

Playing Whack-a-Mole With the Iranian Revolutionary Guard

On Sunday, Col. Hassan Sayyad Khodaei, an officer in Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, was assassinated while sitting in his car in front of his house in central Tehran by two unidentified gunmen on a motorcycle. His assassination has triggered reflexive calls in Iran for reprisals, specifically against Israel, albeit Israel has not taken credit or responsibility for the brazen daytime attack.

It's not unlikely, and certainly not impossible, that Israel had something to do with it. However, whether that's the case or not, blaming Israel is certainly the Iranians' default position. Blaming Israel is popular among the Iranians, especially when they actually have no idea who carried out such an attack in broad daylight in the middle of their capital, as a way to save face and find somebody to take responsibility rather than the Iranian regime itself. Israel is the popular target for Iranian blame, ostensibly to galvanize support for the Islamic regime. Since Israel is going to be blamed anyway, it is probably content to let the Iranians think that Israel was responsible, and that it has the kind of intelligence and free range of operation like this in the center of the lion's den of Islamic hatred and terror.

However, there is no shortage of Iranians who are quietly celebrating Khodaei's death as they would like to be free from the brutality of living under the heel of the Iranian Islamic dictatorship and the Revolutionary Guard's terrorism. It's not impossible, with growing anti-regime unrest in Iran, that there are at least a domestic elements in this assassination. Either way, behind closed doors, many are rejoicing.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is not just a terrorist organization that is a central pillar of Iranian society. They

provide more than simply military defense of Iran, as most armies around the world do in their respective countries. The IRGC finances, supplies and directs numerous terrorist organizations and operations globally. Like a mafia that operates behind the scenes until they need to carry out a "hit," they are entrenched throughout Iranian society, controlling major financial assets and resources throughout Iran as well.

It is not impossible that the timing of this assassination is connected to the Biden administration's discussion about removing the IRGC from the list of international terror organizations as part of its effort to woo Iran back into a nuclear deal along the lines of the failed 2015 Obama-era plan that paved the way for Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. Israel is opposed to a new nuclear deal with Iran, certainly one that doesn't stop the Iranian drive for a nuclear bomb in its tracks. Without taking credit or responsibility, assuming Israel had something to do with Khodaei's death, it provides a tangible action to back the words of numerous Israeli leaders that Israel will not be prevented from taking action where and when needed, with the IRGC listed as a terror organization or not, or with a new nuclear deal or not.

It's been noted that the Iranian colonel was responsible for planning attacks against Israelis and other Jewish targets around the world. If he was involved with that, there's no doubt that he was involved with much more. There's no question that the world overall is a safer place without him using up any additional oxygen.

The only problem with the killing of this Iranian terrorist leader is that it's like playing whack-a-mole. As soon as you take one down, two or three more pop up. The terrorist network within Iran is so wide and deep that one can eliminate an individual terrorist leader but not its network of terror that is entrenched throughout Iranian society. To borrow a baseball analogy, it's not impossible to win a game with a bunch of

base hits, but it's harder than winning with a couple of well-placed home runs or pitching a shutout.

The killing of Khodaei was a solid hit, maybe even a double or triple. But there's still a whole IRGC team ready to step up to the plate.

A previous "hit" was the 2020 assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh. Fakhrizadeh may not have been a member of the IRGC, but as a key party to Iran's drive to get a nuclear weapon, someone decided he was using too much oxygen too. It's reported that he was killed as his car drove past a remote-controlled automatic weapon that shot him 15 times. Israel was blamed for Fakhrizadeh's death, of course, but never took responsibility.

Earlier that same year, President Trump had ordered the assassination of General Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC Quds force. This took place not in central Tehran but at the airport in Baghdad. Soleimani was as close to being the head of the snake as can be. His death was more like a home run than a base hit, but it still didn't shut down the Iranian terrorist operations or drive for a nuclear weapon.

If Israel did have something to do with Khodaei's death and was going to be blamed anyway, why not take responsibility? First of all, Israel doesn't want to show its hand and confirm its reach, much less tip off the Iranians as to who is involved. That could compromise future operations. Then, if Israel is going to be blamed anyway, what's bad about letting the Iranians think Israel was responsible? It also gives Israel plausible deniability, so the Iranians won't feel pushed into a corner knowing that Israel was not only brazen (and successful) enough to carry out this hit but also not publicly embarrassed, and therefore pressured to carry out a major strike against Israel. There's diplomacy even in taking out terrorist leaders.

Perhaps the killing of this one terrorist will lead others who enjoy oxygen to give a second thought as to whether being part of the Iranian guard is a safe profession. Anyone who follows their Bible knows that terrorism in general is frowned upon, but specifically attacking Israel has its own built-in divine curse as in Genesis 12:3 (TLB), "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you." More and more Iranians are learning their Bible the hard way. {eoa}

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