Instructions Given by Yahya al-Sinwar for the October 7, 2023 Attack and Massacre

Dr. Igal Shiri, Dr. Hayim Iserovich, Avishi Karo

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Overview

- After Operation Guardian of the Walls (or "The Sword of Jerusalem Battle," as Hamas calls it) in May 2021, the Hamas leadership, led by Yahya al-Sinwar, leader of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, began planning a campaign to realize the vision of "the destruction of Israel."
- In addition to the Hamas leadership's strategic coordination with Iran and Hezbollah, al-Sinwar personally participated in planning the terrorist attack and massacre carried out by the organization's military wing.
- A document handwritten by al-Sinwar in August 2022, which was found by the IDF in the Gaza Strip[1], detailed his instructions, from the deceptions in the weeks before the invasion to the conduct of invasion itself, based on the understanding that the Israeli defense measures along the border would not be able to stop the waves of attacking terrorists.
- According to the document, al-Sinwar kept the plan secret from the other terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip, intending to involve them only in subsequent waves after Hamas had secured control of Israeli territory.
- Al-Sinwar expressed his confidence that the Hamas offensive would lead to a multi-front campaign involving Israeli Arabs, Judea and Samaria, and east Jerusalem, as well as an invasion of Israel's north by Hezbollah.
- A central part of the document is dedicated to the psychology of the attack, with al-Sinwar's explicit instructions to document Hamas terrorist operatives indiscriminately slaughtering civilians, trampling soldiers' bodies, burning residential neighborhoods, and blowing up tanks. The documentation of the atrocities was intended not only for internal use but was planned as a psychological tool to shock and terrorize the Israeli public and send a message of power to "resistance"[2] operatives in the region.

[1] The documents mentioned in this study can be viewed at the archives of The Amit Terrorism and Intelligence Research Institute at the Israeli Intelligence Heritage and Commemoration.
[2] Terrorist.

The document shows al-Sinwar's control over all the details of the invasion as it was carried out during the early hours of the attack on October 7, 2023. In ITIC assessment, al-Sinwar was not content with a large-scale terrorist attack or with sending a message but aspired to a complete strategic change on the ground through prolonged physical control of command centers, communication hubs, and IDF bases to leverage Israel's initial confusion and establish a new reality before the IDF or the international community could respond.

Background

Hamas regarded Operation Guardian of the Walls (May 2021), or "The Sword of Jerusalem Battle," as Hamas calls it, as a major achievement for the movement and a defeat for Israel, as reflected in statements by Hamas officials who referred to it as a "divine victory." For Hamas, especially Yahya al-Sinwar,[3] head of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip, the campaign "proved" that the vision of the destruction of Israel, to which the movement has adhered since its founding.

As a result, al-Sinwar began promoting military plans for the "decisive" campaign, called "The Promise of the Second Time." Hamas documents found by IDF forces showed how al-Sinwar planned the campaign in coordination with the other members of the "resistance axis,"[4] especially Iran and Hezbollah. Al-Sinwar drafted three possible scenarios for a multi-front confrontation, even though he acknowledged that in the end, Hamas would have to manage without Iranian involvement and with only partial involvement by Hezbollah.

Another document found by the IDF was handwritten by al-Sinwar on August 24, 2022. It presented al-Sinwar's detailed tactical and strategic plans, more than a year before Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, 2023.

The Plan to Invade Israel

The IDF carried out an investigation into the perception of the pre-October 7, 2023 threat of an attack from the Gaza Strip and Israel's response. The results showed that in the assessment the IDF and other security agencies, Hamas' capabilities to conduct a large-scale invasion of Israeli territory were limited. The assessment relied on an overconfidence on the strengh of the barrier built along the border [the border security fence] and on a combination of intelligence and

[3] Al-Sinwar, who was appointed head of the Hamas political bureau in August 2024, was eliminated by the IDF in the Gaza Strip on October 16, 2024.

[4] Iran, Hezbollah, the Palestinian terrorist organizations, the Houthis in Yemen and the Shi'ite militias in Iraq.

defensive firepower that was considered sufficient to repel mass demonstrations or a limited raid attempt on the border, even given force reductions due to IDF constraints (IDF spokesperson and Israeli media, February 27, 2025). On the other hand, the document reveals that al-Sinwar had identified the IDF's weak points, and his instructions were meant to exploit them to maximize "achievements," especially in the opening stages of the attack.

