



Yahya al-Sinwar Named Head of Hamas Political Bureau: Reactions and Significance

August 8, 2024

Overview¹

- ▶ On August 6, 2024, Hamas announced that Yahya al-Sinwar, head of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip, had been unanimously chosen as the movement's new head following the elimination in Tehran of Isma'il Haniyeh, its former head, which was attributed to Israel. Hamas represented al-Sinwar's appointment as indicating Hamas' strength and national unity.
- ▶ In the Palestinian arena, al-Sinwar's appointment was welcomed. Jibril al-Rajoub, secretary of Fatah's Central Committee, called al-Sinwar a "pragmatic, realistic, logical person."
- ▶ Iran and the "resistance axis"² congratulated al-Sinwar and called it a blow to Israel, which [allegedly] had not been able to significantly damage Hamas since the beginning of the war.
- ▶ Al-Sinwar, one of the leaders of Hamas' military wing, spent more than 20 years in an Israeli prison until his release in 2011 as part of the Gilad Shalit exchange deal. He became the most influential person in Hamas, with connections in both the movement's military and political wings. Since 2017 he has been the head of the Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip, and, with Muhammed Deif, the commander of Hamas' military wing, planned and orchestrated the terrorist attack and massacre on October 7, 2023; Deif was killed in an Israeli attack in July 2024.
- ▶ **In ITIC assessment, appointing Yahya al-Sinwar writes finish to the separation of "internal" and "external" Hamas and concentrates complete control in the hands of al-Sinwar, who will remain the decisive factor in the negotiations for the end of the war in the Gaza Strip and the release of the hostages. Since al-Sinwar has not been seen in**

¹ Click <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en> to subscribe and receive the ITIC's daily updates as well as its other publications.

² Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, the Palestinian organizations, the Shi'ite Houthis in Yemen and the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq.

public since the beginning of the war and is hiding in the tunnels in the Gaza Strip, apparently there is no continuous communication with him. He is therefore expected to rely on those in the "external" leadership who are loyal to him to promote negotiations and manage Hamas' relations with Iran and the "resistance axis."

Hamas Chooses Yahya al-Sinwar to Replace Isma'il Haniyeh

▶ Before dawn on July 31, 2024, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps announced that Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, and one of his bodyguards were killed in an attack on the guest house where they were staying in Tehran. Haniyeh was in Tehran to attend the swearing-in of Masoud Pezeshkian, the new Iranian president, which was held the previous day (Noor News, July 31, 2024).³

▶ Hamas confirmed that Haniyeh "was killed by a Zionist attack on the place where he was staying in Tehran" after attending the inauguration of the new president (Hamas Telegram channel, July 31, 2024). Hamas claimed Haniyeh had been killed "in a cowardly, treacherous killing carried out by the Zionist enemy" (Hamas website, July 31, 2024).

▶ Following Haniyeh's death, the Hamas leadership began consultations to choose someone to replace him as head of its political bureau, putting forward several suggestions. One was "the establishment of a joint leadership which would consist of Khaled Mashal, head of the 'external' political bureau, Yahya al-Sinwar and Zaher Jabarin, head of Hamas in Judea and Samaria" (al-Sharq, August 4, 2024).

▶ On August 6, 2024, the Hamas movement announced that after "extensive, in-depth consultations" Yahya al-Sinwar had been chosen to head the political bureau. According to its announcement, Hamas "expresses its confidence in Brother Abu Ibrahim [Yahya al-Sinwar] as its leader during this sensitive phase and in complex local, regional and international circumstances." Hamas added that the movement was confident that under al-Sinwar's leadership, Hamas would "complete the journey begun by Haniyeh and the previous leaders, and preserve the legacy of jihad and 'struggle' until liberation and return" (Hamas website, August 6, 2024).

³ For further information, see the August 2024 ITIC report, "[Reactions to the Deaths of Fuad Shukr and Isma'il Haniyeh.](#)"



Yahya al-Sinwar (right) and Isma'il Haniyeh (al-Manar, August 6, 2024)

