From Gaza to Ramallah, Haniyeh remembered as advocate of national unity The assassinated leader was a proponent of Hamas' political engagement and pursued Palestinian reconciliation at home and in exile, admirers say."This is a message that Israel doesn't want to see a deal happen," he argued, stressing that Haniyeh's personal qualities as a pragmatic and flexible negotiator meant that Netanyahu has no interest in reaching a solution.Back then, he was very concerned about the impact of the siege that was imposed on Gaza, and the need to strike a serious national unity deal." 'Targeting him undermines the will for Palestinian unity' Though in exile, Haniyeh continued to be directly impacted by Israel's onslaught in Gaza personally as much as politically. Since the start of the war, around a dozen of Haniyeh's family members -- including his three sons, grandchildren, and his sister -- have been killed by Israeli attacks on their residences in Al-Shati refugee camp. In May, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) Karim Khan announced he was seeking arrest warrants for Haniyeh -- along with Gaza chief Yahya Sinwar and military commander Mohammed Deif -- on suspicions of war crimes and crimes against humanity during and after Hamas' October 7 attack on southern Israel. Khan also named as suspects Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for suspected crimes during the military assault on Gaza. In one of his final statements before his assassination in Tehran, Haniyeh called for August 3 to be a day of global solidarity "to support the people of Gaza and Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails."The fact that the political leader was killed on foreign soil does not diminish the reality that "he was connected through the struggle with his people of Gaza and Palestine, sharing their cause in exile and the pursuit of justice worldwide." ? Hamas supporters take part in a protest following the killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, in the West Bank city of Hebron, July 31, 2024. Musbah Abo Shbana, a 43-year-old resident of Rafah now displaced in Deir Al-Balah, said the targeting of Haniyeh complicates the future of Palestinians in Gaza, as he led the negotiations for a ceasefire. While some may not agree that his faction's political endeavors were effective, they still believe he was "one of the few faithful symbols" of Palestinian leaders in the history of their cause.When he joined Hamas, Zaqout explained, "Haniyeh's political approach was to localize the party, transforming it from an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood into a Palestinian faction." After the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, Arafat asked Zaqout to set up a meeting with Haniyeh to gauge Hamas' position towards the newly established PA, and to encourage the Islamist movement not to challenge it. "I was surprised by Ismail's flexibility, which warmed Arafat's heart," Zaqout said.Hajjaj added that she and her family are proud to have supported the "humble yet determined leader, who aspired for the full liberation of all Palestinians enduring Israel's decades-long occupation." Ahmed Sheikh Ali, a 30-year-old activist and journalist from Nuseirat refugee camp, told +972 that Haniyeh rose to power from among the people and "solely served his home city and land."As a student at the Islamic University of Gaza in 1983, Haniyeh led a demonstration in support of PLO chairman Yasser Arafat while the latter was under siege by the Syrian army and pro-Syrian factions in Tripoli in Lebanon, Zaqout recalled."His diplomatic efforts aimed to garner support for the Palestinian cause and bolster Hamas' position within the region," the Hamas official explained, noting that in recent months, "Haniyeh was known for his direct involvement and flexibility toward reaching a ceasefire."(Hassan Jedi/Flash90) When Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, the founder of Hamas, was released from Israeli prison in

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1997, Haniyeh returned to his previous role as the top leader's confidant and worked as his bureau chief in Gaza for years.(Abed Rahim Khatib/Flash90) "The last time I met [Haniyeh] was last March in Doha," Zaqout lamented, "where he expressed to me his keenness on achieving a ceasefire, as well as a national reconciliation deal.For many Palestinians, Haniyeh's assassination extinguishes any possibility of ending the war with Israel in the near term, and highlights Israel's disregard for political and diplomatic efforts to resolve the months-long calamity.In late 1987, during a period of heightened political activity in the occupied territories and the onset of the First Intifada, Haniyeh, then 24, joined the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) at its inception.His involvement quickly deepened, and in 1992, Israel deported Haniyeh to Marj al-Zohour in southern Lebanon along with other Hamas leaders."I believe that targeting him -- like Sheikh Yassin and [Saleh] Arouri [a senior Hamas commander killed in Lebanon in January] -- undermines the will for Palestinian unity.""Haniyeh was known inside the movement as a persistent advocate for reconciliation and national unity efforts with Fatah. He always insisted on having harmony among all the Palestinian factions, not just Fatah."Zaqout noted that Haniyeh was one of the few Hamas leaders who tried to participate in the 1996 legislative elections, though the movement boycotted them.By Fatima AbdulKarim and Mohammed R. MhawishAugust 1, 2024 ??

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