Lulling Israel into a False Sense of Security

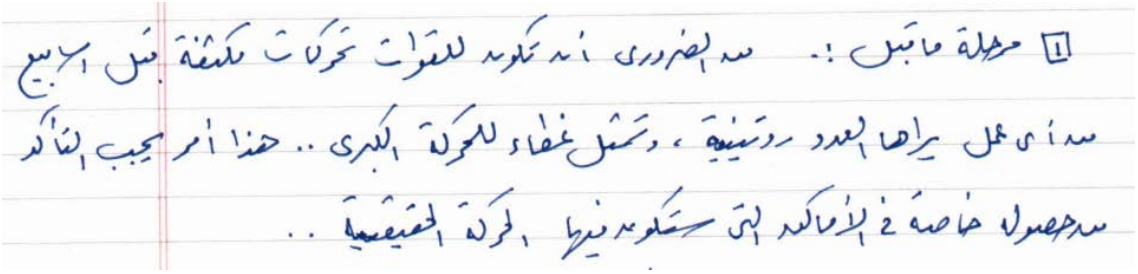
- Long before the attack, Al-Sinwar instructed his men to carry out military "simulations" in the Gaza Strip. but stressed that they should appear to the "enemy" as routine and thus not be perceived as actual preparations for military actions. In that way, al-Sinwar sought to blur the real movements of Hamas operatives, especially near the border fence, and to create a false impression of normal activity.
- In late August and early September 2023, several unusual events took place near the Gaza-Israel border, including protests near the security fence during which rocks and explosives were thrown at IDF forces and attempts were made to climb the fence. In addition, tractors and heavy equipment were seen leveling the ground and clearing access routes, allegedly in preparation for the re-establishment of "return camps" for demonstrators protesting the continued "siege" of the Gaza Strip and demanding the return of refugees to the lands from which they had been uprooted.[5] In retrospect, the events were consistent with al-Sinwar's instructions to intensify activity near the border.



Right: Protesters climbing the security fence in eastern Gaza (Hassan Aslih's Telegram channel, August 21, 2023). Left: Preparations for "return camps" (Safa, August 30, 2023)

[5] For further information, see the wept 2023 ITIC report, **Possible Renewal of the Return Marches**

The preliminary stage of the raid [attack]: It is essential that the forces carry out intensive movements[1] weeks before any activity in such a way that the enemy will perceive them as routine. That will serve as camouflage for the major [raid]. They must take place especially in the locations where the [raid] is planned to occur.

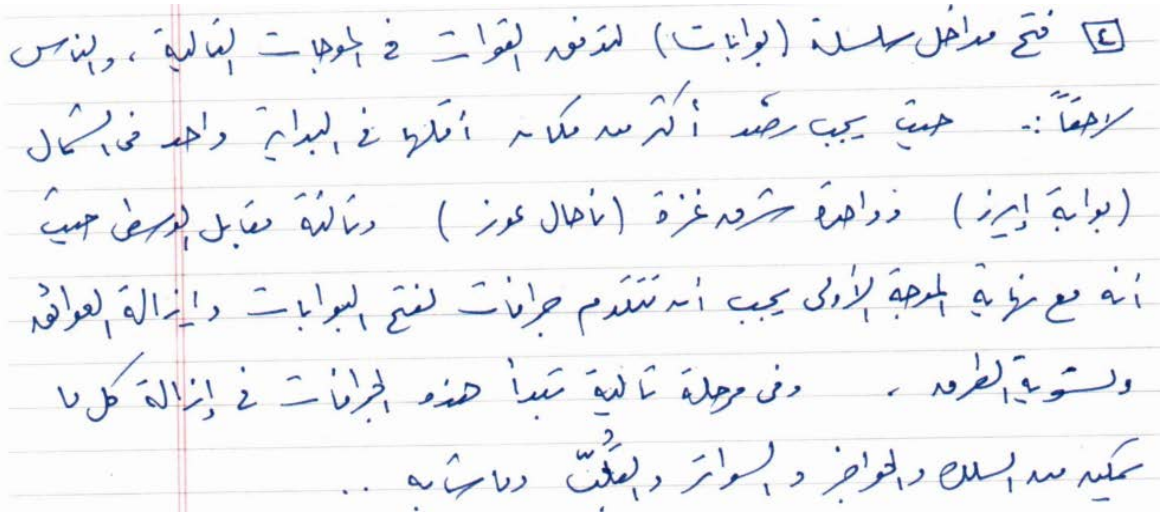


From al-Sinwar's handwritten document

The Invasion of Israeli Territory

A critical tactical stage in the plan was breaking through openings in the border fence and the rapid, coordinated entry of Hamas units into Israeli territory. Al-Sinwar marked three strategic infiltration points along the border: in the north of the Strip, in the east, and opposite the central refugee camps. He emphasized the need to use bulldozers and heavy engineering equipment to break through gates and clear obstacles to facilitate the entry of additional invading forces.

4. The [gates] must be breached in sequence to allow the flow of the next waves of forces and subsequently of personnel. Several locations must be selected. At minimum, one in the north in the area of the Erez Gate, one east of Gaza in the Nahal Oz area, and the third opposite the central camps, so that by the end of the first wave, bulldozers will advance, open the gates, clear obstacles, and level the routes. In the next stage, the bulldozers will begin removing the barbed wire fence, barricades, earth embankments, positions, etc. as much as possible.



