

Hamas leader Sinwar died alone, heavily wounded – and fully aware Israel had gotten to him

On Wednesday evening, a little over a year after he brought unspeakable suffering to thousands of Israelis, Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar was killed in a chance encounter with IDF soldiers.

While the IDF didn't officially confirm the details, a plethora of reports and eyewitness accounts in the Israeli media allow us to gain a comprehensive picture of the circumstances of the death of the world's most wanted terrorist.

After the months that Israel's security forces were hunting Sinwar through the underground maze he had built himself in Gaza, he was found by chance, walking above ground in broad daylight in the city of Rafah.

The place of his death is intensely symbolic.

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Israel's government defied months-long massive international pressure to refrain from invading the city, including explicit calls not to do so by the U.S. Kamala Harris informed the public that entering Rafah was "a huge mistake," helpfully explaining that she had "studied the maps" to reach this conclusion.

Several months later, Sinwar was found in Rafah's Tel al-Sultan district, where he had apparently been hiding for

months. Following his death, the army cleared for publication that DNA samples of Sinwar were found in the tunnel where the six Israeli hostages were murdered at the end of August, in the same district.

Sinwar apparently used the six hostages as human shields to prevent airstrikes against him and may have even given the order to execute them when IDF soldiers came close to discovering him.

Tel al-Sultan is also located just over a kilometer, less than a mile, from the Philadelphi Corridor, where Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisted the presence of the IDF was of crucial importance, again defying international and domestic pressure.

After his death, a large sum of cash and several passports, including one belonging to a UNRWA teacher, were found. This could suggest that Sinwar was trying to approach the border and flee to Egypt – though this remains unconfirmed.

Also symbolic is the fact that the unit that ended up killing Sinwar is the same force of the 828th Infantry School (Bislah) Brigade that was responsible for mistakenly killing three Israeli hostages it believed to be terrorists last December.

On Thursday, Iris Haim, the mother of one of the killed hostages, praised the brigade for killing Sinwar. "Exactly ten months ago I sent you a message, I told you to keep fighting and not to think that you shot a hostage on purpose because we need you safe and sound and to keep taking care of yourselves," she said.

"Today you did the thing we were all waiting for, you saved and continue to save us, the people of Israel, you killed Yahya Sinwar. I'm proud of you."

According to the IDF, intelligence information had indicated that unnamed senior Hamas officials were present in the area.

According to an only partly confirmed, but widely cited audio message by one of the involved soldiers, the force was in the area to detonate explosives remaining in the field.

After the detonation, he said they saw four terrorists fleeing the area and a fifth – who turned out to be Sinwar – throwing grenades at them out of a nearby window.

The soldiers shot at the four terrorists, killing two of them. Then, they directed a tank to fire several rounds into Sinwar's building. When they saw that he had survived, they fired a Matador missile at him – but he still survived.

Then they sent a drone into the building to see whether he was still alive. The IDF later published part of the footage, showing Sinwar on a sofa, with a bandana covering his head and face, one arm apparently blown off from the tank and missile fire.

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Sinwar tried to chase off the drone by throwing stones and a stick at it. "Then, apparently he lifted his head, and a sniper took him down, a head shot, a Bisliah sniper took him down," the unnamed soldier said in the voice message.

Only on Thursday morning did the soldiers reach the building on foot and discover Sinwar lying dead in the rubble of the booby-trapped building. They took pictures of the body and especially the teeth, and also cut off a finger to be able to quickly identify him through DNA and fingerprints.

Only later was the body carried out of the building, possibly due to the booby-traps that had to be deactivated first. After extensive testing, on Friday it was taken to an undisclosed location in Israel, secured by a special escort of the Israel Police.

His body weight was found to be in the normal range, indicating he hadn't lacked for food, in contrast to the Israeli hostages that were found murdered. Results of a toxicology report haven't been published yet, Ynet News reported.

His body showed a gruesome head wound, his right arm was blown off below the elbow, and he was wounded by shrapnel from the tank shells and the Matador missile. Later, the building partially collapsed on him.

Israeli media reported that in addition to cash, passports and several other items, Sinwar carried information that could help locate Israeli hostages. Pictures showed a scrap of paper with what looked like drawings of tunnel routes.

Many in Israel, including some hostage families, are now demanding to use Sinwar's body to help negotiate the release of Israel's remaining hostages from the Gaza Strip.



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The IDF and the Shin Bet stated that "Sinwar was eliminated after a year in which he hid in the heart of the civilian population in Gaza, and in hiding above and below the ground in the Hamas tunnels."

"Dozens of actions carried out by the IDF and the Shin Bet in the last year, and in the last few weeks in the area where he was killed, reduced the area of activity of Yahya Sinwar, who was pursued by the forces, and led to his death."

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