



# Israel's Assassination of Ismail Haniyeh

August 2024



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London | Washington

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“Bodies fall,  
but ideas  
endure.”

**Ghassan Kanafani**  
Renowned Palestinian  
author & poet<sup>1</sup>



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# Previous Assassinations of Palestinian Resistance Leaders



01

# Previous Assassinations of Palestinian Resistance Leaders

## Timeline

Jun 1972

**Ghassan Kanafani**

Israel assassinated Kanafani, alongside his niece, using a car bomb in Beirut in 1972.<sup>2</sup> Kanafani was a spokesperson for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and a renowned author and poet.<sup>3</sup>

Jun 1973

**Mohamed Boudia**

Israel assassinated Boudia using a car bomb in Paris in 1973.<sup>4</sup> Boudia, an Algerian, was a senior member of the PFLP and had fought in the liberation of Algeria. He was also a famous playwright and poet.<sup>5</sup>

Jan 1979

**Ali Hassan Salameh**

Israel assassinated Salameh using a car bomb in Beirut in 1979.<sup>6</sup> Salameh founded the Black September group that killed 11 Israeli athletes in the 1972 Munich Olympics.<sup>7</sup>

Jun 1986

**Khaled Nazzal**

Israel assassinated Nazzal in Athens in 1986.<sup>8</sup> Nazzal was a leader in the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), and the Secretary for the Central Committee of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP).<sup>9</sup>

Apr 1988

**Khalil Al-Wazir**

Israel assassinated Al-Wazir by gunshot in Tunis in 1988.<sup>10</sup> Al-Wazir was a leader in the PLO, founder of Fatah, and the deputy to PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat.<sup>11</sup> Israel denied responsibility for his assassination until 2012.<sup>12</sup>

Nov 1993

**Imad Akel**

Israel assassinated Akel by gunshot in Gaza in 1993.<sup>13</sup> Akel was a commander in the Qassam Brigades.<sup>14</sup>

## Timeline of Previous Assassinations of Palestinian Resistance Leaders continued...

**Oct 1995**

**Fathi Al-Shaqaqi**



Israel assassinated Al-Shaqaqi by gunshot in Malta in 1995.<sup>15</sup> Al-Shaqaqi was the founder and leader of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.<sup>16</sup>

**Jan 1996**

**Yahya Ayyash**



Israel assassinated Ayyash through a bomb in his mobile phone in Gaza in 1996.<sup>17</sup> Ayyash was a commander in the Qassam Brigades.<sup>18</sup>

**Jul 2002**

**Saleh Shehadeh**



Israel assassinated Shehadeh during its bombing of Gaza in 2002.<sup>19</sup> Shehadeh was a founder of the Qassam Brigades and had been imprisoned by Israel for over a decade.<sup>20</sup>

**Mar 2004**

**Sheikh Ahmed Yassin**



Israel assassinated Yassin in a missile strike in Gaza in 2004.<sup>21</sup> Yassin was the spiritual leader of Hamas.<sup>22</sup>

**Apr 2004**

**Abdel Aziz Al-Rantisi**



Israel assassinated Al-Rantisi in a missile strike in Gaza in 2004.<sup>23</sup> Al-Rantisi was a co-founder of Hamas, and the leader of Hamas at the time of his assassination, following Israel's assassination of Yassin the month prior.<sup>24</sup>

**Oct 2004**

**Adnan Al-Ghul**



Israel assassinated Al-Ghul through helicopter fire in Gaza in 2004.<sup>25</sup> Al-Ghul was a senior figure in the Qassam Brigades.<sup>26</sup>

**Nov 2004**

**Yasser Arafat**



Israel is believed to be behind the assassination of Arafat by radioactive poisoning in Paris in 2004.<sup>27</sup> Arafat was chairman of the PLO, and had previously survived an Israeli assassination attempt in Tunis in 1985.<sup>28</sup>

**May 2006**

**Mahmoud Al-Majzoub**



Israel assassinated Al-Majzoub through a car bomb in Sidon in 2006.<sup>29</sup> Al-Majzoub was a senior figure in the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and ally of Hezbollah.<sup>30</sup>

**Jan 2010**

**Mahmoud Al-Mabhough**



Israel assassinated Al-Mabhough by electrocution and suffocation in Dubai in 2010.<sup>31</sup> Al-Mabhough was a military commander in the Qassam Brigades.<sup>32</sup>

**Jan 2024**

**Saleh Al-Arouri**



Israel assassinated Al-Arouri in a drone strike in Beirut earlier this year.<sup>33</sup> Al-Arouri was the deputy chief of Hamas' political bureau and a founder of the Qassam Brigades.<sup>34</sup>

**“This assassination by the Israeli occupation of brother Haniyeh is a grave escalation that aims to break the will of Hamas and the will of our people and achieve fake goals. We confirm that this escalation will fail to achieve its objectives. Hamas is a concept and an institution and not persons. Hamas will continue on this path regardless of the sacrifices and we are confident of victory.”**

**Sami Abu Zuhri**  
Senior Hamas official<sup>35</sup>



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# Who was Ismail Haniyeh?