From al-Sinwar's handwritten document

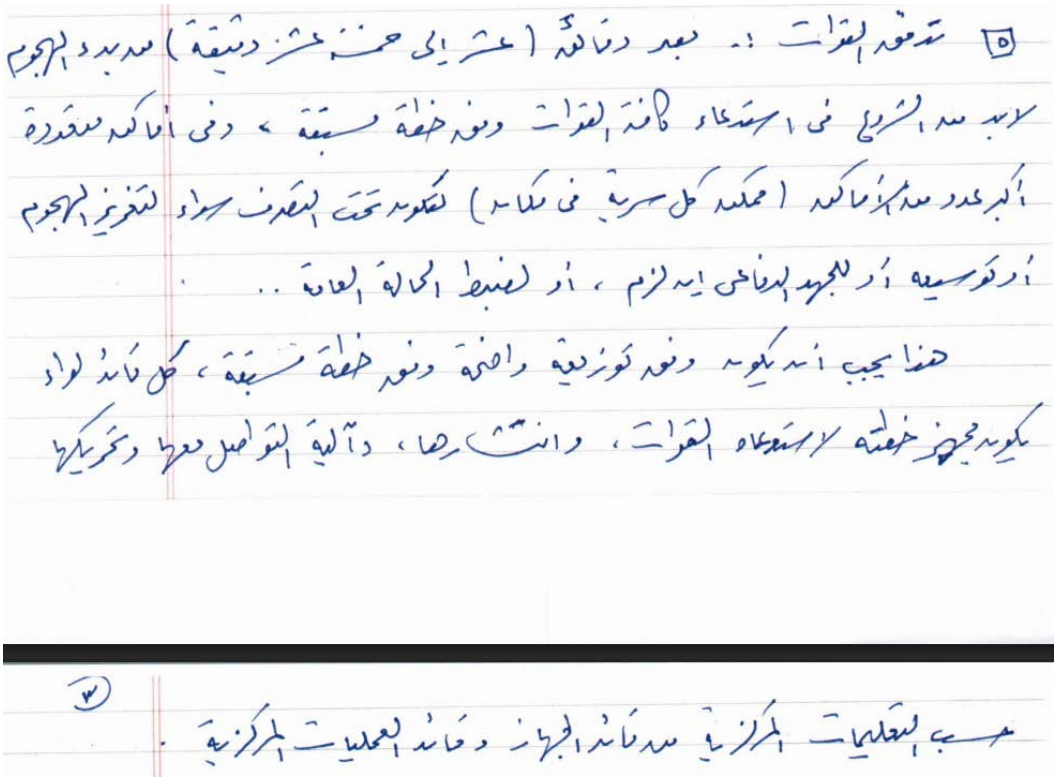


A Hamas tractor breaching the border fence during the October 7 attack
(Shehab News Agency Telegram channel, October 7, 2023)

Al-Sinwar estimated that the initial phase would take only 10–15 minutes, a testament to his confidence in Hamas' ability to overcome Israel's border defenses. He stressed that the forces had to deploy in as many locations as possible according to the plan to allow the orderly and controlled activation of all forces, while ensuring dispersed deployment on the ground to generate operational flexibility. Each brigade commander could call up, deploy, and activate forces according to the instructions of the military wing commander and the central operations

headquarters, proof of a hierarchical command-and-control system tracking the overall battle picture.

A few minutes (10 to 15 minutes) after the start of the attack it is essential to begin summoning all the forces according to the plan and at numerous locations, as many locations as possible (each company can be in a different place), so that the forces will be available to reinforce the attack for its expansion, for a defensive effort if necessary, or to control the overall situation. There must be a clear division in accordance with the plan. Each brigade commander must have a plan prepared for summoning the forces, deploying them, the mode of communication with them, and their operation according to central instructions from the commander of the apparatus [Hamas' military wing] and the commander of the central operations [headquarters].

