



**Yahya al-Sinwar gave a belligerent speech warning Israel that Hamas and the Palestinian people would not accept the continuation of the "siege" of the Gaza Strip, saying, "We can no longer bear it and our patience is at an end."**

November 10, 2019

## Overview

On November 4, 2019, Yahya al-Sinwar, head of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip, gave a speech before Palestinian youngsters in the Gaza Strip (considered a very important target audience). **The speech**, which was **belligerent and assertive**, elaborated on the course of actions of Hamas and the other terrorist organizations (the so-called "resistance") had taken during the past two years and indicated **the challenges facing them**. He stressed that **the military buildup of the various organizations had given them the capabilities to stand up to Israel in future confrontations, far beyond what they had in Operation Protective Edge**. Their military capabilities **include thousands of rockets that could allegedly turn Israel's cities into ruins and ghost towns; they have thousands of anti-tank missiles, hundreds of tunnels, hundreds of control and command rooms and hundreds and even thousands of ambushes to attack IDF forces if they enter the Gaza Strip**.



**Yahya al-Sinwar delivers his belligerent speech to Palestinian youngsters in the Gaza Strip (Shehab Facebook page, November 4, 2019).**

► Yahya al-Sinwar's speech came in the wake of the rocket fire initiated by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) three days previously (November 1, 2019). Al-Sinwar seems to have exploited the speech **to send a message of deterrence to Israel** in response to the threats heard in Israel following the rocket fire, and **to warn Israel not to begin a broad military operation in the Gaza Strip**. Al-Sinwar stressed, however, **that the struggle against Israel**

**had to continue** and sent Israel a threat (see below). However, he added that  **Hamas knows how to deal with Israel without taking steps leading to a broad military confrontation, noting 12-13 short rounds of escalation during the past two years that did not escalate.**

► In addition, al-Sinwar's speech was also intended to **provide a response for what is perceived as a PIJ "success."** It was widely covered by the media, which represented the PIJ as conducting its own independent policy regarding the confrontation with Israel. For the internal Gazan arena, **the meeting and speech may have been aimed to calm the Gazans' emotions resulting from their difficult humanitarian situation, and possibly also to provide a response to the expressions of disappointment with the results of the return march project.** PIJ-affiliated activists used the social networks to criticize Yahya al-Sinwar's speech. For example, senior PIJ figure Isma'il Abu Khreis wrote on his Facebook page that **"You [i.e., Yahya al-Sinwar] don't have the PIJ in your [pocket], and you don't pay anyone [in the PIJ] a salary"** (for further responses see the Appendix).

Yahya al-Sinwar ended his speech with **a threat against Israel.** He said that **breaking the "siege" [of the Gaza Strip] is one of the greatest challenges facing [Hamas and the Palestinian people].** So far, he said, the Palestinian people have been very patient and shown restraint with the siege, but now they can no longer remain silent. He said the Palestinian people could no longer bear the situation. "Some of the Israeli leadership," he said, "competes with one another in issuing threats. And we say to them, there is a solution. **The humanitarian problem of the Gaza Strip has to be the number one priority on the [Israeli] agenda.**" He ended his speech by saying, **"Prepare yourselves for something big [to happen], because we will no longer agree for this situation to continue. We can no longer bear it and our patience is at an end."**

► The main points of Yahya al-Sinwar's speech and criticism of it on the social networks follow in the Appendix.

## Appendix

### The main points made by Yahya al-Sinwar (al-Aqsa, November 4, 2019)

#### Overview

Since Yahya al-Sinwar was elected as head of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip (February 2017), he has made it his habit to convene various forums (young people, women, journalists) to explain Hamas' policies. This time he chose to meet with young Gazan men and women, whom he considers an important target audience. He began his speech by making it clear that the objective of the meeting was to review for the audience the course of actions of the "resistance" [i.e., Hamas and the other terrorist organizations] have taken in the past two years and the future challenges facing the "resistance."

► Yahya al-Sinwar praised the young men and women of the Gaza Strip and criticized those who spread rumors that the younger generation is leaving the Gaza Strip. He said that in the Gaza Strip there were **70,000 armed young men who served in the ranks of [the Izz al-Din] Qassam [Brigades]; the Jerusalem Brigades [the PIJ's military-terrorist wing]; the [al-Nasser Salah al-Din] Brigades (the Popular Resistance Committees' military-terrorist wing); the military wings of the other organizations and the security apparatuses.**<sup>1</sup>



**Yahya al-Sinwar speaks before the audience of Palestinian youngsters (Shehab Facebook page, November 4, 2019).**

► Yahya al-Sinwar said that Hamas (and the other terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip) **had taken their course of actions in six main directions over the past two years:**

<sup>1</sup> I.e., Yahya al-Sinwar related to Hamas' security forces as a military force in every respect and not as security apparatuses.

