



The Future of Hamas and the War in Gaza After the Sinwar Era

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Yahya Sinwar was the individual most closely associated with Hamas and with the war initiated by that organization on October 7, 2023. On that date, Hamas terrorists swarmed across the Israeli border, killed approximately 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and kidnapped approximately 250 more to the Gaza Strip. Sinwar's elimination on October 17, 2024, is an image of Israeli victory. A year after the outbreak of the war and after the recent elimination of Sinwar, Hamas is now at a crossroads. Will its new leadership accept an arrangement that returns the abductees, ends the war, and brings the group's rule in the Gaza Strip to an end? Or will Hamas continue along Sinwar's lines - a futile war against Israel that will lead to yet further suffering for the two million Palestinian civilians of Gaza?

Hamas defined the war it started on October 7, 2023, as a divine victory. Iran and Hezbollah were privy to the planning and scope of the planned attack. Hamas was well aware of the sacrifice that would be required to pull it off, but in all the Hamas protocols [seized by the IDF in the ensuing war](#), the heavy Israeli price tag was hardly mentioned. Palestinian sacrifice, especially the deaths of many Palestinians, was seen as a necessary evil in order to gain independence.

In the official document explaining Operation Tufan Al-Aqsa (Al-Aqsa Flood) that Hamas published on all its websites, several justifications for war with Israel are described, but the immediate reason for the October 7 assault is not mentioned.

The reasons cited in the Hamas document include Jewish ascension to the Temple Mount, an ongoing event that has taken place on and off since 1967 under various restrictions; the presence of seven million Palestinian refugees in refugee camps throughout the Middle East; the continuation of the Palestinian problem for about 75 years, the settlements in the West Bank; and the detention by Israel of Palestinian prisoners. None of these reasons is new. No world-changing event obliged Hamas to launch an all-out war on Israel with the support of the entire Iranian resistance axis. So why did it proceed?

An analysis of articles published on Hamas websites shows that the main goal of Tufan al-Aqsa was to prevent [a normalization agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia](#). This aim was also revealed in the secret seized protocols of Hamas. This goal is a distinct Iranian interest.

Yahya Sinwar was the person most associated with the planning and execution of Operation Tufan al-Aqsa. By virtue of his position as head of the Hamas organization in the Gaza Strip, and as one of the group's founders and part of its military arm, Sinwar held power on a level unequaled by anyone before him. After the death of Ismail Haniyeh, Sinwar was officially appointed head of the political bureau. He was the first Hamas chief to emerge from the military wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, to head the organization's political bureau as well (he is the fourth leader of the political bureau after Musa Abu Marzouk, Khaled Mashal and Ismail Haniyeh).

Sinwar, as claimed in [Al-Sharq Al-Awast](#), represented the connection between Hamas and Iran. This connection led to the training by Iran of Hamas's military arm; the supply of armaments, including precision armaments; and tremendous financial support from Iran.

Sinwar's assassination was described by sources in Hamas as "*aqsa dharba*", or an extremely severe blow. Sinwar had charisma and was able to sway people to follow him. His survival, as the man who symbolized the October 7 war for Hamas, was in itself an image of victory over Israel. His elimination constitutes a counter-image of Israeli victory, regardless of how the war ends.

The candidates to replace Sinwar at the head of Hamas are Khalil al-Hayya, Sinwar's deputy head of the political bureau (al-Hayya is considered less

charismatic and pragmatic); Muhammad al-Sinwar, Yahya's brother, who currently heads the military wing of Hamas in the Gaza Strip (after replacing Mohammed Deif); and Izz ad-Din al-Haddad, head of the North Gaza Brigade and the only senior military commander to have survived thus far. It is likely that Khaled Meshaal will return to lead Hamas as the main leader of the political arm – at least temporarily, until a permanent appointment is made by the Shura Council.

The war Hamas started on October 7 has destroyed the Gaza Strip, killed over 50,000 Palestinians (according to Hamas sources, which do not differentiate between civilians and militants), and wounded over 100,000. Faced with such grim results, Hamas is now trying to explain why it embarked on Operation Tufan al-Aqsa in the first place. The organization is well aware that its support among the Gazan population is at an unprecedented low. The majority of the Palestinian population in the Strip [currently](#) believes Hamas's decision to launch the invasion on October 7, 2023, was based on incorrect assumptions and a strategic mistake. This is despite the degree of Islamization that Palestinian society has undergone since Hamas took over the Gaza Strip.

In an article entitled, [Was Sinwar's decision \[to start the war\] correct?](#) published on the Hamas website on October 10, 2024, the one-year anniversary of the outbreak of Sinwar's war in Gaza, the war is presented as a "victory of the resistance, steadfastness, faith, patience and sacrifice of the people of Gaza. This is an epic historical resistance that will lead to the liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea." The author, Monir Shafiq, a Lebanese writer of Christian-Palestinian origin, was active in Fatah, converted to Islam, and over the years came closer to the concept of Islamic Jihad and Hamas. The publication of the article in October 2024 indicates a striking disconnect between the organization's leadership and the suffering Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip. The article describes Hamas's indiscriminate murder, torture, rape, and abduction of Jewish men, women and children in the Gaza Envelope as heroic actions justified by the "takeover" of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the other reasons mentioned above. Israel is described as the "representative of Western civilization (the white race) against the barbarians (the peoples of the world)".

According to this logic, the barbaric attack by Hamas is justified according to international law while Israel's attempts to protect and defend the lives of its citizens are violations of those laws. According to Hamas, Israel has no right to exist as a state and a sovereign entity in any borders whatsoever (not the 1967 borders, the 1947 borders, or any others). A year after October 7, Hamas is still refusing to take responsibility for the vast destruction it has brought down upon its people, the Gaza Strip, and the peoples of the region. Hamas has expressed no desire to reach a historical reconciliation that will end hostilities between the nations. After Sinwar's departure, will Hamas realize that the time has come to end the war they started and lost with a settlement that restores the Gaza Strip and establishes regional peace? Or does Hamas prefer to continue serving Iran, even if doing so is directly at odds with the national interest of the Palestinian people?

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