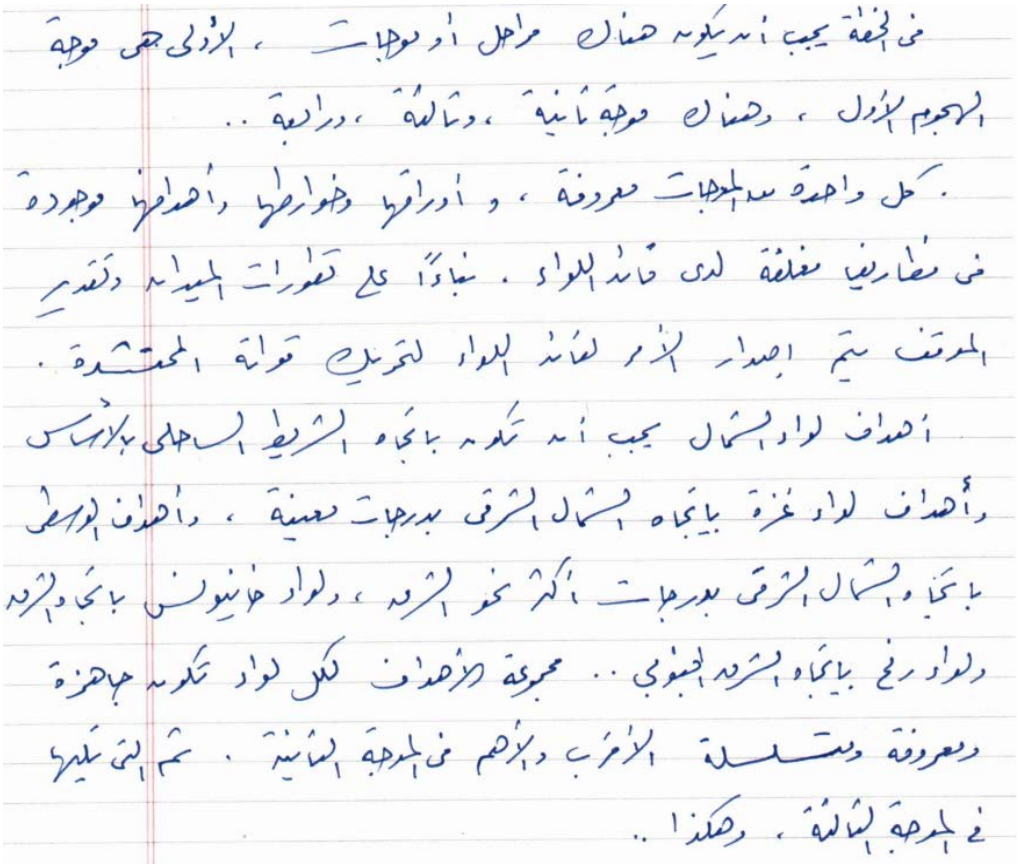


From al-Sinwar's handwritten document

- Al-Sinwar noted that after the first wave of the raid, three additional waves would follow, each with its own maps and objectives according to the instructions in the hands of the brigade commander responsible for the sector and depending on developments on the ground. The document also presented the directions of advance for each brigade.

The plan must include stages or waves. The first is the initial attack wave, followed by a second, third, and fourth wave. Each wave is predetermined and has its own documents, maps, and objectives sealed in envelopes held by the brigade commander.

Based on developments on the ground and situational assessments, an order will be given to the brigade commander to move his deployed forces. The objectives of the Northern Brigade should be primarily toward the coastline. The objectives of the Gaza Brigade should attack towards the northeast, the Central Camps Brigade, northeast-east. The objectives of the Khan Yunis Brigade should be eastward, and the objectives of the Rafah Brigade should be towards the southeast. The full set of objectives for each brigade must be prepared, known, and organized in order, such that the more critical and significant targets are prioritized for the second wave, followed by the next targets in the third wave, and so on.

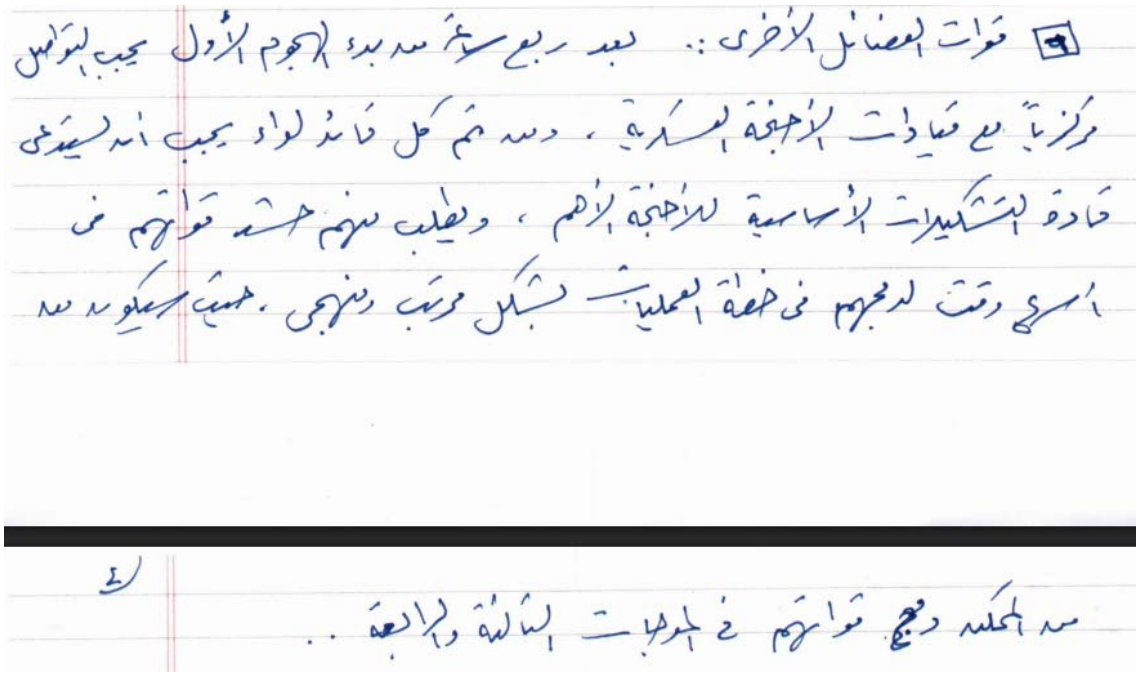


From al-Sinwar's handwritten document

According to al-Sinwar, Hamas units were to lead the invasion of Israeli territory in the first and second waves, while the Palestinian terrorist organizations were to join in the later waves. He stated that contact with the commanders of the military wings of the other organizations should begin about fifteen minutes after the invasion had begun, and only then were they to

assemble their forces for joining the fighting. Consequently, it can be inferred that the other factions were not aware of the scheduled date of the invasion and perhaps not even of the detailed operational plans. An IDF investigation confirmed that only during the third wave of the raid did hundreds of terrorists from other terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip join, along with thousands of terrorists unaffiliated with any organization (IDF spokesperson and Israeli media, February 27, 2025).

