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Yahya Sinwar as a Posthumous Social Media Legend?

By Ghada Soliman

SYNOPSIS

A narrative on the October 16 killing of Hamas leader [Yahya Sinwar](#) has been widely disseminated across various social media platforms in the Arab world. The portrayal of Sinwar as a martyred freedom fighter solidified his legacy and is inspiring resistance movements against Israel.

COMMENTARY

Yahya Sinwar, the [mastermind](#) of the October 7 attack on Israel, has been portrayed as a valiant freedom fighter following his killing by soldiers of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). [Video footage](#) of the killing broadcasted across media outlets has elevated his status to that of an icon among his supporters and a magnet for potential recruits to Hamas.

Sinwar had long been recognised as a key military figure in Hamas and involved in various capacities since the organisation's inception. He was arrested by Israel in 1989 for involvement in militant activities and sentenced to multiple life terms in prison. However, he was among those released as part of a prisoner exchange deal over the Israeli soldier, [Gilad Shalit](#), who was captured by Hamas militants in 2006.

Divergent Perspectives About Sinwar's Death

Reactions to the demise of Sinwar have varied depending on geopolitical underpinnings. As expected, several countries in the West, particularly those aligned with Israel, including the [United States](#), released statements expressing hopes that his death was [a significant step](#) towards ending the ongoing Israeli-Hamas war.

On the other hand, the Arab states have mostly [been silent](#), including Qatar, despite

its robust relationship with Hamas. Before Sinwar's death, Doha had hosted several Hamas leaders – including Sinwar's predecessor, Ismail Haniyeh, before his assassination by the Israelis – and continues to play an active intermediary role in ceasefire negotiations between Israel and Hamas.

Saudi Arabia, a key regional power, has also been relatively silent about Sinwar's death, although the authorities have taken action against a local media company, the [MBC Group](#), for a controversial news report aired on October 18 titled "[The Millennium of Salvation from Terrorists](#)". The report discussed the deaths of various terrorist leaders, including references to figures from organisations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS. Notably, it mentioned Yahya Sinwar and Ismail Haniyeh in a manner that equated them with these terrorist groups.

This portrayal was perceived to be at odds with Saudi Arabia's media regulations and policy stance, which aims for neutrality. Saudi Arabia's position regarding Hamas is influenced by its antagonistic relationships with regional actors Iran and Qatar, both of whom have historically provided support to Hamas. Hence, its action against the MBC group reflects its broader strategy of upholding a less contentious position in regional politics while navigating the complexities of its alliances.

As for Iran and its proxies, Hezbollah and the Houthis, Sinwar was regarded as a martyr and a hero who fought against what they perceived as Western imperialism and Israeli aggression.

The Iconisation of Sinwar After His Death

Significantly, Yahya Sinwar has already become part of [modern Arab folklore](#) shortly after his death. His supporters have circulated on social media a photo of him sitting on a sofa in a Rafah home, hurling a stick at an Israeli drone despite being badly injured. Among the captions accompanying the photo, there was one "[I threw at him a Sinwar stick](#)" – implying that he did everything possible to resist even when armed with only a stick – an expression which has now become a proverb in the *Encyclopaedia of Modern Arabic Folklore*.

Although there has been relative silence from Arab governments, social media have been abuzz with reactions to Sinwar's death. In particular, the video footage showing Sinwar's final moments has made an enormous impact. Severely injured, having lost an arm, and all alone by himself, Sinwar struck a heroic figure as he threw a stick at the enemy's drone in a final act of defiance, proving false Israeli claims that he always had hostages with him to avoid being targeted. His death transformed him into an iconic figure, and he is now labelled a legend by many users on social media platforms across the region.

On 18 October 2024, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi, declared that Sinwar would continue to be a [source of "inspiration"](#) for movements against Israel across the Middle East, citing the Palestinian leader's unwavering struggle as a symbol of resistance. Araghchi could not have been more prescient. As it so happened, on October 24, an eleven-year-old Palestinian boy, Abdullah Hawash, confronted Israeli military vehicles in the West Bank with a stone in his hand. Before

an Israeli sniper shot him dead, he declared defiantly, "[I am like Sinwar, and I am not afraid](#)".

Conclusion

As more people are inspired by Sinwar's dedication to the Palestinian cause and the circumstances of his death, there is a risk of further escalation in violence and terrorism. Hamas will regain its strength as Sinwar's iconisation will reinforce the organisation's recruitment efforts down the road. Social media platforms will no doubt fuel these efforts as images and narratives of Israel's war on Gaza are circulated widely.

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