Reactions in Hamas

- ▶ Senior Hamas figure Muhammad al-Mardawi stated that Yahya al-Sinwar had been chosen after internal consultations, and claimed that Hamas was still a united movement which received "national support." He said choosing al-Sinwar meant Hamas continued on its path and that October 7, 2023, had provided "a new course to follow." He added that al-Sinwar could choose his deputy without restrictions, but he had to be a member of the Shura Council, and the entire movement would obey the choice (al-Mayadeen, August 6, 2024).
- ▶ Osama Hamdan, a senior Hamas figure who lives in Lebanon, said that the choice of Yahya al-Sinwar was unanimous and that proved the movement's "vitality" (Shehab Telegram channel, August 6, 2024). He claimed choosing al-Sinwar showed that killing Hamas' leaders would not cause chaos in the movement. He said Hamas would continue to "protect" the Palestinian people and strengthen national unity (al-Arabi TV, August 6, 2024). Regarding a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, he said al-Sinwar had always been involved in the negotiations and that the team which had conducted the talks under Haniyeh would continue under al-Sinwar. However, he admitted that it was still too early to talk about how the appointment would affect the negotiations (al-Jazeera, August 6, 2024).
- ▶ Ahmed Abd al-Hadi, Hamas representative in Lebanon, said choosing al-Sinwar conveyed the message that the leader of the movement was at the heart of the campaign. He added that Hamas and all its institutions, as well as Yahya al-Sinwar himself, were now involved in the negotiations (al-Manar, August 7, 2024).
- ▶ Senior Hamas figure Taher al-Nunu, who was advisor to Isma'il Haniyeh, said that appointing al-Sinwar sent a message of unity within Hamas and was also a message of strength and confirmation that "the threats of the occupation do not scare anyone." He claimed there had been communication between al-Sinwar and the Hamas negotiating team

since the first day of the war. Referring to the Hamas position under al-Sinwar regarding the internal Palestinian reconciliation, al-Nunu said that Hamas was not and would never be an obstacle to achieving a national consensus (al-Jazeera, August 6, 2024).

▶ Three "Palestinian sources" said that senior Hamas figure Khalil al-Haya, who was al-Sinwar's deputy in the Gaza Strip, would continue to lead the indirect negotiations with Israel for a ceasefire, under al-Sinwar's direction. One of the "sources" claimed that al-Haya was trusted by both Haniyeh and al-Sinwar and was expected to continue as the movement's "diplomatic face." The "source" added that both al-Haya and Zaher Jabarin, holder of the prisoner portfolio and acting head of Hamas in Judea and Samaria, would play a greater role in the future, since both had good relations with Iran and Hezbollah (Reuters, August 8, 2024).



**Al-Sinwar with a Hamas military wing operative at a ceremony in the Gaza Strip
(al-Aqsa TV Telegram channel, August 7, 2024)**

Reactions in the Palestinian Arena

▶ Jibril al-Rajoub, secretary of Fatah's Central Committee, said that Yahya al-Sinwar was "pragmatic, realistic and logical," and choosing him was logical and had been the expected response to Haniyeh's killing (al-Mayadeen channel website, August 6, 2024).

▶ The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) welcomed the appointment, claiming that the success of the "brothers" in Hamas to conduct internal consultations and fill the political bureau's leadership void sent a "strong" message to Israel that Hamas was still strong and cohesive, and that Israel had achieved nothing despite the[alleged] "war of extermination" it was waging (PIJ combat information Telegram channel the Telegram channel, August 6, 2024).

▶ The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) expressed its confidence in Hamas' ability to overcome the "agony" of Haniyeh's death and continue his path and that of the other leaders. The PFLP wished al-Sinwar success in his new role in "protecting the rights of the Palestinian people" at such a crucial stage (al-Quds, August 7, 2024).

► Fahd Suleiman, the secretary general of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), said that choosing Yahya al-Sinwar confirmed the unity of the movement, its cohesion and stability in the face of challenges. He claimed that choosing al-Sinwar while fighting the "occupation army" was a challenge for Israel and witness to Hamas' determination "to continue the resistance until complete 'liberation'" (al-Quds, August 7, 2024).

► The Mujahideen Movement claimed that the Hamas movement's "speed and success of appointing a leader was a message of strength and a challenge to Israel, which tried to create a vacuum and internal confusion" (Safa, August 6, 2024).

Reactions in Iran and the "Resistance Axis"

► Ali Bagheri Kani, Iran's acting foreign minister, congratulated Hamas after Yahya al-Sinwar's appointment. He claimed that appointing al-Sinwar reflected the failure of the policy of the "Zionist entity" and its international supporters. He added that appointing al-Sinwar in the current "sensitive" phase brought hope, unity, strength and victory for Hamas and the Palestinian people (al-Mayadeen, August 8, 2024).

► Abdolrahim Mousavi, the commander of the Iranian Army, welcomed the election of Yahya al-Sinwar, whom he called "another special personality from the great fighters of the era." He claimed the appointment showed how the Palestinian "fighters" and Hamas wanted to continue, and meant Israel should not develop hope regarding its future (Tasnim, August 6, 2024).