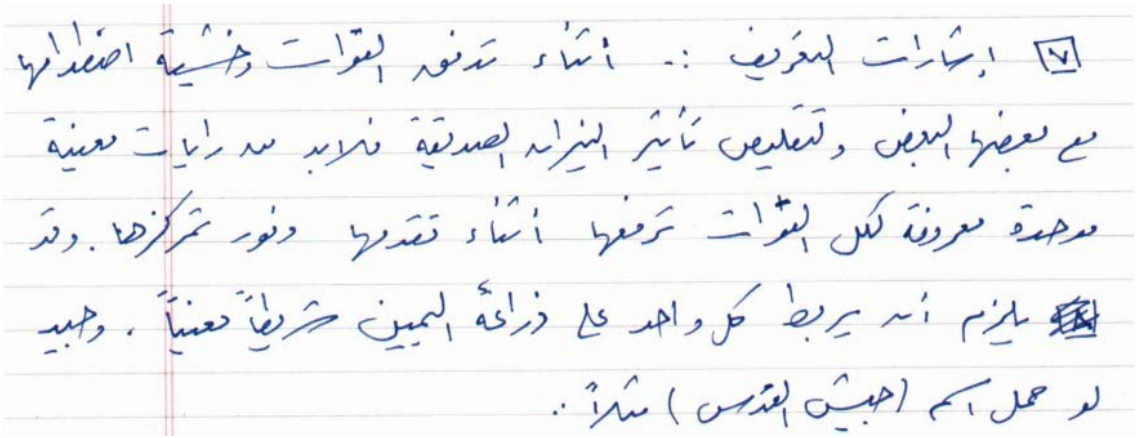
Forces of the other organizations – a quarter of an hour after the start of the initial attack, contact must be made across the entire Strip with the commanders of the military wings of other Palestinian organizations, and then each brigade commander must summon the commanders of the basic forces of the most important wings and ask them to concentrate all their forces as quickly as possible in order to integrate them into the operational plan in an orderly manner, so that their forces can be incorporated into the third and fourth waves.



From al-Sinwar's handwritten document

Although al-Sinwar did not specify the number of Hamas operatives meant to participate in the raid, it is implied from the document that the number ranged from several hundreds to thousands. For that reason, and to avoid incidents of friendly fire among Hamas operatives and with other factions, he instructed his men to place identifying marks on their arms.

7. During the flow of forces, and out of concern that they might collide with one another and thereby weaken the firepower of our forces, it is essential that there be uniform and recognizable flags for all forces, so that they raise them during their advance and immediately after they position themselves. It may be necessary for each person to wear a specific armband on their right arm. Preferably, for example, the band should be marked with "al-Quds Army."

