



IDF exploits 'free' chance to strike Hamas but risks angering Trump

Amos Harel

Raed Saad, whom Israel assassinated in Gaza on Saturday afternoon, was one of the small group of senior Hamas officials who planned the October 7 massacre, and one of the last who was still alive. The Israel Air Force struck the car in which he was traveling. Four men were reportedly killed in the incident; Israel said that Saad was one of them. As of Saturday evening, Hamas had not confirmed his death.

Saad held multiple senior posts in Hamas' military

UN calls on Israel to work with UNRWA

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arm, including head of its operations wing, head of arms production and a founder of the Hamas military academy. His relations with the leaders of the military wing, Mohammed Deif and brothers Yahya and Mohammed Sinwar, have had ups and downs over the years.

Saad not only helped plan the massacre but also took part in drafting one of the final versions of what Israel calls Jericho Wall: the plan to defeat the Gaza Division of the Israel Defense Forces, which Hamas executed with impressive success on October 7. It can be cautiously said that Saad was not eligible for Hamas' information security



Palestinians inspect the site of the Israeli strike on a car in Gaza City on Saturday that killed senior Hamas commander Raed Saad.

Dawoud Abu Alkas/Reuters

award, it was the scandalous handling by the IDF and the Shin Bet security service of the sensitive intelligence that reached Israel prevented the attack from being thwarted.

Saad's assassination was carried out during the faltering cease-fire in the Gaza Strip. The real reason is a set-

ting of a historic account for his involvement in the massacre and the wish to continue striking the leaders of Hamas in Gaza, which is now headed by Izz al-Din al-Haddad. (Saad was recently described in Gaza as his deputy.) Israel justifies it as a response to an incident that occurred earlier

Saturday: the explosion of a device in the southern Strip, in which two reservists suffered minor injuries.

Hamas' expected retaliation for the assassination is not particularly worrisome at this time. Its military capabilities – both to fire rockets into Israel and to attack

border-area communities – are quite limited. Hamas' chain of command has been hit hard up to its highest echelon, which was entirely eliminated during the war. What is left is mainly a large reservoir of young draftees, which it uses to terrorize Gaza's Palestinian popula-

tion and prevent the rise of alternative forces to power.

The key question now is what the United States will think and say. President Donald Trump said last week that he plans to begin implementing the next phase

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IDF: Senior Hamas commander Raed Saad killed in Gaza

Yaniv Kubovich and Jack Khoury

The army struck and killed senior Hamas commander Raed Saad near Gaza City, Israeli officials said. Palestinian media reported that four Palestinians were killed in the airstrike.

Saad was considered one of the two most senior figures of the organization's military wing, alongside Hamas' leader in Gaza, Izz al-Din al-Haddad.

According to the Israel Defense Forces, Saad was in charge of the terror group's weapons production headquarters and had recently "operated to reestablish Hamas' capabilities and weapons manufacturing."

He previously served as head of Hamas' operations staff, during which he founded the Nukhba force and helped design and implement the "Jericho Wall" plan, which formed the basis of the October 7 massacre plans.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Israel Katz said they instructed the IDF to assassinate Saad following an incident in southern Gaza earlier Saturday in which two reserve soldiers were lightly wounded by an explosive device.

Netanyahu and Katz said that "Saad was one of the architects of the October 7 massacre and was currently involved in rebuilding the terrorist organization, planning and carrying out attacks against Israel, and reconstructing its strike capabilities."

The IDF stated that forces had identified "repeated attempts by the Hamas terrorist organization to carry out

terrorist activity, including the use of explosive devices against IDF troops, activities that constitute a blatant violation of the agreement, as occurred this morning." It added that it had identified attempts by Hamas to rebuild its capabilities, with Saad leading efforts to re-arm and strengthen it. Army officials also suspect that he worked to advance weapons manufacturing for Hamas' branch in Lebanon.

Saad held a series of positions within the terror organization over the years and was close to Marwan Issa,

Saving seriously ill Gazans

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the former deputy head of its military wing, who was killed in an Israeli strike last year. He established and commanded the Gaza City Brigade and worked to set up the naval force in the Strip.

After completing his role as commander of the Gaza Brigade, he was appointed head of Hamas' operation staff. He was later appointed head of Hamas' production staff, overseeing the manufacture of all types of weapons for its military wing in preparation for the massacre.

During the war, he focused on restoring the group's weapons production capabilities. According to the IDF, he was responsible for producing numerous explosive devices that killed many soldiers.

In 2024, Israel attempted and failed to assassinate Saad in a strike on Gaza City.

Ministers said to weigh legalizing outposts evacuated in 2005

Matan Golan, Jonathan Lis and Liza Rozovsky

The security cabinet discussed on Thursday regularizing the status of 19 West Bank settlement outposts, including some that are deep inside Samaria. A source said the cabinet is expected to make an official announcement on the matter this week.

The anticipated move would complete the abrogation of those sections of the 2005 Gaza disengagement law that pertained to the West Bank. The law prompted the evacuations of Kadim, Ganim, Homesh and Sa-Nur, all of them in the same area deep inside Samaria. The move began in March 2023, with an amendment to the law al-

lowing Israelis to remain in areas that were evacuated during the disengagement and giving them land rights in the area that were revoked by that law.

These isolated settlements were built in the 1980s, becoming Area C enclaves, under Israeli control,

in a region which was mostly designated as Area A and partly as Area B, as defined in the Oslo Accords. These enclaves cut off Palestinian contiguity in the area. The disengagement law prohibited Israeli citizens from being there after the evacuation of the five settle-

ments. "We are reducing the daily friction and its victims on both sides," explained then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2005. Kadim and Ganim are close to the city of Jenin, where the IDF has recently waged a campaign based on perceived terror threats in the region. The

repopulation of these settlements is expected to deepen Israel's military presence in an area that is supposed to be under Palestinian civil and security control. This counters the principles of the disengagement, which called for no Israeli presence in the area.