► Hassan Salami, commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), sent letter to Yahya al-Sinwar congratulating him. He said the announcement of his election was a "life-giving light" after the death of Isma'il Haniyeh, and [allegedly] sowed fear and terror in the hearts of the "Zionists." He called on Hamas to continue the "path of shaheeds and fighters" and fulfill the promise to liberate "Palestine" and its capital Jerusalem. He said he and the IRGC would not hesitate to support Hamas and all "resistance" organizations (Tasnim, August 7, 2024).

► The Muslim Brotherhood welcomed Yahya al-Sinwar's appointment during the Israeli "aggression," claiming it testified to the strength of the movement's internal structure and its decision-making process. The Muslim Brotherhood said that despite the ongoing crisis and war, Hamas had chosen a new leader and proved that even the killing of its leaders did not

affect the "struggle for the liberation of Palestine" (Muslim Brotherhood Movement X account, August 7, 2024).

► Hezbollah welcomed al-Sinwar's appointment, stating that the choice sent a strong message to the "Zionist enemy" and those standing behind it, Washington and its allies, that Hamas was united in its decision and "firm in its principles." Hezbollah said that the election of al-Sinwar at such an important time in the middle of the campaign increased the "nation's" [sic] determination to continue the jihad and "resistance," and indicated that ten months after the start of the war, the leaders of the Palestinian movement still adhered to the decision to attack Israel (al-Mayadeen, August 7, 2024).

► The political bureau of the Houthis in Yemen praised the "blessed step" of the "successful" election of al-Sinwar, calling it "evidence of Hamas' strength and unity." The Houthis added that the election showed Hamas' ability to quickly fill the void in leadership, and it was a blow to the "Zionist enemy," which had tried to dismantle Hamas for more than 300 days in the war in the Gaza Strip (al-Masirah, August 7, 2024).

► Abu Alaa' al-Walaid, secretary general of the Iraqi militia Ktaib Sayyed al-Shuhadaa', called the election of al-Sinwar the first step in the response to the "crime of Haniyeh's killing" because it conveyed messages about the "resistance's" ability to adapt to changes in circumstances without affecting the confrontation. He added that it showed the "resistance" had become an institutional system capable of bearing responsibility and that the "enemy" was losing the ability to harm the resistance through "cowardly killings" (Abu Alaa' al-Walaid, X account, August 8, 2024).

Commentary in the Media

► Muamar Orabi, general director and editor-in-chief of Wattan Media Network, said that appointing Yahya al-Sinwar was part of a "strategic change" because it would affect Israel, the United States and the other regional countries. He said al-Sinwar's appointment created "a new road map" for dealing with the "resistance," freed Hamas from regional pressures and strengthened and motivated the "resistance" in the Gaza Strip. He added that the choice of al-Sinwar was symbolic, since the events of October 7, 2023, initiated by al-Sinwar, constituted an "earthquake" that broke the Palestinian people's illusion of 76 years that Israel had an invincible army (Wattan, August 7, 2024)

► Muhammad Aloush, a political commentator and student of international relations, said appointing al-Sinwar surprised many people who expected that some other "political

personality" would be chosen, and hinted at the internal forces in Hamas and the trust that al-Sinwar received from Hamas' political and military wings. He said appointing al-Sinwar sent three main messages: Hamas was capable of leading the "resistance" even after the death of Haniyeh; it humiliated Prime Minister Netanyahu; and Hamas planned to continue the fight against Israel without any change in policy or tactics (al-Jazeera August 7, 2024).

► Gazan journalist Yusuf Fares claimed that the unanimous choice of al-Sinwar conveyed Hamas' message regarding the ability of the military wing to continue fighting for a long time (al-Akhbar, August 7, 2024).

► Ayman al-Raqab, a professor of political science at al-Quds University, said that appointing al-Sinwar told Israel directly that anyone who wanted to negotiate with Hamas had to negotiate with a person hiding underground. He said that in his opinion, killing Haniyeh would upset the negotiations with Israel since Haniyeh represented "flexibility" and new ideas for resolving the issue of the hostages and ending the war. In al-Raqab's opinion, appointing al-Sinwar would make the negotiations more difficult because of accessibility and communication problems, since several days would be needed before answers could be received from al-Sinwar (Sky News in Arabic, August 7, 2024).

► Dr. Omar al-Shubaki, a consultant at the al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, said that what led to the election of al-Sinwar was the actual control of the Hamas military wing over the movement since October 7, 2023, the continued failures in promoting negotiations to end the war, the "stubbornness and procrastination" of Prime Minister Netanyahu and the inability of the international community to rein him in. He claimed Hamas' decision was therefore the result of feeling it would be futile to choose a moderate approach or show flexibility when Israel was intransigent. In his opinion, appointing al-Sinwar would not have a material effect on the negotiations, in particular since al-Sinwar had been making most of the decisions throughout the war (al-Sharq al-Awsat, August 6, 2024).