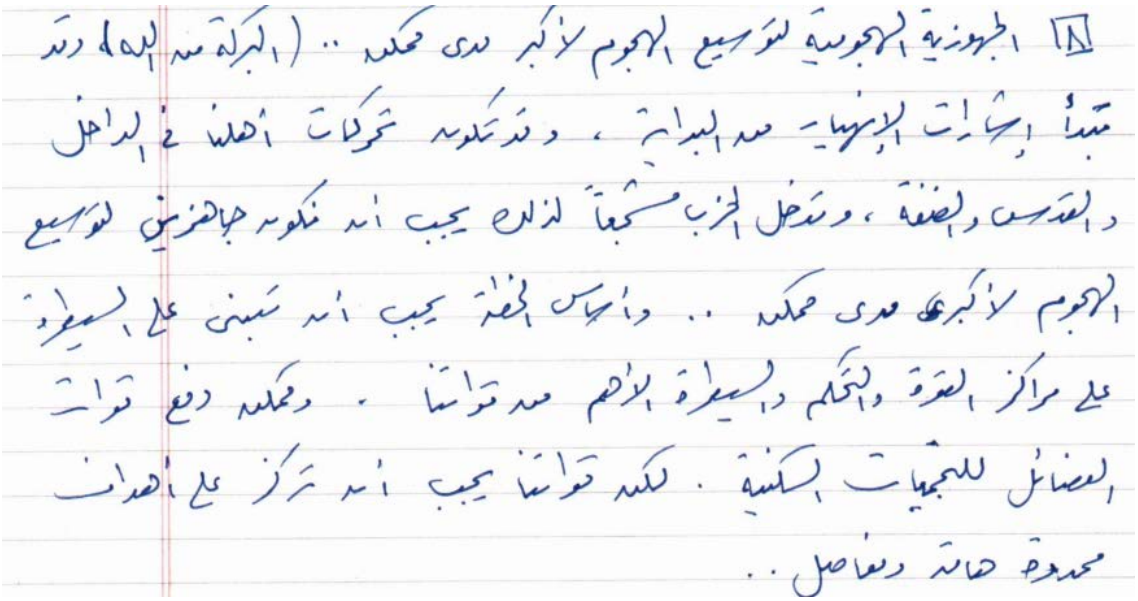


From al-Sinwar's handwritten document

Expanding the Attack

In al-Sinwar assessment, Israel's defenses would collapse rapidly with the start of the attack, as indeed happened. He also believed the Hamas invasion would trigger a chain reaction for a multi-front campaign, involving fighting from Judea and Samaria and east Jerusalem, as well as from Israeli Arabs ("the internal front"), and with a Hezbollah invasion from the north. Al-Sinwar noted that Hamas forces had to engage with "defined, important, strategic" targets, although he did not specify them, while the other Palestinian organizations could simultaneously operate against civilian population centers.

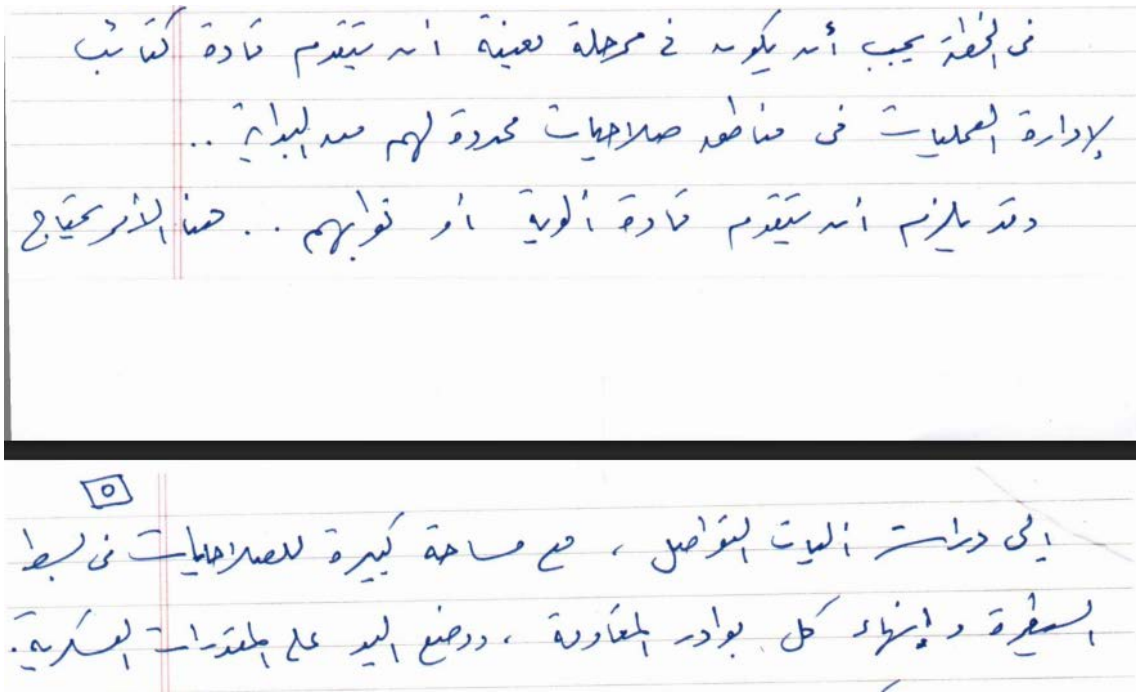
8. There may be indications of enemy collapse already at the outset, and the movements of our people "inside" in Jerusalem and the West Bank, as well as Hezbollah's attack, may encourage this. Therefore, we must be prepared to expand the attack to the maximum. The core of the plan must include control over centers of power and command and control over our main forces. Forces of the Palestinian organizations may be sent to population centers, but our forces must concentrate on defined, important objectives and key positions.



From al-Sinwar's handwritten document

According to al-Sinwar, brigade commanders and their deputies were not to join the first wave of the invasion but would integrate later, understanding that they would need to manage the fighting in the broader areas captured by the Hamas military wing, while maintaining the boundaries of responsibility allocated to them to prevent friction between the various brigades.