Since the disengagement, numerous settlements have been built in Samaria, as in the rest of the West Bank, with an accelerated pace since the war broke out. These particular settlements were like pincers surrounding the area from three directions. In May 2023, following the law's amendment, a new military order was invoked, implementing the

new amendment at Homesh. A year later, following the instructions of then-Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, the order was expanded to include the other settlements. The entire area was declared a closed military region, preventing Israelis from returning without coordinating their moves with the army.

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Lebanese foreign minister:

'Arab, int'l officials say Israel is planning major attack against us'



Rajji, right, shaking hands with Michel Issa.

Anwar Amro/AFP

Jack Khoury

Arab and international officials have warned Lebanon that Israel is planning a large-scale military operation against the country, Lebanese Foreign Minister Youssef Rajji said in an interview with Al Jazeera on Friday.

According to the foreign minister, Lebanon is strengthening its diplomatic ties to defend itself against such an attack. Rajji also criticized Hezbollah for its refusal to disarm.

"Hezbollah's weapons have proven ineffective in supporting Gaza and de-

fending Lebanon," he said. He added that Hezbollah's actions "brought about the Israeli occupation."

According to the foreign minister, Lebanon aims to return to the cease-fire agreement with Israel but is pessimistic about the possibility of peace between the countries.

He stressed that the meetings of the international mechanism overseeing the implementation of the cease-fire agreement between Israel and Lebanon at the beginning of this month should not be seen as "traditional" negotiations with Israel.

In the interview, Rajji also criticized Iran, saying that its regional policy "is a source of instability" and its influence on Lebanon is negative. Speaking of Iran's support for Hezbollah, he added that Tehran must "stop financing an illegal organization."

Rajji added that Lebanon is nonetheless open to dialogue with Iran, provided that Tehran stops interfering in Lebanon's internal affairs.

Earlier Friday, the Israel Defense Forces said it struck a "training and qualification compound" in southern Lebanon, which it alleges was used by Hezbollah's elite Radwan Force.

According to the military, the compound was used for "planning and executing terrorist attacks against IDF troops and Israeli civilians." Several other Hezbollah targets were hit in strikes across southern Lebanon, the statement said.

Following an urgent evacuation warning issued to a village in southern Lebanon earlier Saturday,

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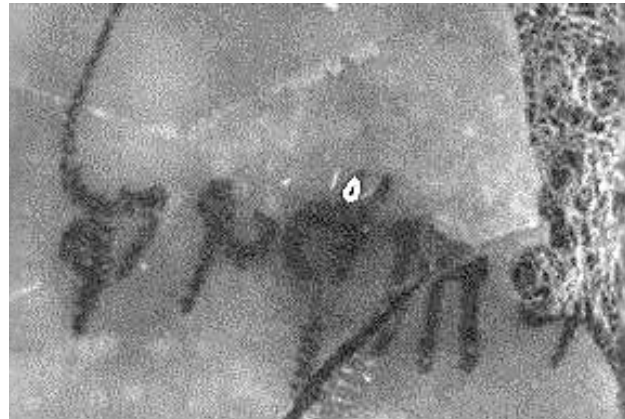
Scholar: Unknown alphabet in Dead Sea Scrolls has been cracked

Ruth Schuster

Decades after a number of unknown alphabets were discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls, and against all odds, Emmanuel Oliveira of the University of Groningen in the Netherlands believes he has cracked the "impossible" one known as Cryptic B. The code had been considered to be impossible to decipher, mainly because of the sheer paucity of Cryptic B material. All we have are isolated fragments from two scrolls called 4Q362 and 4Q363, and a few spots in other scrolls where scribes briefly introduced Cryptic B in the middle of a Hebrew text, Oliveira explains, in the journal Dead Sea Discoveries in December.

Oliveira's process was based on analysis and intuition, similar to the methodology the scholar Jozef Milik used when deciphering Cryptic A in 1955. Both began with assuming that they were dealing with a mono-alphabetic substitution system—where each of the 22 letters of Hebrew or Aramaic is consistently replaced with a specific cryptic sign (as in – say A is always replaced by \$).

Well and good. Oliveira also saw similarities between



The word "Yisrael" in Cryptic B, top, and pieces of Dead Sea Scroll with Cryptic B.

Leon Levy Dead Scrolls Digital Library, Shai Halevi/Israel Antiquities Authority

Cryptic B and Cryptic A, and that Cryptic B also featured what looked like modified "Jewish" Hebrew letters.

But the key break-

through was suddenly realizing that a sequence of five letters in a Cryptic B fragment might represent the five-letter Hebrew word

Yisrael: spelled yod, sin, resh, aleph and culminating in an elaborate lamed.

It is true that the resh did not survive the eons intact. But looking at the high-resolution image of the age-darkened fragment – the word יִשְׂרָאֵל (Yisrael) leaps out. "Once you've seen it, you can't unsee it," as Oliveira tells Haaretz by Zoom.

The texts in 4Q362 and 4Q363 don't seem to be one-on-one identical to biblical texts, but echo biblical idioms and eschatological themes appearing in Qumran writings, he says – for example, "Judah", "shall forsake", and "the tents of Jacob".

He also identified a numeric theme in the scanty Cryptic B corpus, possibly referring to dates, which also resonates with the biblical corpus such as in Ezra 6:15: "This temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar; it was the sixth year of the reign of King Dariusus."

Dark mysteries?

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls starting in 1947 was a turning point in the annals of biblical studies. To date, we have four more

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