- ◆ **Promoting internal Palestinian cooperation:** Yahya al-Sinwar accused the Israeli security services of fueling the internal Palestinian schism. However, he added, there are examples of cooperation [among the various organizations] in the Gaza Strip: **the joint operations room** of representatives from 13 military forces, and the **Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March**, which operates the marches.
- ◆ **Fostering Arab, Islamic and international connections:** al-Sinwar stressed Hamas' political achievements **in fostering relations with Egypt, Qatar and Iran. He praised the support Iran gives the organizations in the Gaza Strip, which includes money, arms and training.**
- ◆ **Building up military power and coping with Israel:** al-Sinwar related to the military buildup in the Gaza Strip since Operation Protective Edge and the advanced capabilities Hamas and the other organizations have developed to withstand Israel in future confrontations.
- ◆ **Establishing internal security in the Gaza Strip:** al-Sinwar related to Israel's [so-called] attempts to undermine security in the Gaza Strip. He claimed most of the attempts had failed because of the successes of the security services in the Gaza Strip.
- ◆ **The humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip [allegedly] caused by the Israeli siege:** al-Sinwar described Hamas' achievements in providing a response to the humanitarian crisis, although he admitted they could not resolve it.
- ◆ **Hamas' taking responsibility for the population in the Gaza Strip:** al-Sinwar said the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip, had unwillingly accepted responsibility for the Gazan population. Hamas, he claimed, was doing its best to provide the population with services and prevent the collapse of the public infrastructure.

### Internal Palestinian cooperation

- ▶ Al-Sinwar accused Israel, and particularly the Israeli security services, of fueling the internal Palestinian schism. However, he said that despite the schism there were important examples of cooperation among the organization. **He mentioned the joint operations room of 13 military apparatuses of the various organizations in the Gaza Strip, and the Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March, which has held return march activities every Friday for [more than] the past year and a half.**

## Fostering Arab, Islamic and international connections

► According to Yahya al-Sinwar many Arab states closed their doors to Hamas, claiming Hamas first had to settle its disputes with the United States. However, he said, **the "resistance" had made impressive achievements with three countries.**

- ◆ **Egypt:** According to al-Sinwar, after Egypt settled its differences with Hamas relations became much closer between the two. He gave Egypt credit for opening the Rafah Crossing and the entrance of goods into the Gaza Strip.

- ◆ **Qatar:** According to al-Sinwar, **during the past five years Qatar has given Hamas about a billion dollars for various projects such as housing, the infrastructure, fuel, electricity, the salaries of officials and funds for needy families.**

- ◆ **Iran:** According to al-Sinwar **Iran makes a great contribution to the military buildup of the "resistance" in the Gaza Strip.** He said that without Iranian support for the "resistance" and Palestine, they would not have gotten to where they are now. He added **that Iran supported them with money, weapons and training.**

## Military power buildup and coping with Israel "(the enemy")

► Al-Sinwar said that in recent years **the "resistance"** (i.e., Hamas and the other terrorist organizations) **had built a much larger military power than what it had at its disposal during Operation Protective Edge.** The military power, he said, **could stand up better to any entrance into the Gaza Strip of an Israeli military force.** He said that **in Operation Protective Edge they had hundreds of anti-tank missiles, while today they have thousands which were manufactured in the Gaza Strip. They also have rockets which could turn Israel's cities into ruins and ghost towns.** As an example he gave the most recent round of confrontation with Israel, during which **in one rocket barrage about fifty to sixty rockets had been fired.** During Operation Protective Edge, on the other hand, six to eight rockets were fired in a barrage.

According to al-Sinwar, the Palestinian military power **has hundreds of tunnels, hundreds of control and command rooms both above and below ground. It has hundreds and even thousands of ambushes waiting for IDF forces if they decide to enter the Gaza Strip.** Al-Sinwar added that **the "resistance" would continue to build up its power** and would not allow Israel to change the "equation of the struggle" (i.e., prevent the military buildup of Hamas and other terrorist organizations). He stressed that **the struggle against Israel had to continue.** However, **he added that [Hamas] knew how to cope with Israel without getting dragged into a broad military confrontation. He said the rounds of escalation over the past two years [mentioning 12-13] did not develop into long-term fighting.**

► Regarding the **return marches** al-Sinwar said the basic assumption was that the confrontation with Israel had to continue, although they understood that a full-scale military confrontation was impossible. **Thus the return marches, he said, were a wonderful invention which had achieved many objectives. The most important objectives were the revival of the concept of the "right of return" among the younger generation and exhausting Israel every week.** Al-Sinwar said the situation of on-going confrontation **preserved the spirit of struggle against the "occupation" (i.e., Israel).**

► As to the West Bank and the attacks carried out there, al-Sinwar said there were men and women in the West Bank who, if they only had the opportunity to act, there would be no Israeli presence there [an implied accusation against the Palestinian Authority, which prevents them from carrying out terrorist attacks]. However, he added that despite all the attempts to uproot the "resistance" in the West Bank, **thousands of attacks have been carried out there in recent years: vehicular, stabbing, shooting and IED attacks.**

► Al-Sinwar concluded the subject by saying that the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip had gathered strength and would continue to gather strength. **They had stood up to Israel in 13 rounds of fighting; they also confronted Israel by means of "popular resistance" activities** [i.e., popular terrorism activities] which were manifested by the return marches and with all the forms of the glorious "resistance" in the West Bank.