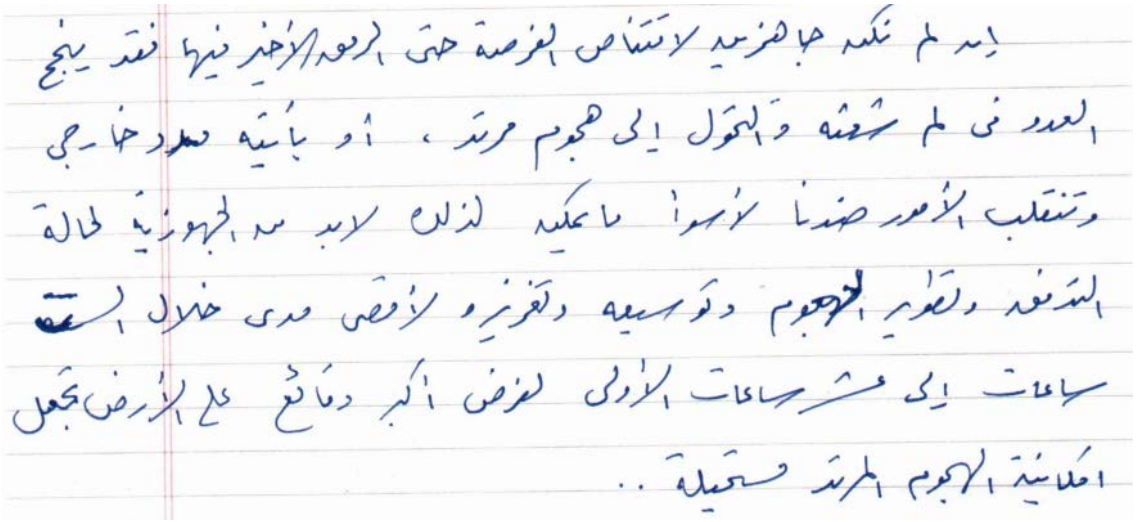
The plan must include a specific stage in which the [Hamas] battalion commanders will advance in order to manage the operations in their pre-assigned sectors of responsibility. It may be necessary for the brigade commanders or their deputies to advance as well. That requires examining how to manage communications, as it will be necessary to impose control over a very large area and over military capabilities.



From al-Sinwar's handwritten document

Al-Sinwar wrote that the window of opportunity for the success of the attack was between six and ten hours, during which the forces had to firmly establish facts on the ground to thwart any Israeli attempt at a counterattack. He warned that if the opportunity were not exploited, Israel would quickly recover and launch a counterattack and might also receive critical assistance, most likely from the United States. According to the IDF investigation, control over the border area was regained only during the night between October 7 and 8, 2023 (IDF spokesperson and Israeli media, February 27, 2025).

If we are not prepared to fully exploit the opportunity the enemy may succeed in regaining control of the chaos and launching a counterattack, or it may receive external assistance, in which case the situation will turn against us in the worst possible way. Therefore, it is essential to be prepared for the flow of forces (inward) and to expand the attack to the maximum during the first 6 to 10 hours in order to solidly establish facts on the ground in a way that will render any counterattack impossible.



From al-Sinwar's handwritten document

Psychological Warfare: Instructions to Massacre Civilians

In 2004, while al-Sinwar was serving a prison sentence in Israel for the murder of collaborators, he published a novel called *The Thorns and the Carnation.* At the center of the book, which parallels al-Sinwar's personal story, is a Palestinian family in the Gaza Strip and what it experiences during the developments in the Palestinian arena between 1967 and the second intifada, and the "struggle" against Israel. Throughout the book, al-Sinwar described the confrontation with Israel as a religious war and emphasized jihad and self-sacrifice as sacred values. Another theme was the need to kill as many Israelis as possible with barbaric cruelty, without distinguishing between soldiers and civilians, along with the glorification of suicide bombings and kidnappings for bargaining.[6]

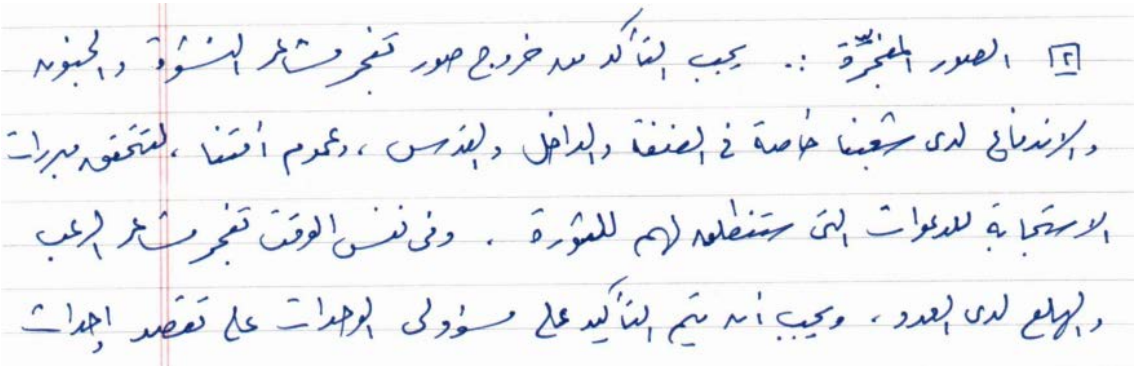
Even after his release from prison in the Gilad Shalit exchange deal in 2011 and his election as head of Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip, al-Sinwar continued to promote violent narratives, particularly the need to kill Jews by any means possible. In a speech he gave at the World Jerusalem Day event in Gaza on April 30, 2022, he urged Palestinians, especially Israeli Arabs ("Arabs of the Negev, the Triangle, the Galilee, Haifa, Jaffa, Acre, and Lod") and urged

[6] Ofir Winter and Niv Shayovitz, “The Struggle Has Faces Other Than We Knew”: A retrospective reading of the book by the orchestrator of the October 7 massacre, *Strategic Assessment;* The Institute for National Security Studies, July 2025 (Hebrew only).

