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The Endless Israel-Hamas War and Its Consequences

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Ismail Haniyeh, chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau, was assassinated in Tehran on July 31. As the future possibility of a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas War becomes even less certain, the ravages of war are spreading to neighboring countries.

Ceasefire negotiations between Israel and Hamas have been mediated by Qatar even as Israel's fierce attacks against Hamas have continued. While the basic structure of a ceasefire is predicated on a cessation of attacks by Israel and the release of hostages by Hamas, negotiations have met difficulties over such details as the return of refugees, the future stationing of Israeli troops, and border control. Given that pressure on Hamas is increasing through the mediation by Qatar, there are rumors that Hamas wishes to move their political command to Iraq or Jordan. Ceasefire negotiations were held in Rome on July 28 with William J. Burns, Director of the U.S. CIA, David Barnea, Director of the Israeli Mossad, Major General Abbas Kamel, Director of the Egyptian General Intelligence Directorate, and Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, but no conclusion was reached. Amongst these circumstances, Ismail Haniyeh was assassinated as he was visiting Iran to attend the inauguration ceremonies for the new Iranian president, Masoud Pezeshkian. This is expected to make ceasefire negotiations even more difficult.

The fact is that the political incentive to reach a ceasefire is not strong for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. If the Israel-Hamas War were to be resolved, he would have to face his long simmering corruption scandal in addition to facing his responsibility for allowing Hamas to launch their surprise attack in October 2023 in the first place. On the other hand, the Palestinian side is faced with the difficult question of who will govern Gaza, and

how, after the Israel-Hamas War. Meanwhile, in mid-July, the Chinese government gathered the lead Palestinian faction of Fatah, Hamas, who has held actual control in Gaza, as well as 12 other Palestinian factions, in Beijing, reaching a basic agreement after three days of talks to form a unified interim government to rule the West Bank and the Gaza Strip once the Israel-Hamas War was over. It is unclear whether this initiative will actually work, given the number of attempts to form a unified government made so far. Nevertheless, the establishment of a Palestinian structure is essential for the post war governance of Gaza, and the presence of China as part of that establishment is a new development.

Since the start of the Israel-Hamas War, pro-Iranian armed non-state actors known as the “axis of resistance” have been attacking Israel and their ally, the U.S. government, and others, and recently, the war damage has begun to spread further.

To date, the Houthis, who effectively control the Yemeni capital of Sanaa, have repeatedly attacked vessels in the Red Sea, the Bab al-Mandab Strait, and the Gulf of Aden. On July 19, they caused a death in Israel for the first time with their drone attack on Tel Aviv. In response, the Israeli forces carried out a retaliatory attack on Al Hudaydah, Yemen, on the following day, July 20, killing six and wounding 83 people. However, this did not stop the Houthis, who responded by launching a ballistic missile toward Israel the following day, July 21st (the missile was intercepted by the Israeli forces, causing no damage.) Furthermore, the Houthis of Yemen and the Iraqi Shiite militias, which had previously been attacking separately, began conducting joint operations from around mid-June. For example, the Iraqi Shiite militias claimed that they had attacked Israel 24 times in June (though this number is self-reported and the actual number appears to be much lower), and eight of those attacks were announced jointly with the Houthis. In fact, however, this appears to be more of a propaganda effort geared toward external parties than actual military cooperation. Nevertheless, Israeli radar analysts had been tracking (and subsequently shot down) another drone during the successful attack on Israel by the Houthis on July 19, suggesting a successful simultaneous attack by Iraq and Yemen.

Furthermore, roughly 30 rockets were fired into the Golan Heights, which are under Israeli control, on July 27, killing 12 children who had been playing on a soccer field, and injuring 44 others. This is the largest number of deaths in a day on the Israeli side since the start of the Israel-Hamas War. Israel carried out a retaliatory air strike the following day, July 28, claiming that Hezbollah was responsible, and further bombed southern Beirut on the 30th to kill a

Hezbollah military commander. Hezbollah denies involvement in the attack on the soccer field. However, to date, Hezbollah has repeatedly carried out cross-border attacks against Israel from Lebanon and elsewhere, expressing solidarity with Gaza, so this incident may lead to the further escalation of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, even if that was not intended.

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