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# Who was Ismail Haniyeh?

Ismail Haniyeh was the head of Hamas' Political Bureau, and worked as the political and diplomatic front of Hamas outside of Gaza, which he left in 2017.<sup>36</sup>

Haniyeh's family are Nakba refugees from the village of Al-Jura, located directly north of Gaza.<sup>37</sup>

Haniyeh began his political journey as a student activist at the Islamic University of Gaza. He joined Hamas at its inception in 1987, during the First Intifada.<sup>38</sup>

Haniyeh strongly believed in Hamas' participation in formal politics, and later became the Prime Minister of Palestine after Hamas won the parliamentary elections in Gaza in 2006.<sup>39</sup>

Since the genocide in Gaza began, Israel has intentionally and repeatedly targeted Haniyeh's wider family, despite Haniyeh's participation in ceasefire negotiations.<sup>40</sup> Israel has killed over 60 members of Haniyeh's wider family since October 2023.<sup>41</sup>

On 10 April 2024, an Israeli airstrike killed three of Haniyeh's sons (Hazem, Amir, and Mohammed), and four of his grandchildren (three girls and a boy).<sup>42</sup>

Haniyeh's sister was also arrested in April 2024.<sup>43</sup>

Despite Israel's killing of his family members, Haniyeh showed remarkable restraint by continuing to participate in ceasefire talks, stating: "the interests of the Palestinian people are placed ahead of everything. All our people and all the families of Gaza residents have paid a heavy price with the blood of their children, and I am one of them".<sup>44</sup>

In May 2024, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for Ismail Haniyeh, alongside Israeli leaders Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant, and Hamas officials Yahya Sinwar and Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Al-Masri.<sup>45</sup>

**“My father survived four assassination attempts during his patriotic journey, and today Allah has granted him the martyrdom that he always wished for. He was very keen to establish national unity and strived for the unity of all Palestinian factions and we affirm that this assassination will not deter the resistance, which will fight until freedom is achieved.”**

**Abdul Salam Haniyeh**  
Ismail Haniyeh’s son<sup>46</sup>



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# Haniyeh's Role in Ceasefire Negotiations



## 03

# Haniyeh's Role in Ceasefire Negotiations

As the leader of Hamas' political bureau, Ismael Haniyeh was a vital part of the Gaza ceasefire negotiations mediated by Qatar, alongside Khaled Meshaal<sup>47</sup> and Khalil Al-Hayya.<sup>48</sup>

Despite American officials recently suggesting that the ceasefire negotiations were making positive progress, any ceasefire negotiations will now be impossible following Israel's assassination of Haniyeh.<sup>49</sup>

Both Qatar and Egypt, who had been facilitating the negotiations, have stated that the assassination demonstrates Israel's lack of political will for a ceasefire agreement.<sup>50</sup>

Haniyeh had been at forefront of ceasefire negotiations, aimed at ending Israel's genocide in Gaza. Negotiations included the release of Israeli captives, in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners<sup>94</sup>, who continue to be tortured, sexually assaulted and killed in Israeli prisons.<sup>95</sup>

Gaza-based researcher for Crisis Group, Azim Keshawi, described Haniyeh as a "unifying man"<sup>96</sup>, and someone widely considered to be a "charismatic, popular and pragmatic leader" within Hamas.<sup>97</sup>

The repercussions of the assassination of such a key figure within ceasefire negotiations remain to be seen, though it is clear that Israel's killing of Haniyeh has derailed and set back any semblance of developing negotiations since Israel's genocide in Gaza began.

