

Israel vows to make up for Oct. 7 'defeat' with assassinations

Sovereignty absurd to terrorist 'state'

International Desk

According to a leaked recording, the head of Israel's domestic security agency, Shin Bet, has vowed to hunt down members of the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas in Lebanon, Turkey, and Qatar.

Ronen Bar, who has not spoken publicly since October 7, also took responsibility for Israeli security failures that contributed to the Hamas attack, The New Arab reported.

Israel's public broadcaster Kan aired the audio on Sunday, where Shin Bet chief Ronen Bar can be heard saying: "The cabinet has set us a goal, in street talk, to eliminate Hamas."

"We will do this everywhere, in Gaza, in the West Bank, in Lebanon, in Turkey, in Qatar. It will take a few years, but we will be there to do it."

It was unclear when Bar made the remarks, or to whom. The agency declined to comment on the report.

Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas since launching its own air and ground assault on Gaza, which has killed more than 15,500 people, including over

6,000 children.

Israel has bombed Gaza for two months after Hamas fighters launched an attack on Israel that killed 1,200 people.

Other than in Gaza, Hamas leaders reside in, or frequently visit, Lebanon, Turkey, and Qatar.

Qatar helped mediate a week-long truce that saw hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and dozens of Israeli captives released. The truce broke down on Friday.

Bar's comments appear to be the first time that a senior Israeli figure has vowed that Israel will target Hamas figures in Qatar or Turkey, Kan reported.

Bar, who has not spoken publicly since October 7, took some responsibility for the security failure during the attack.

"The security responsibility is ours. Our duty is to provide both security and a sense of security. Unfortunately, on October 7, we were unable to do it," Bar said.

Taher al-Nono, a media adviser to the head of Hamas' political bureau, brushed off Bar's comments, saying: "The threats... do not frighten any of the movement's leaders."

The Wall Street Journal reported earlier this week that Israeli offi-

cial had said they plan to assassinate Hamas officials in Lebanon, Qatar, and Turkey.

Israel has carried out assassinations of Palestinian leaders in the Middle East, Europe, and beyond since its creation in 1948.

On September 25, 1997, Mossad agents, acting under orders from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his security cabinet, attempted to assassinate the former head of Hamas, Khaled Mashal. The agents, disguised as tourists, injected a fast-acting poison into Mashal but were not quick enough to escape. With the scandal erupting, then-head of Mossad Danny Yatom flew to Jordan and brought an antidote to treat Mashal, with Netanyahu's consent.

However, Israel has not always failed in what can only be called committing "state" terrorism. One should hesitate to call Israel's assassinations around the world "state"-sponsored terrorism, as its agencies do not rely on outsourcing the dirty work to foreign hitmen. They typically roll up their sleeves and carry out assassination attempts in sovereign states.

Mohsen Fakhriyadeh, an Iranian



nuclear scientist, was assassinated in a road ambush on November 27, 2020, by a one-ton gun smuggled into Iran in pieces by the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad, according to a report by The Jewish Chronicle. In a June 2021 television interview, former Mossad chief Yossi Cohen offered Israel's closest admission yet of its responsibility for the assassination.

In 2018, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu mentioned Fakhriyadeh by name several times in a news conference. "Remember that name," he said. "Fakhriyadeh."

Another high-profile target, Yasser Arafat, the former president

of the Palestinian National Authority, may have died as a consequence of polonium poisoning, a report by Swiss scientists published by Al Jazeera television revealed, prompting new allegations by his widow that the Palestinian leader was murdered.

On February 16, 1992, former Hezbollah secretary General Abbas al-Musawi was killed, along with six other people, including his wife and son. IDF helicopters attacked his convoy with missiles while traveling in southern Lebanon.

Fathi Shaqqa, the co-founder of the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine, was also assassinated by Mossad agents in Malta in 1995.

Tehran, Moscow bent...

On a much larger scale, Tehran and Moscow have teamed up under two major international blocs. One is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), where military, security, and political cooperation between the two were influential. The development of such cooperation can well be on the agenda of the presidents of Iran and Russia during Raisi's trip to Moscow. The other global organization in question is BRICS. It provided a chance for the two member states to expand their bilateral cooperation and promote their national interests better.

Russia's facilitative efforts in securing Iran's membership in the three aforementioned organizations show that the officials of both countries are determined to realize the establishment of strategic relations. Some 20 years ago, the two signed a comprehensive cooperation document. Not only did it eventually expire, but many of its articles were also in dire need of being updated. What is more, Tehran and Moscow do not stand where they once stood in the world. That is why they emphasize that a new comprehensive document for strategic cooperation between Iran and Russia needs to be drafted and concluded. In the meantime, they are striving to remove any and all existing obstacles.

After the start of the Ukraine war and the subsequent imposition of the West's sanctions on Russia, Moscow threw away its old considerations for not violating sanctions against Iran, which forged even more ties. Moreover, since Moscow's transit routes to Europe have now been blocked, it has had to find new routes and new partners.

