

In a secret meeting in an Asian Capitol: Ali Larijani seemed interested in dialogue

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Via Google Translate

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One of the discussions currently taking place on social media in Israel and around the world deals with the wisdom of eliminating a person like Ali Larijani. Many of the participants in the discourse (including those who decided on the assassination) believe that Larijani was a pillar of the regime, an intelligent but cruel and ruthless man who oversaw the killing of protesters in Iran, and therefore his killing was justified. I would like to offer a slightly different perspective here. From now on, I will blur out unnecessary details, knowing that even if I reported all my actions correctly to the right people, in this article I may endanger others.

The story began several months ago. Colleagues with whom my colleague Ehud Toledano and I often meet in a regional Middle East framework, conveyed a message that Iran was looking for a way to create a space for dialogue and the transmission of messages between it and Israel. The Iranians asked the Chinese government to participate in the discourse, apparently because they were not confident in the sincerity of the Israeli side's intentions. We reported this to the relevant authorities in Israel, who metaphorically shrugged their shoulders. That is, they did not express opposition to such a meeting but did not actively encourage it.

For several months we held discussions through intermediaries about the format of the meetings, the methods of financing and the participants. The Iranians and the Chinese were interested in holding the first meeting in Beijing. Some of the potential participants from the Israeli side refused to meet under Chinese auspices, even if the meeting was held outside of China. Finally, we agreed to hold a low-profile initial meeting, in another Asian capital, with the participation of representatives from Iran and China, and colleagues from other countries who agreed to join in order to give the meeting the guise of an international conference. One of the Scandinavian countries agreed to finance a series of meetings.

Less than a year ago, at an Israeli-Iranian meeting, we looked for ways to create a dialogue between the two countries. According to testimonies, it was Larijani who pushed for the meeting to be held

Two of the Iranian participants who intended to attend could not leave because of the riots in Iran itself, and the only actual participant was a former Foreign Ministry official who now lives outside Iran. But during the meeting, it became clear to us, to our surprise, both from the testimony of the Iranian participant and from the words of the Chinese representative, that the one who pushed for dialogue, back in late 2025, was Larijani, and that he was interested in knowing whether there were people on the Israeli side who thought like him.

During a two-day meeting, we tried to think of possible ways to maintain such a space for dialogue, and of the steps that could be taken to increase trust, at least by having a person with authority and the ability to implement it on both sides of the line. For example, we suggested that the Iranian and Israeli

sides simultaneously approve quiet, unpublicized visits by religious figures: a senior Shiite cleric who would visit Al-Aqsa, and a Jewish rabbi who would visit the tombs of Esther and Mordechai. In Iran.

We all know the end of the story: war broke out, Larijani was eliminated, and the whole story burst like a soap bubble. It is possible that there was nothing here to begin with. Perhaps the whole thing was an attempt to recruit agents for Iranian intelligence, or perhaps, as in Robert Frost's poem, two roads diverged in the forest:

Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

An aside, especially for Mark:

What I'm sending here is a Google Translate translation of the article by Ze'evi. (For some reason Google Translate gave a totally different title than the precise Hebrew. I've read that that's happening, but I think this is the first time I've encountered this.) At the end of the piece Ze'evi quotes from Robert Frost's **The Road Not Taken**, but he uses a (perhaps the) Hebrew translation. Google Translate then translated the Hebrew into English which I'm pasting below:

"One I left for another day,/ But I knew that while I was still in it,/ The second would surely be abandoned" (translation: Eliyahu Tzipor).

The Hebrew reads:

"האמת הותרתי ליזם האחר, / אך ידעתי כי בעודי בה בוחר, / השנייה בספק תוותר"

I won't go into the fine points of the Hebrew translation, but it's very close to the original. The Google Translate version is not only very wrong, it's almost incomprehensible.