**“The blood of my children is not more valuable than the blood of the people of Palestine, and all the martyrs in Gaza are my children.”**

**Ismail Haniyeh,**  
following Israel’s  
assassination of his  
children.<sup>51</sup>



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# The Importance of the Timing and Location of Haniyeh's Assassination



© Iranian Presidency Office - AP

## 04

# The Importance of the Timing and Location of Haniyeh's Assassination

Israel assassinated Ismail Haniyeh alongside his bodyguards in a rocket attack where he was staying in Tehran, ahead of his attendance to the inauguration ceremony of Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian.<sup>52</sup>

## Timing

The timing of Ismail Haniyeh's assassination so soon after Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to the US government indicates that Netanyahu was given the green light and unconditional support by the US to conduct this assassination.<sup>53</sup>

US support for the assassination of Haniyeh was confirmed by US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin's swift statement that Washington would help to defend Israel if it is attacked in retaliation for the assassination.<sup>54</sup>

Israel's assassination of Haniyeh also comes less than 24 hours after Israel assassinated Hezbollah military commander, Fuad Shukur, in southern Beirut.<sup>55</sup>

Israel's attack also killed a woman and two children,<sup>56</sup> and a further 74 people were injured, as the entire top three floors of the residential building that Israel targeted collapsed.<sup>57</sup>

This suggests that Israel may have received approval from the US to escalate not just its genocide in Gaza, but also to instigate a wider regional war against both Lebanon and Iran.<sup>58</sup>

## Location

Israel's decision to assassinate Ismail Haniyeh in Iran has not just escalated Israel's conflict with Hamas, but also with Iran.<sup>59</sup> The attack violated Iranian sovereignty and will likely trigger a response that brings Israel and Iran into greater direct conflict.<sup>60</sup>

Israel's deliberate attempt to provoke greater confrontation with Iran may also entail an escalation by all members of the axis of resistance – such as Hezbollah, the Houthis, and the Islamic Resistance in Iraq – in response to Israel's double assassination.<sup>61</sup>

The precision of Israel's airstrike in Iran, despite the distance from Israeli military bases, also demonstrates Israel's capability to engage in precision airstrikes when it chooses, and the intentionality of the systematic and widespread attacks on civilians in Gaza, which Israel has full surveillance over.<sup>62</sup>

**“Some people think that the truth can be hidden with a little cover-up and decoration. But as time goes by, what is true is revealed, and what is fake fades away. This is what is happening in the Middle East today.”**

**Ismail Haniyeh<sup>90</sup>**

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# Haniyeh's Assassination as a Violation of International Law



# Haniyeh's Assassination as a Violation of International Law

Israel's assassination of Haniyeh amounts to yet another violation of international law. International law prohibits states from conducting targeted killings within another State under Article 2(4) UN Charter.<sup>64</sup>

In order for targeted killings abroad to be justified, there must be a situation of interstate self-defence, which does not apply since Palestine is not a state, or prior authorisation by either the territorial state (in this case Iran), or the UN Security Council – neither of which were present.<sup>65</sup>

Israel's assassination of Haniyeh also violates their own military manual, entitled 'Manual on the Laws of War' and penned in 1998 by the Israeli Occupation Forces, which states that: "an attempt on the lives of enemy leaders (civilian or military) is forbidden. As a rule, it is forbidden to single out a specific person on the adversary's side and request his death (whether by dispatching an assassin or by offering an award for his liquidation)".<sup>66</sup>

**“The Palestinian people do not beg the world for a state, and the state can’t be created through decisions and initiatives. States liberate their land first and then the political body can be established.”**

**Ismail Haniyeh<sup>91</sup>**

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# Impacts of Haniyeh's Assassination



© Majid Asgaripour via Reuters

# Impacts of Haniyeh's Assassination

Hamas' resistance operations in Gaza will not be impacted by Haniyeh's assassination, as the group has dealt with the assassination of many of its previous leaders and fighters.<sup>68</sup>

Indeed, after the news broke, Moussa Abu Marzouk, a senior Hamas official, stated: "Hamas will not be affected by the assassination of any of its leaders".<sup>69</sup>

Haniyeh's assassination will entail the continuation of Israel's genocide in Gaza, due to the negative impact on ceasefire negotiations.<sup>70</sup> The assassination of Hamas' leader is also a clear indication that Israel has no intention of ending the genocide or engaging in ceasefire talks.<sup>71</sup>

Haniyeh's assassination will also likely result in the escalation of regional conflict with Israel by the axis of resistance, particularly by Iran, potentially in coordinated attacks.<sup>72</sup> However, as US officials have stated their support for Israel in the event of retaliation by Iran, there may be restraint in Iran's retaliation.<sup>73</sup>

**“We promise you that we will not cede a single part of Palestine, we will not cede Jerusalem, we will continue to fight and we will not lay down our arms.”**

**Ismail Haniyeh<sup>92</sup>**

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# International Responses to Haniyeh's Assassination



