

Israel's US-backed rampage across the Middle East threatens to ignite region-wide war

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With Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza now in its tenth month, the Netanyahu regime and its US imperialist paymasters and arms providers are relentlessly pushing the Middle East over the precipice and into the abyss of an all-out regional war.

In what was simultaneously a calculated provocation and an act of extreme recklessness, Israel assassinated Ismail Haniyeh, the leader of Hamas's political wing, in Iran's capital early Wednesday morning.

Haniyeh, who was in Tehran to attend the inauguration of Iran's new president, was killed along with his bodyguard when a guided missile, said by Iranian authorities to have been launched from outside the country, hit the compound where he was staying.

Only hours before this brazen act of criminality, Israeli drones demolished a five-story building in a heavily populated area of Beirut. Described by the Israeli government as "targeted," the drone strike killed five and injured scores of other residents of the apartment block. The five fatalities included Fuad Shukr, said to be the right-hand man of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, and two children aged 10 and 6.

The Gaza-born 62 year-old Haniyeh was Hamas's chief negotiator in the protracted, on-again off-again Gaza war peace negotiations.

"How can mediation succeed when one party assassinates the negotiator on other side?" asked Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, who has hosted the peace negotiations, in a post on X.

The reality is the negotiations have been a Biden-Harris administration-orchestrated sham. Israel, with the full support of the US, Canada and the European imperialist powers, has used them as a smokescreen for its continuing prosecution, through mass murder, ethnic cleansing and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, of a "final solution" to the Palestinian question.

Haniyeh's summary execution was a war crime. That it

was carried out on Iranian soil and amid the ceremonies marking the assumption of office by a new president, Masoud Pezeshkian, adds a further explosive dimension of criminality and provocation.

The Israeli strike was aimed at humiliating Iran, destabilizing its leadership, undermining confidence in its security forces and, last but not least, forcing it to respond, providing Israel with a pretext for still more aggression. Just hours before his death, Haniyeh had met with Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei.

For an Israeli government that is pursuing genocide and is responsible—according to *The Lancet*, one of the world's leading medical journals—for at least 186,000 deaths during the Gaza War, there are truly no limits. Still, the execution of Haniyeh, who for the last seven years had headed Hamas's Politburo and prior to that led the civil administration in Gaza, represents a new level of lawlessness and brutality in international relations. By way of comparison, Israel's murder by missile strike of the head of Hamas's political wing would be akin to Russia using a drone to kill Ukrainian President Zelensky when he was visiting Washington or Berlin.

In the imperialist capitals, this is no cause for even a quiver of embarrassment. Their universal response to the Israeli strikes in Tehran and Beirut has been to threaten Iran and Hezbollah and reaffirm their unflinching commitment to Israeli "self-defence."

As is now a familiar pattern after every Israeli escalation, there has been a flurry of statements from Washington, London, Berlin and Paris that blame Iran and its allies for the growing threat of a wider war and demand they stand down. "Hezbollah's attacks on Israel must stop," exclaimed German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock. "It is important to prevent a regional conflagration."

US Deputy Ambassador to the UN Robert Wood, in an emergency Security Council session Wednesday afternoon, declared: "We call on the Security Council to send an

unambiguous message to Hezbollah by standing with Israel as it defends itself against Hezbollah's repeated attacks."

Continuing in the same vein, Wood demanded the Security Council take actions, including possibly new sanctions, to "hold Iran accountable and address repeated action by its terrorist proxies."

Earlier Wednesday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken claimed the US was "not aware of or involved in" the Israeli assassination of Haniyeh in Tehran. Even if one were to accept that Tel Aviv did not share the operational details, Washington's hands are smeared with the blood of this crime.

Blinken, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and other White House officials have been publicly urging Israel to make greater use of "targeted" assassinations against Hamas and its allies. Moreover, even amid the so-called "peace negotiations," Washington has been pressing Qatar to expel the Hamas leadership in exile.

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has issued an ominously worded statement preparing the population for an expansion of the war. "Citizens of Israel," he declared, "challenging days lie ahead. Since the strike in Beirut there are threats sounding from all directions We are prepared for any scenario [and] will exact a heavy price for any aggression."

Since Netanyahu's visit to Washington last week, which included meetings with President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, the presumptive Democratic Party presidential nominee, Israel has gone on a rampage. In addition to the attacks on Beirut and Tehran, Israel has carried out strikes in southern Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. On July 20, it struck Yemen's port of Hodeida, which is under the control of the Houthi insurgency.

The timing of Israel's escalation of the war makes clear that the expansion of the Gaza genocide into a major regional conflict was greenlighted by Washington during Netanyahu's visit. At the key public event of his trip, his July 24 address to a joint session of Congress, the Israeli prime minister centered much of his remarks on bellicose denunciations of Iran.

Turning reality on its head, he painted Tehran as the aggressor, just as he grotesquely claimed there have been almost no civilian casualties in Gaza. To boisterous applause, Netanyahu declared that in fighting Iran and its allies, Israel was waging America's fight and that Israel deserved Washington's unstinting support in using genocidal methods and otherwise shredding international law. "If Israel's hands are tied," he declared, "America is next."

Exactly how the war will develop in the coming days and weeks cannot be said with any certainty. What is incontestable is that the crisis of the Israeli regime and its

imperialist backers, above all, Washington, and the logic of the war they have initiated—the predatory aims they are pursuing and the escalating violence and recklessness with which they are seeking to realize them—lead inexorably to a region-wide Mideast war, with the US joining in the assault on Iran and its allies.

Such a war could rapidly draw in a host of regional and great powers and threaten to ignite a global conflagration. At issue would be the fate of the region that is the world's largest exporter of oil, and that, because of its location at the intersection of Europe, Asia and Africa, is of enormous geo-strategic importance.

The imperialist powers, led by the US, have backed Israel to the hilt in its genocide for they see the Gaza war as a first step to realizing their plans for the establishment of unbridled imperialist domination over the Middle East. Moreover, as Biden and Blinken have themselves made clear, the war they are prosecuting alongside Israel is only one front in a developing global war. Securing domination over the Middle East is viewed as critical to subjugating Russia, with which the US and NATO powers are already at war, and prevailing in what is an all-sided military-strategic and economic offensive against China.

As in the late 1930s, various regional conflicts are inexorably merging into a new imperialist world war. If such a catastrophe is to be avoided—and it must be avoided—the global working class must be mobilized as an independent political force, united in struggle against imperialist war and the capitalist system which is its source.

The rally the Socialist Equality Party organized outside the July 24 joint session of the US Congress that was addressed by Netanyahu outlined the programmatic foundations for such a struggle, uniting the fight against war, the degradations of capitalism and the defense of democratic rights with the fight for social equality and workers' power.



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