► In the assessment of Dr. Ahmed Fouad Anwar, an expert on Israel from the University of Alexandria, appointing al-Sinwar would damage the negotiations and Prime Minister Netanyahu would use it as an excuse to cancel the agreement being formulated. He added that unlike the situation under Haniyeh, when the political bureau of Hamas was abroad and direct meetings with it could be held, now things would be more complex and difficult due to al-Sinwar's "lack of public appearance" (al-Sharq al-Awsat, August 6, 2024).

► The Economist expressed concern that appointing al-Sinwar meant the control of extremists over the Hamas movement would increase, making it difficult in the future to reach an agreement with Israel to end the war. According to an editorial, while it was a technical, temporary appointment until next year's elections, the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip would most likely mean elections would not be held and al-Sinwar would retain the role. Regarding the choice of al-Sinwar over Khaled Mashal, former head of the political bureau, according to The Economist it showed Hamas wanted to continue its rapprochement with Iran and its need for continued Iranian support (The Economist, August 7, 2024).

Initial Considerations

► Appointing Yahya al-Sinwar confirmed his status as the most powerful and influential person in Hamas and it testified to the trust placed in him by the Hamas leadership. It might also strengthen his position on the Palestinian street, in light of harsh criticism that he dragged the Gaza Strip into war.

► It can also be seen as part of Hamas' response to the killing of Isma'il Haniyeh, which it attributes to Israel, and conveys an ideological message about the movement's intention to continue on the path of jihad and "resistance," since Yahya al-Sinwar represents it more than any other leader, especially after the terrorist attack of October 7, 2023.

► **Appointing al-Sinwar effectively cancels the division between the "internal" [inside the Gaza Strip] and the "external" [Lebanon, Qatar, Turkey] Hamas and turns Hamas into a centralized movement whose political and military issues are concentrated in the hands of one person in the Gaza Strip.** Until now, the head of Hamas' political bureau served as the official representative of Hamas outside the Gaza Strip, traveled around the world and had diplomatic contacts, mainly in the Arab and Islamic arena. Appointing al-Sinwar, who is besieged in the Gaza Strip and has not been seen in public since the beginning of the war, and apparently does not have continuous communication with either the "external" Hamas or the outside world, would greatly limit his abilities to promote political moves. The choice can also testify to the weakness of the "external" leadership, which has no control over what was happening in the Gaza Strip and no influence on al-Sinwar. It can also be assumed that al-Sinwar will rely mainly on his loyal followers from the Gaza Strip, including his deputy Khalil al-Haya, and his brother, Muhammad al-Sinwar, after the elimination of Muhammed Deif, the commander of Hamas' military wing, and Rawhi Mushtaha, a member of Hamas' political bureau.

▶ Al-Sinwar's intransigence in the negotiations for a ceasefire and a hostage-release deal may make such deals difficult to achieve. Without the counterweight of the "external" leadership, al-Sinwar will actually be the only person determining the terms of the deal. However, even in previous contacts, the final decision rested with al-Sinwar since he controls the fate of the hostages.

▶ The appointment indicates there may have been some communication between al-Sinwar in the Gaza Strip and the "external" Hamas leadership. Hamas figures emphasized that communication with al-Sinwar took place in the past, including during the crucial periods of the negotiations, but they did not specify whether it was direct or indirect. They claim his whereabouts are known to a very limited circle of Hamas members, no more than two or three people who provide for his needs and maintain his communications with the other leaders of the movement (al-Sharq al-Awsat, August 6, 2024).

▶ Apparently al-Sinwar's appointment will not significantly affect Hamas' relations with Iran or Hezbollah. He fosters relations with Iran and Hezbollah because he regards them as tools and sources of money and weapons. However, apparently unlike Haniyeh, he did not cultivate personal ties with the Hezbollah or Iranian leadership, and now such relations would be difficult for him to form. In all probability Khalil al-Haya, his deputy in the Gaza Strip, will be appointed as the new deputy head of the political bureau since he has good relations with both Iran and Hezbollah, which he can be expected to further cultivate.

▶ At the moment, it is unclear what effect al-Sinwar's appointment will have on the attempts to reach a Hamas-Fatah rapprochement, as well as on the discourse about "the day after" the war in the Gaza Strip.