### **Establishing internal security in the Gaza Strip**

► According to Yahya al-Sinwar, many intelligence services, first and foremost Israeli intelligence, invest great effort to undermine security stability in the Gaza Strip. However, he said, most of the attempts have failed. He said Israel spares no effort to recruit collaborators

in the Gaza Strip, including the exploitation of extremist Islamic operatives. **He praised the successes of the security forces in the Gaza Strip in dealing with efforts to undermine local stability.**

### **The humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip caused by the "Israeli siege"**

► Al-Sinwar said **the humanitarian crisis was forced on the Gaza by the "siege" and the sanctions imposed on it**, and had hit every single household in the Gaza Strip. Therefore, Hamas had decided that before the situation exploded, [the "resistance"] would act against Israel, which al-Sinwar regarded as responsible for the situation. For that reason, said al-Sinwar, **Hamas threatened to bomb Tel Aviv for six consecutive months**. He added **that as soon as the threat had been made, figures had arrived in the Gaza Strip expressing their willingness to mediate between the sides and contacts began for a solution to the humanitarian crisis. Following the mediation efforts, he claimed, many measures had been made to ease the situation of the residents of the Gaza Strip.**

► Among the steps to ease the situation, al-Sinwar mentioned the opening of the Rafah Crossing; the delivery of money from Qatar and imposing taxes on merchandise imported into the Gaza Strip, which paid the salaries of employees in a number of sectors. However, he said, **they still were not satisfied with what they had achieved, because the humanitarian crisis was greater [than their capabilities]**. He mentioned two for solving the humanitarian crisis: one was to agree to "strategic concessions" regarding the Palestinian cause (a possibility he rejected); and the other was **to create an substantial change in the balance of power with Israel and to force it to "break the siege."** Al-Sinwar said they were working on a solution but **they [i.e., Hamas] would make no "strategic concessions."**

## The end of the speech: a threat directed at Israel

**Yahya al-Sinwar devoted the final part of his speech to the [so-called] challenge of "breaking the siege."** He said that "the challenge of breaking the siege is one of the largest facing them, and we would work at it in the future. We hope to succeed in breaking the siege so that our sons and young people will live a life of respect. [So far] we have been very patient, **but we will not continue to be patient, and we will force the enemy to break the siege.** I say here, and it is connected to the military matter, to the military challenge before us, that **our people have remained silent for a long time regarding the siege, but they can no longer remain silent.** Our people have had enough. They can't take it any more. **Some of the Israeli leadership compete with each other in issuing threats,** and we say to them, the **solution for the humanitarian problem of the Gaza Strip has to be first and foremost the opinion priority on the agenda. That is because if it is not the top priority, prepare yourselves for something big [to happen]. Prepare yourselves for something big because we will not agree to the continuation of this situation. We are fed up and can no longer be patient."**

### Criticism of Yahya al-Sinwar's speech on the social networks

► Yahya al-Sinwar's most recent speech caused **a wave of reactions and criticism on the social networks, especially from PIJ-affiliated activists.** Most of the criticism focused on the fact the **al-Sinwar mentioned his achievements and those of Hamas without mentioning the PIJ.** Some examples follow (Amad, November 4, 2019):

- ◆ **Senior PIJ figure Isma'il Abu Khreis** wrote on his Facebook page that "**You [i.e., Yahya al-Sinwar] don't have the PIJ in your [pocket], and you don't pay anyone [in the PIJ] salary.** We [i.e., the PIJ] are men of the homeland and its sons. We sacrificed what is dear [to us] for its sake. Enough cheap exaggeration...I want [to earn] my salary and live with respect, beyond that don't take care [of anything for me]."
- ◆ **Journalist Maysoun Kheil** responded that the education, health and security systems had not collapsed, but she said, "Seriously, Abu Ibrahim [aka Yahya al-Sinwar], go to the Shifaa [Hospital in Gaza City], and to a school and a market, **and see what we have come to.**" She added that her friend, journalist Hani al-Agha, has been detained for the past 40 days by Hamas security forces.



- ◆ **Yahya Hilles, a media activist affiliated with the PIJ**, tweeted a response to al-Sinwar's praise for Iran. He said that it was forbidden to speak to and forbidden to converse with someone who verified what was said by Avihai [Edri, the IDF spokesman in Arabic] and people like him. Hilles asked, "**Why stab the resistance in the back? Is there no resistance except for you [i.e., Hamas]?**"
- ◆ **Another activist using a social network affiliated with the PIJ** who chose to remain anonymous said that **what was needed on the ground was deeds and not words.**
- ◆ A tweeter **aka "Guardians of al-Aqsa"** wrote that "the question is where are you now? And where have you brought the Palestinian cause to?" (Twitter account of "Guardians of al-Aqsa, November 4, 2019).