

Slaughtering by Tel Aviv & Washington's Alliance Conundrum

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Ismail Haniyeh, the political leader of Hamas, died of a bomb attack on Wednesday last week; the assassination was executed in Tehran, where he had been to attend the inaugural ceremony of Iran's new President Masoud Pezeshkian.

There is little doubt that Israel was behind the murder although there has been no official claim of responsibility from Tel Aviv. The Incident occurred after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to America two weeks ago, during which he noticeably addressed a joint session of the Congress and received nearly 60 standing ovations for his less than 60-minute speech, in utter defiance of some strong voices from the international community condemning him and his government for IDF's "genocidal acts" against the Palestinians in Gaza.

That Haniyeh's killing was a very serious provocation is all too obvious. It demonstrated that Netanyahu's government means what it says with its vow that it won't stop the war in Gaza until Hamas is extinguished. A humiliated Tehran was furious, with its supreme leader Ali Khamenei ordering to revenge. The world holds its breath for next escalation in the Middle East.

This put Washington in a difficult position, yet again. State Secretary Anthony Blinken said Washington had nothing to do with the assassination. President Joe Biden said the murder was "not helpful" to the ceasefire endeavour his administration had been trying hard to broker; but he re-iterated, as he had to, America's commitment to defend Israel. Aircraft-

carrier Lincoln is hurrying from the Pacific to the Mediterranean to join Roosevelt already deployed there to ward off Tehran's likely retaliation. Groaning of "backstabbing" by Tel Aviv has been heard in Washington.

Indeed, a "tail-wags-dog" drama is unfolding. The assassination of Hanyieh dispersed any doubt about it, if there has been any, which entails a bigger risk of America being bogged down in the Middle East or worse, a potentially all-out war with Iran at a time when Washington is desperate to extricate itself out of the regional morass of lesser importance to focus on China as its alleged sole strategic challenge.

Many wonder how come Israel, a tiny enclave state, could have a sway over Washington's foreign policy to the extent of owning its support "whatever it takes" to America, even taking into account its being deemed as pivotally positioned in the oil rich region and as the only "democratic" ally America has over there.

The answer is the Israel lobby, according to John Mearsheimer, a Chicago University professor and renowned proponent of "offensive realism" international politics theory. He co-authored a seminal book, "The Israel Lobby", in 2007 to give a systemic description and critique of the Israel lobby's productive efforts to influence American foreign policy into benefiting Israel, often to the detriment of America's own prestige and interests, despite the fact that America has all along been the chief sponsor and guarantor of Israel's very existence.

Whether the latest killing of Hanyieh will trigger, as many fear, a full-blown regional war that would drag America into an unwanted direct military confrontation with Iran is anyone's guess. What is certain, however, is that Washington's Middle East policy will remain largely dictated by Israel and it will remain quagmired in the region as a result, at the expense of its avowed determination to place China at the bullseye.

As a matter of fact, the point which Israel exemplifies here is a bigger one, and it points to the sterility of Washington's global alliance strategy.

In his first presidential visit to Europe in April 2021, Biden declared that "America is back", trying to remedy his predecessor Trump's "America first" proposition and putting the alliance system at the core of its geopolitical approach to contesting against China.

In September 2023, Blinken developed that strategy into what he called "diplomatic variable geometry", the core of which is "assembling the group of partners that's the right size and the right shape to address" the problems like China.

The strategy sounds great and has exhibited a semblance of having worked, culminating in the Nato summit in Washington last month, at which China was censured as "decisive enabler" of Russia's military actions in Ukraine and warned against continuing to act as one, to which China reacted indignantly by defending itself for being not an instigator of the Ukraine crisis nor a party to it.

Delving further into it, however, one would be hard pushed to see Washington profiting substantively from its allies' contribution to its contest against China as a colossal military and economic rival. As America secures its allies' pledged solidarity allegiance, leverages its numerous legacy military bases in their respective territories, and makes full use of its

supreme economic and financial clouts to pressurise them not to sell China certain products and technologies, such as high-end chips and chipmaking equipment, and not to buy some Chinese products, such as advanced electronic vehicles, the momentum of China's rise continues on all fronts.

Down the road, the global alliance system of the American style is even in danger of becoming its Achilles Heel, as the latest ominous development in the Middle East detonated by Israel's upstaging slaughtering of Hanyieh signifies.

Europe is another case of the same nature yet in a different form. A critical question Washington has to ask on that front is, given their persevering aspiration for "European autonomy", can it really afford to leave tackling Russia in Ukraine to its European partners in order to be laser focused on China, as Elbridge Colby, a former Defence Department official under the Trump administration being rumoured to be a heavy-weight figure in the second Trump term (if he wins in the upcoming presidential election) keeps pushing for?

Suffice it to say for now that such "tail-wags-dog" cases will remain Washington's bad headache well into next administration, be Trump or Harris voted into the White House in November.

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