



IDF Kills Sinwar: A Blow for Iran, Triumph for Israelis and Palestinians

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Israeli soldiers who killed Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar on October 17 brought justice to the architect of the October 7 attack and a man chiefly responsible for the suffering of countless Israelis and Palestinians. Sinwar's death marks a significant milestone in the war and another severe blow for Iran's regional proxy network. It also demonstrates that Israel was right, despite U.S. criticisms, to mount a ground operation into Rafah, where Sinwar was found, and use a strategy of re-entering previously cleared areas to find and fix reconstituted elements of Hamas.

However, Sinwar's death was not the goal of Israeli operations in Gaza and will not end the war. President Joe Biden's [message](#) that it is now time to "move on" to a ceasefire downplays the necessity of continued Israeli operations in Gaza and beyond to return the hostages and to ensure another attack like October 7 cannot happen again. Instead of U.S. officials pushing Israel to end the war, ensuring it has the capabilities necessary to target threats and U.S. pressure on Iran and its terrorist proxies would make achieving these objectives more likely.

What Happened?

- On October 17, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers conducting a patrol in the southern Gaza city of Rafah [killed Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar](#). The Israeli soldiers had engaged three terrorists and did not realize that one of them was Sinwar until examining his body afterward. Biometric tests confirmed Sinwar's identity.
 - » An [Israeli tank fired](#) at the home where Sinwar and two bodyguards were hiding.

Why Is It Important?

- Sinwar's death brings to justice the architect of the October 7 attacks, the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust, during which Hamas terrorists killed 1,200 people, including over [40 American citizens](#), and kidnapped 250 individuals to hold as hostages in Gaza.
 - » Sinwar was responsible for brutality against Israelis and Palestinians and transformed Gaza into a fortress designed to put Palestinian civilians at risk by using them as human shields in defense of Hamas.
 - » However, Sinwar's death does not mark the end of the need for Israeli operations to ensure Hamas cannot reconstitute itself and to return the hostages.
- Sinwar's death removed the Palestinian leader who built Hamas from a terrorist group into a terrorist army that was [organized](#), trained, equipped, and motivated to viciously kill as many civilians as possible during the October 7 attack that he planned.

- » The viciousness against civilians during the attack, including mutilation, rape, and sexual violence, indicated it was not a spontaneous event but a premeditated offensive that Sinwar stoked by conditioning Palestinians in Gaza to hate Jews.
- Under Sinwar’s control of Gaza, Hamas diverted money and supplies away from the public to transform the territory into a fortress with a network of above- and below-ground fortified fighting positions for the specific purpose of delaying IDF operations, launching counterattacks, and putting Palestinian civilians at risk to feed its disinformation warfare campaign.
 - » Recognizing that Hamas could not defeat Israel in a conventional fight, Sinwar’s strategy was to maximize the number of civilian casualties in Gaza, in order to build international pressure against Israel and drive it to end the war before defeating the terrorist organization or recovering the hostages.
 - » Hamas places its military assets, such as weapons and its extensive tunnel labyrinth, near and below civilian facilities, such as hospitals, schools, humanitarian zones, and United Nations facilities, in a deliberate and illegal attempt to deter or prematurely halt IDF operations, and to leverage Israel’s legal attacks against terrorist targets for its disinformation campaign.
 - » Sinwar was committed to fighting to the last Palestinian. While in [Israeli prison](#), Sinwar had argued when asked “is it worth 10,000 innocent people to die in order to free 100 prisoners?” that “even 100,000 is worth it.”
 - Sinwar served [22 years of four life sentences](#) for murdering Palestinians in his role as a ruthless Hamas enforcer. He was released in 2011 as one of the over 1,000 Palestinians who were released as part of the deal that brought home an Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, who had been held captive in Gaza for five years.
- Sinwar was a key obstacle to reaching a ceasefire and hostage release deal. His death and the dismantlement of Hamas in Gaza increases the possibility of a day after plan for Gaza that benefits both Palestinians and Israelis.
 - » As U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken indicated in his [statement](#) after Sinwar’s death, “on multiple occasions over the past months, Sinwar rebuffed efforts by the United States and its partners to bring this war to a close through an agreement that would return the hostages to their families and alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people.”
- Sinwar’s death will bring added pressure for Israel to declare victory and end the war. While statements from U.S. officials took the positive step of noting that his death marks an opportunity to move toward a postwar settlement in Gaza that does not include Hamas, efforts to restrain Israeli military action would undermine efforts to dismantle Hamas, return the hostages, and reach an end to the war.
 - » President Joe Biden [told reporters](#) after Sinwar’s death that “now's the time to move on. Move on, move towards a ceasefire in Gaza, make sure that we are moving in a direction that we're going to be able to make things better for the whole world.”
 - » In his official [statement](#), Biden argued that “there is now the opportunity for a ‘day after’ in Gaza without Hamas in power, and for a political settlement that provides a better future for Israelis and Palestinians alike.”
 - » Vice President Kamala Harris argued in her [statement](#) that “this moment gives us an opportunity to finally end the war in Gaza, and it must end such that Israel is secure, the hostages are released, the suffering in Gaza ends, and the Palestinian people can

