

New York Times revels in remote-control assassination of Iranian scientist

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The *New York Times* plastered across the front page of its Sunday edition a lengthy report on the assassination last November 27 of Iran's top nuclear physicist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh. The report describes in excruciating detail how this state killing took place and establishes that it was an operation jointly organized by Israel and the United States.

The *Times* piece, based on information fed by high-level state sources and "two intelligence officials familiar with the details of the planning and execution of the operation," is provocative in the extreme.

The report is one more verification of the normalization of assassination as state policy. While the US government has long utilized the CIA—and Israel the Mossad—to carry out such killings, in the past these were operations that relevant agencies declined to either "confirm or deny." Now they are the subject of public boasting.

That the corporate media, with the *Times* in the lead, is a full partner in this shift is made clear in the report on the Fakhrizadeh assassination. One can search the article in vain for words like "legal" or "illegal," much less "state terrorism." There is not a single passage suggesting even the mildest criticism of the flagrantly criminal act it describes.

Instead, it celebrates the long record of Israel "methodically picking off the experts thought to be leading Iran's nuclear weapons program," while sympathetically describing the tactical challenges in carrying out these terrorist murders.

"Since 2007, its agents had assassinated five Iranian nuclear scientists and wounded another. ... Israeli agents had also killed the Iranian general in charge of missile development and 16 members of his team," the *Times* reports.

When it comes to the method used to assassinate Fakhrizadeh, shot multiple times by a remote-control machine gun operated by an Israeli aiming the device

from 1,000 miles away, the article adopts an obscene tone that could be mistaken for a sales pitch from an arms manufacturer.

The operation, it states, was "the debut test of a high-tech, computerized sharpshooter kitted out with artificial intelligence and multiple-camera eyes, operated via satellite and capable of firing 600 rounds a minute.

"The souped-up, remote-controlled machine gun now joins the combat drone in the arsenal of high-tech weapons for remote targeted killing. But unlike a drone, the robotic machine gun draws no attention in the sky, where a drone could be shot down, and can be situated anywhere, qualities likely to reshape the worlds of security and espionage."

The "worlds of security and espionage" is a cowardly euphemism for the practice of state terrorist murder. Fakhrizadeh, one of Iran's most prominent scientists, was gunned down driving his car, with his wife beside him, as he was headed to Tehran to teach a university class. There is no evidence to support the claims by nuclear-armed Israel that he was some mastermind of an Iranian bomb. In fact, both UN weapons inspectors and US intelligence agencies have concluded that Iran abandoned any program in support of nuclear weapons development at least as early as 2003.

The article, which provocatively mocks the efforts of Iranian security to protect Fakhrizadeh's life, sends a clear message to Tehran: "This is what we did before, and this is what we'll do again. What are you going to do about it?"

The *Times* reports that the assassination was plotted by the Israeli government and its Mossad spy agency in collaboration with "high-ranking American officials, including President Donald J. Trump, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the C.I.A. director, Gina Haspel."

It pointedly states that "Both countries were encouraged by Iran's relatively tepid response to the American

assassination of Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani, the Iranian military commander killed in a U.S. drone strike with the help of Israeli intelligence in January 2020.” In other words, one criminal assassination set the stage for the next.

Both Washington and Tel Aviv recognized, nonetheless, that the assassination could provoke a war in which Israel would depend upon US military support.

The Israeli government of President Benjamin Netanyahu, bent on permanently upending the 2015 Iranian nuclear accord and preventing any US return to it under an incoming Biden administration, welcomed the prospect of war.

Trump, whose Middle East policies were the most closely aligned with those of Israel in US history, had unilaterally abrogated the Iran nuclear agreement in 2018 and had his own reasons for courting a military confrontation.

At the end of November 2020, after losing to Democrat Joe Biden, Trump was already engaged in a feverish campaign to overturn the results of the presidential election. Just two weeks before the assassination, Trump had met with his national security cabinet to propose an air strike on the main Iranian nuclear facility at Natanz, using as a pretext Iran’s increasing its stockpile of enriched uranium, which violated no international law nor provided any evidence of pursuit of a bomb.

While his advisers talked the US president out of committing such a monstrous war crime, it was abundantly clear that Trump was searching for a provocation to justify war. There was a threat that he could exploit a provoked military confrontation with Iran as a justification for nullifying the election results and imposing martial law.

So why are the *Times* and its well-placed state informants raking over the coals of the Fakhrizadeh assassination today?

Relations between Washington and Tehran have grown increasingly tense. While Iran had initially expressed optimism that the Biden administration would carry through on its promise to rejoin the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement, it has thus far taken no significant steps in that direction, instead maintaining punishing US sanctions in place and insisting that Iran roll back its increases in enrichment and stockpiles of uranium built up in response to Washington’s unilateral abrogation of the agreement. Washington is also reportedly pressing Tehran for further concessions on its conventional missile program, as well as demanding that it surrender influence in the broader

Middle East, bowing to the US drive for regional hegemony.

For its part, Israel has issued increasingly bellicose threats against Iran. Earlier this month, Israeli Foreign Affairs Minister Yair Lapid accused Tehran of building a bomb, stating: “The world needs to stop Iran from getting a nuclear capability, no matter the price. If the world doesn’t do it, Israel reserves the right to act.”

Washington increasingly views Iran through the prism of its escalating buildup toward military confrontation with China and the strategic imperative of securing US domination of the Middle East, which provides much of China’s energy imports. Just last week, Washington slapped fresh sanctions on Chinese companies accused of trading with Iran. Chinese firms are the main customers for Iran’s petrochemical exports, and Beijing has rejected Washington’s unilateral sanctions regime.

Under conditions of mounting international tensions, there are doubtless bitter tactical divisions within the US ruling establishment of how closely to align with Israel and how aggressively to confront Iran. The *Times* article may well have been planted with the aim of tipping the scales, provoking a confrontation or laying the groundwork for staging an incident that could then be used as a pretext for armed action.

Like his predecessor, Biden, in the face of the humiliating US defeat in Afghanistan along with a growing domestic political and social crisis, may also welcome the prospect of a confrontation with Iran as a means of diverting internal pressures outward through military violence.

Whatever the case, the *Times* piece on the assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh represents a damning, if unintended, exposure of the criminality of US imperialism, which confronts humanity with the escalating threat of war.



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