The Iranian president has all these topics to discuss with his Russian counterpart during the trip. The two ongoing wars in Ukraine and Gaza are also areas where the two might have things to say. Russia was among the countries that showed an interest in mediating between Palestine and Israel, despite the increased efforts of the US in minimizing Russia's role in international relations.

So, even though the prospect of Moscow mediating in the Gaza war seems distant, the country still has aces up its sleeves that it can use to put a wrench in the Israeli war machine, as it once did by vetoing the US's biased resolution in the UN Security Council. It's worth noting that the Israeli prime minister has always been after maintaining relations with Moscow. The same goes for many Middle Eastern countries that are not allied with the US, as evidenced by their attempts to expand ties with Russia.

Grossi's biased Iran positions poised to derail IAEA



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PERSPECTIVE

"There needs to be some re-creation of a system of dialogue with Iran."

These are the exact words that Rafael Grossi, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency told the Financial Times last week, referring to the failed 2015 nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

This suggestion by Grossi is a positive step towards paving the path for diplomacy. However, he has also urged world powers not to lose sight of the risks posed by Iran's stockpiling of enriched uranium while attention has turned to the war between Israel and Hamas, which started on October 7.

It's crucial to note that it was Washington that put the agreement under serious threat in

2018, when then-president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States from the agreement, subsequently re-imposing its unilateral sanctions and more on Tehran, and prompting it to retaliate by ramping up its nuclear activities to levels beyond what was allowed under the JCPOA.

In 2015, the decade-old nuclear negotiations between Iran and 5+1 Group – the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, China plus Germany – resulted in the lifting of many Western-led sanctions on Tehran in return for curbs on its nuclear activities. But it was the United States, and then the European parties to the deal that were in violation of it.

Trump even made it challenging for other parties to the deal, especially Europeans – Britain, France, Germany – to keep it alive and closed the long-drawn diplomatic path that took years to yield results.

He claimed that the deal – which the international community

believed was working – actually undermined the security of the American people he swore to protect and, accordingly, withdrew from the deal. He did this despite a lack of evidence that Iran was violating the agreement, as well as the IAEA's numerous verifications confirming Tehran's compliance with its commitments.

After two years of warnings by Tehran, during which it no longer found reasons to adhere to the deal due to Europe's inability or unwillingness to resist US secondary sanctions, or domestic pressures in Iran, questioning the value of the agreement, the country dropped some of its nuclear commitments under the deal.

The talks on the revival of the JCPOA began in April 2021 in Vienna, Austria. Despite several rounds of talks, no significant breakthrough was achieved since the end of the last round in August 2022.

And now the IAEA chief put the agency's reputation under question, saying talks with Iran might require a new framework, rather than an attempt to revive the 2015 accord.

"Trying to put [a nuclear deal] back into the JCPOA box wouldn't work," Grossi said. "You can still call it a JCPOA but it should be a JCPOA 2, or something, because you have to adapt."

"We're not asking for people to put pressure on Iran but to engage with us," Grossi said. "For this thing to succeed there must be a minimum level of consensus

in the international community... that Iran must really cooperate with us and that it's not a good thing to have latent proliferation points."

Grossi is seeking this cooperation from Iran, while the country has repeatedly emphasized that it will return to its commitments if the other parties fulfill their obligations.

Mohammad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, said last December that if the United States and Western countries lift their sanctions against the Islamic Republic, Tehran will also return to its commitments within the framework of the JCPOA.

Another point is that Grossi mentions a JCPOA 2, or something. However, with both sides returning to the JCPOA, his claimed international concerns about Iran's nuclear program will be addressed.

Regarding negotiations for a new nuclear agreement between Iran and global powers, the head of Iran's Strategic Council on Foreign Relations, Kamal Kharrazi, has recently said that the country insists on the current version of the JCPOA, and there is no need for a new version.

In an interview with Al Jazeera, he emphasized that the only action required in this regard is the return of other parties to this agreement.

The former foreign minister confirmed that although Iran "can build an atomic bomb, its strategy is not to build one". Kharrazi echoed the sentiment

of the head of the AEOL, saying, "If the opposing parties return to the JCPOA, we will also return to it and reduce enrichment."

Now we need to see what "framework" Grossi, who has shown a lack of impartiality, has in mind. If he is referring to Iran's defensive and space capabilities, including its missile activities, which Iran has consistently declared as non-negotiable, it requires further clarification.

Moreover, Grossi's statements and actions suggest a departure from the IAEA's traditional role as a neutral nuclear watchdog, raising concerns about the agency's credibility and impartiality in addressing global nuclear issues. Downplaying the significance of the Gaza war, during which nearly 16,000 civilians have been killed, he calls for global attention to Iran's uranium enrichment, while Israel has registered two nuclear threats within the past two months.

Despite widespread speculation, Israel has neither confirmed nor denied having nuclear weapons, adhering to a policy of deliberate ambiguity.

Israel is believed to have between 80 to 400 nuclear warheads, with the first completed around late 1966, or early 1967, but it has never faced serious international scrutiny over this. So, as a neutral nuclear watchdog, it is essential for the agency to uphold its vital role in fostering peaceful uses of nuclear energy and preventing the spread of atomic weapons on the international arena.