- realize their right to dignity, security, freedom, and self-determination. And it is time for the day after to begin without Hamas in power.”
- That IDF troops found Sinwar while on a training mission in Rafah validates Israel’s operational concept in Gaza, despite the heavy criticism it has come under from the United States.
 - » While U.S. officials had previously sought to restrain Israeli operations in Rafah out of concerns over civilian casualties, the killing of Sinwar demonstrated the necessity of the IDF conducting thorough operations to degrade Hamas throughout the entirety of Gaza.
 - In March, Biden had said that the operation Israel had planned to conduct in Rafah would [constitute](#) a “red line.”
 - Also in March, U.S. officials [indicated](#) that Biden was considering conditioning arms sales to Israel if it pursued the planned operation in Rafah.
 - That month, Harris also [warned](#) that she had “studied the maps, there’s nowhere for those folks to go.”
 - » Additionally, the United States has been critical of IDF operations that first sought to destroy the organized Hamas battalion in a specific Gaza neighborhood, then left the area, only to return once the remnants had [reconstituted themselves](#).
 - Major examples of this, like the IDF returning several times to clear and re-clear al-Shifa hospital, have been [cited by U.S. critics](#) as examples of the IDF failing to eliminate Hamas and only creating conditions for continued radicalization.
 - However, as demonstrated by the killing of Sinwar, Israel’s operational concept served to make it easier to find and fix reconstituted Hamas elements that thought it safe to emerge and move in areas that they seemingly believed the IDF to have departed from.
 - However, the war was not about killing Sinwar, and Israeli operations in Gaza and beyond remain necessary for Israel to ensure another October 7 attack cannot happen again.
 - » Continued Israeli operations remain necessary to ensure that Hamas cannot reconstitute itself as a political or military force in Gaza and to return the hostages.
 - » Considering Hezbollah also had a plan to invade Israel, Israel’s limited ground operations in Lebanon are crucial to push the terrorist organization north of the Litani River so that it is away from the border.
 - Sinwar’s death along with the ongoing dismantlement of Hamas underscore the importance for Israel to develop and implement a day after plan for Gaza as increase Palestinian access of aid within the territory to capitalize on the post-Sinwar vacuum and prevent Hamas from reconstituting.
 - » Despite U.S. concerns about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and [threats](#) to condition aid if Israel does not increase aid into the territory, Israel has allowed massive quantities of assistance into the Strip. Hamas frequently steals this aid, preventing it from reaching civilians.
 - Sinwar’s death also marks another severe blow for Iran’s regional terrorist proxy network.
 - » While he had long been the most important figure in Hamas as the leader of the terrorist organization within Gaza, Sinwar took over as the political leader of the group as well after the death of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran. Tehran [blamed Israel](#) for Haniyeh’s death and vowed to retaliate.

- » Increased Israeli operations since September 19 have [devastated](#) Hezbollah's leadership, fighters, and capabilities. On September 27, Israeli airstrikes in Beirut killed Hezbollah leader [Hassan Nasrallah](#).

What Should the United States Do Next?

- Instead of pushing Israel to reach a ceasefire deal, U.S. officials should pressure Iran and Hamas, in particular whomever takes over as the leader of the group, to release the hostages and lay down their weapons.
- U.S. officials should avoid publicly signaling daylight between the U.S. and Israeli governments that encourages further Iran-backed aggression against Israel.
- The United States should ensure that Israel has the [munitions necessary](#) to target terrorist leaders, fighters, and weapons.
- Instead of falsely blaming Israel for the problems of access to humanitarian aid in Gaza, U.S. officials should work with their Israeli counterparts to develop and implement a plan to protect the aid in transit to civilians as well as prepare a day after plan for Gaza.