Appendix: Portrait of Yahya al-Sinwar

▶ Yahya Ibrahim Hassan al-Sinwar, aka Abu Ibrahim, was born on October 19, 1962 in the Khan Yunis refugee camp to a family that was deported from the city of al-Majdal (now Ashkelon) to the Gaza Strip in 1948. After completing his high school studies at the high school for boys in Khan Yunis, he studied at the Islamic University in Gaza, where he received a bachelor's degree in the Arabic language and led the Islamic Bloc at the university. In 1983, he participated in the establishment of Hamas' first internal security apparatus, al-Majd ("honor"), headed by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin (al-Watan TV, February 13, 2017).

▶ Yahya al-Sinwar was involved in planning a series of attacks in which Israelis were murdered. He was also involved in the murder of many Palestinians, and in 1988, he was

sentenced to five terms of life imprisonment after being convicted of murdering five Palestinians suspected of collaborating with Israel. In prison, he was nicknamed "Abu Tanesh" ("father of the 12") after he was involved in the murder of 12 suspected collaborators, although he was convicted of the murder of five.

▶ Even in prison he continued to plan terrorist attacks and the abductions of soldiers, including the abduction of the late Nachshon Waxman in 1994. While in prison, he served as the leader of Hamas prisoners and also learned fluent Hebrew and was even interviewed in Hebrew on Israeli television. He was diagnosed with brain cancer, received medical treatment, was operated on in a hospital in Israel and his life was saved.

▶ In 2006, IDF soldier Gilad Shalit was abducted, an operation in which al-Sinwar's younger brother, Muhammad al-Sinwar, also participated. In October 2011, as part of the deal for Shalit's release, Yahya al-Sinwar was released after serving 23 years in prisons, including four years in solitary confinement.



**Yahya al-Sinwar upon his release in the Gilad Shalit exchange deal in 2011
(Karama Press, February 14, 2017)**

▶ Upon release from prison, al-Sinwar took a senior position in Hamas' military wing and liaised between the military and political wings. He was elected to the Hamas political bureau in 2012, and in 2017 he was elected head of the political bureau in the Gaza Strip, and reelected in 2021. He was the target of several Israeli elimination attempts, and his house was bombed several times. In recent years, he strengthened his position in the Strip when Isma'il Haniyeh and other senior Hamas figures moved to Qatar.

▶ Al-Sinwar was very close to Muhammad Deif, the commander of Hamas' military wing, who was killed in an Israeli strike on July 13, 2024, and they planned and orchestrated the Hamas terrorist attack and massacre in Israel on October 7, 2023, leading to the outbreak of Operation Iron Swords. On December 14, 2022, he presented his plan for the occupation of Israel and the "liberation" of Jerusalem. He also reiterated his commitment, as a former

prisoner, to release all the Palestinians imprisoned in Israel. He said "We will come to you, with the help of Allah, in a roaring flood. We will come to you with endless amounts of rockets, we will come to you with a boundless flood of soldiers, we will come to you with millions of our people, again and again" (Hamas website, December 14, 2022).

► The survey conducted by Khalil Shkaki's Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in March 2024 showed that Yahya al-Sinwar received the support of 61% of all Palestinians, while in Judea and Samaria the support was 68% compared to 52% in the Gaza Strip (PCPSR website, March 20, 2024).

► Al-Sinwar was also considered a strong supporter of the ties between Sunni Hamas and Shi'ite Iran, despite the fact that he did not share the plans for the October 7 attack with the Iranians. He also publicly thanked the regime in Tehran for giving Hamas the ability to launch missiles at Israeli territory.⁴

► Al-Sinwar is recognized as a "messianic" person with religious concepts dealing with Judgment Day and the fulfillment of the divine promise in Islam, according to which anyone who does not become a Muslim will be killed or forcibly converted. He expressed his positions in sermons, rallies and speeches while calling for the conquest of Israel (MEMRI, December 22, 2023).

► On September 8, 2015, the United States added him to its list of designated international terrorists. The State Department defined him as one of the senior members of Hamas' military wing (United States State Department website, September 8, 2015). On January 16, 2024, he was also placed on the EU sanctions list (European Commission website, January 16, 2024).

► On May 20, 2024, Karim Khan, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court in The Hague (ICC) announced he had submitted a request for arrest warrants to be issued for Yahya al-Sinwar, Muhammad Deif, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant on suspicion of war crimes and crimes against humanity.⁵

⁴ For further information, see the June 2019 ITIC report, "[During the annual Iranian-sponsored Global Jerusalem Day events, prominent were threats made against Israel and the United States, and calls to undermine the "deal of the century."](#)"

⁵ For further information, see the May 2024 ITIC report, "[The International Judicial System vs. Israel Reactions and Significance.](#)"