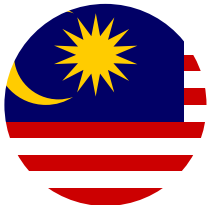
07

# International Responses to Haniyeh's Assassination



## Deputy Russian Foreign Minister, Mikhail Bogdanov

"This is an absolutely unacceptable political murder, and it will lead to further escalation of tensions."<sup>76</sup>



## Malaysian Foreign Ministry

"Malaysia unequivocally condemns all acts of violence, including targeted assassination, and urges all peace-loving nations to join in denouncing such acts. The incident underscores the urgent need for de-escalation and reinforces the necessity for all parties to engage in constructive dialogue and pursue peaceful resolutions."<sup>78</sup>



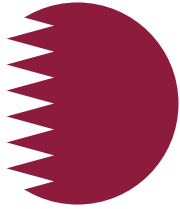
## Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Nasser Kanaani

"Haniyeh's martyrdom in Tehran will strengthen the deep and unbreakable bond between Tehran, Palestine, and the resistance."<sup>74</sup>



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## International Responses to Haniyeh's Assassination continued...



### Qatar Foreign Ministry

“Qatar strongly condemns the assassination of Dr. Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran and considers this a heinous crime and a dangerous escalation, as well as a major violation of international and humanitarian laws. The foreign ministry affirms that this assassination and Israel’s reckless, continuous targeting of civilians in Gaza will push the region into a circle of chaos, as well as limit the prospects of peace.”<sup>75</sup>



### Turkish Foreign Ministry

“We offer our condolences to the Palestinian people who have given hundreds of thousands of martyrs like Haniyeh in order to live in peace in their own homeland, under the roof of their own state. It has been revealed once again that the Netanyahu Government has no intention of achieving peace. This attack also aims to spread the war in Gaza to a regional level. If the international community does not take action to stop Israel, our region will face much greater conflicts.”<sup>77</sup>



### Foreign Minister Ronald Lamola, South Africa

“Such acts of extrajudicial killings violate international law and the principles of human rights, undermining global efforts to promote peace and stability in the Middle East.”<sup>79</sup>

“If a leader  
leaves,  
another will  
come.”

**Ismail Haniyeh's**  
last words, spoken a few  
hours before he was killed<sup>93</sup>



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# Meta's Censorship of Tributes to Haniyeh



© Facebook/Anwar Ibrahim via BenarNews

# Meta's Censorship of Tributes to Ismail Haniyeh

## Malaysia

Meta censored several social media posts by the Malaysian state because they reference “dangerous individuals and organisations”.<sup>80</sup>

Meta removed posts by the Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in which he offered his condolences for the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh, and suspended a live Facebook broadcast of a pro-Palestinian rally in Kuala Lumpur by the Malaysian state broadcaster.<sup>81</sup>

The Malaysian government described the acts of censorship as “discriminatory, unjust, and a blatant suppression of free expression”, and “an affront to the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people in their pursuit of justice and human rights.”<sup>82</sup>

The original condolence post, published on the Prime Minister's Instagram account on 1 August, read: “Your torch of struggle will keep burning and fueling our spirit to keep denying tyranny and corruptions. This path of struggle is not easy because this decades of oppression and suffering will only sow new strength and spirit for the fighters...May heaven be for you, my friend”.<sup>83</sup>

Following Malaysia's demand on Monday 5 August for an explanation and an official apology from Meta, the tech giant reinstated the Prime Minister's original condolence post on Tuesday 6 August. A Meta spokesperson told news agency Reuters: “We apologise for an operational error where content from the Prime Minister's Facebook and Instagram pages were removed, and the content has since been restored with the correct newsworthy label”.<sup>84</sup>

## Turkey

Meta censored a message of condolence for Ismail Haniyeh by a senior Turkish official on Instagram, without citing any reason or policy violation.<sup>85</sup>

As a result, on 2 August 2024, the Turkish government banned access to Instagram across Turkey because of its “preventing people from posting messages of condolences for the passing of Hamas leader Haniyeh”.<sup>86</sup> A government spokesperson stated: “this is censorship, pure and simple.”<sup>87</sup>

Regarding the removal of the ban, Turkish officials stated: “We warned Instagram about certain offences. We want some rules to be followed [...] We intervene when they disregard legal rules and public sensitivities [...] as soon as they correct those shortcomings, we will remove the ban. This is a country with laws and rules.”<sup>88</sup>

Seemingly in response to the incident, President Erdogan spoke at a human rights event about censorship on social media on 5 August 2024, saying: “They cannot even tolerate photographs of Palestinian martyrs and immediately ban them. We are confronted with a digital fascism that is disguised as freedom.”<sup>89</sup>

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