali's name at the Hagia Sophia (Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0)



Some self-anointed “Arabists” of the mainstream media posit that the sectarian division goes all the way back to the founding of Islam, 1400 years ago, and contend that the conflict emerged during the reign of the fourth caliph, Ali bin Abi Talib, in the seventh century A.D. Even though both sects of Islam peacefully coexisted during the medieval era in the Middle East, Central Asia and the Mughal India, where several provinces, particularly the glorious State of Awadh, were governed by benevolent Shiite nawabs.

One wonders what the Western-led war on terror’s explanation would be of such “erudite historians of Islam” – that the cause of purported “clash of civilizations” between Christians and Muslims is to be found in the Crusades when Richard the Lionheart and Saladin were skirmishing in the Levant and exchanging courtesies at the same time.

Fact of the matter is that in modern times, the Sunni-Shi’a conflict in the Middle East region is essentially a political conflict between the Gulf Arab autocrats and Iran for regional dominance which is being presented to lay Muslims in the veneer of religiosity.

Saudi Arabia, which has been vying for supremacy as the leader of the Sunni bloc against the Shi’a-led Iran in the regional geopolitics, was staunchly against the invasion of Iraq by the Bush Administration in 2003.

The Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein constituted a Sunni Arab bulwark against Iran’s meddling in the Arab world. But after Saddam was ousted from power in 2003 and subsequently when elections were held in Iraq which were swept by Shi’a-dominated politico-religious parties, Iraq has now been led by a Shi’a-majority government that has become a steadfast regional ally of Iran. Consequently, Iran’s sphere of influence now extends all the way from territorially-contiguous Iraq and Syria to Lebanon and the Mediterranean coast.

Moreover, during the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Bush Administration took advantage of the ethnic and sectarian divisions in Iraq and used the Kurds and Shi’as against the Sunni-led Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein. And during the occupation years from 2003 to 2011, the once dominant Sunni minority was politically marginalized which further exacerbated ethnic and sectarian divisions in Iraq.

The Saudi royal family was resentful of Iran’s encroachment on the traditional Arab heartland. Therefore, when protests broke out against the Shia-led Syrian government in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, the Gulf States along with their regional Sunni allies, Turkey and Jordan, and the Western patrons gradually militarized the protests to

dismantle the Iran-led resistance axis, comprising Iraq, Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Ansarallah in Yemen.

Similarly, during the Libyan so-called “humanitarian intervention” in 2011, the Obama administration provided money and arms to myriads of tribal militias and Islamic jihadists to topple the Arab-nationalist Gaddafi government. But after the policy backfired and pushed Libya into lawlessness, anarchy and civil war, the mainstream media pointed the finger at Egypt, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Russia for backing the renegade general, Khalifa Haftar, in eastern Libya, even though he had lived for more than [two decades](#) in the US right next to the CIA’s headquarter in Langley, Virginia.

Regarding the Western powers’ modus operandi of waging proxy wars in the Middle East, since the times of the Soviet-Afghan jihad during the eighties, it has been the fail-safe game plan of master strategists at NATO to [raise money](#) from the oil-rich emirates of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE and Kuwait; then buy billions of dollars’ worth of weapons from the [arms markets](#) in the Eastern Europe; and then provide those weapons and guerrilla warfare training to the disaffected population of the targeted country by using security agencies of the latter’s regional adversaries. Whether it’s Afghanistan, Libya or Syria, the same playbook was executed to the letter.

More to the point, raising funds for proxy wars from the Gulf Arab States allows Western executives the freedom to evade congressional scrutiny; the benefit of buying weapons from unregulated arms markets of Eastern Europe is that such weapons cannot be traced back to Western capitals; and using jihadist proxies to achieve strategic objectives has the advantage of taking the plea of “plausible deniability” if the strategy backfires, which it often does. Recall that al-Qaeda and Taliban were the by-products of the Soviet-Afghan jihad, and the Islamic State and its global network of terrorists were the blowback of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the proxy war in Syria.

Apart from Syria and Iraq, two other flashpoints of Sunni-Shi’a conflict in the Middle East region are Bahrain and Yemen. When peaceful protests broke out against the Sunni monarchy in Bahrain by the Shi’a majority population in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011, Saudi Arabia sent thousands of troops across the border to quell the uprising.

Image: Ali Abdullah Saleh, President of the Yemen Arab Republic. Photo taken about 1988. (From the Public Domain)



Similarly, as the Arab Spring protests toppled longtime dictators of the Arab World, including Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Yemenis also gathered in the capital's squares demanding removal of Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Instead of conceding to protesters' fervent demand of holding free and fair elections to ascertain democratic aspirations of demonstrators, however, the Obama administration adopted the convenient course of replacing Yemen's longtime autocrat with a Saudi stooge Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi.

Having the reputation of a "wily Arabian fox" and being a Houthi himself, Ali Abdullah Saleh wasn't the one to sit idly by and retire from politics in ignominy. He colluded with the Houthi rebels and incited them to take advantage of the chaos and political vacuum created after the revolution to come out of their northern Saada stronghold and occupy the capital Sanaa in September 2014. How ironic that Ali Abdullah Saleh was eventually killed by Houthis in December 2017 because of his treacherous nature.

Meanwhile, a change of guard took place in Riyadh as Saudi Arabia's longtime ruler King Abdullah died and was replaced by King Salman in January 2015, while de facto control of the kingdom fell into hands of inexperienced and belligerent Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman.

Already furious at the Obama administration for not enforcing its so-called "red line" by imposing a no-fly zone over Syria after the false-flag Ghouta chemical weapons attacks in Damascus in August 2013 and apprehensive of security threat posed to the kingdom from its southern border along Yemen by Houthi rebels under the influence of Iran, the crown prince immediately began a military and air warfare campaign against Houthi rebels with military assistance from the crown prince of Abu Dhabi and de facto ruler of UAE, Mohammad bin Zayed al-Nahyan, in March 2015.

Mindful of the botched policy it had pursued in Libya and Syria and aware of the catastrophe it had wrought in the Middle East region, the Obama administration had to yield to the dictates of Saudi Arabia and UAE by fully coordinating the Gulf-led military campaign in Yemen not only by providing intelligence, planning and logistical support but also by selling billions of dollars' worth of arms and ammunition to the Gulf States during the conflict.

Now, when the fire of inter-sectarian strife is burning on several different fronts in the

Middle East and the Sunni and Shi'a communities are witnessing a merciless slaughter of their brethren in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Bahrain, then it would be preposterous to look for the causes of the conflict in theology and medieval history. If the Sunni and Shi'a Muslims were so thirsty for each other's blood since the founding of Islam, then how come they managed to survive as distinct sectarian groups for 1400 years?

Fact of the matter is that in modern times, the phenomena of Islamic radicalism, jihadism and consequent Sunni-Shi'a conflict are only as old as the Soviet-Afghan jihad during the 1980s when the Western powers with the help of their regional allies trained and armed Afghan jihadists to battle the Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

More significantly, however, the Iran-Iraq War from 1980 to 1988 between the Sunni and Baathist-led Iraq and the Shi'a-led Iran after the 1979 Khomeini revolution engendered hostility between the Sunni and Shi'a communities of the region for the first time in modern history.

And finally, the conflict has been further exacerbated in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011 when the Western powers and their regional client states once again took advantage of the opportunity and nurtured militants against the Arab nationalist Gaddafi government in Libya and the Baathist-led Assad administration in Syria.

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