them to prepare a rifle or axe, a meat cleaver or any knife, to wage a religious war against the Jews. A few days later, four Israelis were murdered in an axe attack in the town of Elad.[7]

Al-Sinwar's brutality is also evident in the handwritten document found by the IDF in the Gaza Strip, where alongside the operational details of the invasion plan, he emphasized the psychological dimension of the assault through massacres that would be documented and broadcast in real time to instill terror in the Israeli public and undermine its sense of security, and to highlight the "historic justice" for the Palestinians, in accordance with the concept of the "theater of terrorism."[8]

Explosive images: Images must be released which will trigger a surge of euphoria, frenzy, and momentum among our people, especially among the residents of the West Bank, the "internal" [Israeli Arabs], Jerusalem, and our entire Islamic nation. This is meant to spur them to respond to the calls to rise up and revolt, while simultaneously sowing fear and terror among the enemy.



From al-Sinwar's handwritten document

According to al-Sinwar, stepping on soldiers' corpses, point-blank shooting, blowing up tanks and car bombs, burning entire neighborhoods, slashing civilians with knives, and documenting surrendering "hostages" would instill fear in Israelis' hearts.[9] To "justify" this religiously, al-

[7] For further information, see the May 2022 ITIC report, "Attack in Elad: Three people were killed and four injured. Hamas continues to praise and encourage attacks from Judea and Samaria while simultaneously maintaining calm in the Strip."

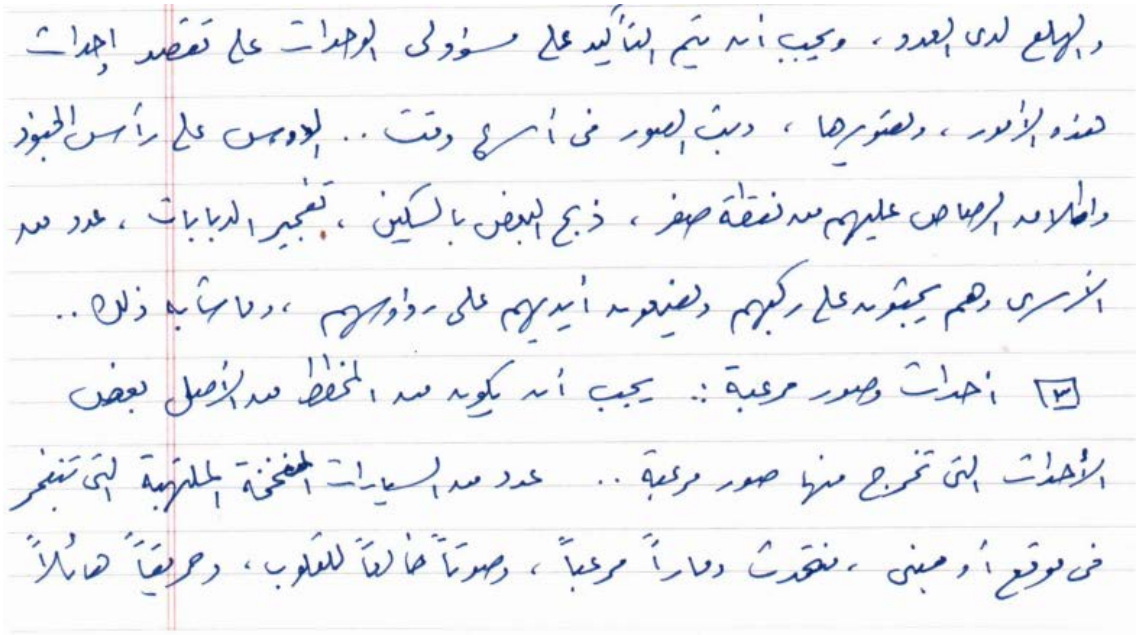
[8] Brian Jenkins, who reseraches terrorism, coined the term "theater of terror" in 1974, noting that terrorist attacks are often carefully planned to attract the attention of electronic media and the international press. He emphasized that terrorism was aimed at the people who were watching, not at the actual victims. Other researchers, including Prof. Gabriel Weimann, have pointed out that attacks are also intended to instill fear among the population of the "victim state" and to generate collective identification and serve as a means of recruiting support within the community from which the terrorist organizations originate.

[9] This is pretty much footnote 6

Sinwar cited a verse from the Quran, which says: "Allah came upon them from where they did not expect and cast terror into their hearts."[10]

It must be emphasized to the unit commanders that these things are to be carried out deliberately. That is, to document and broadcast the images as quickly as possible: stepping on the heads of soldiers, point-blank shootings, slaughtering people with knives, blowing up tanks, prisoners kneeling with their hands on their heads, and the like.

3. Events must be planned from which horrifying images will emerge. A few car bombs exploding inside an outpost or building and causing massive destruction. Heart-wrenching scenes. Enormous fires. 5 or 10 such images will break their spirit. "Allah came upon them from where they had not expected and cast terror into their hearts." Preparations must be made for two or 3 operations whose objective is to burn entire neighborhoods, a kibbutz, and so on. Fuel or diesel will be sprayed on the site from a tanker, the place will be burned, and the images will be broadcast.



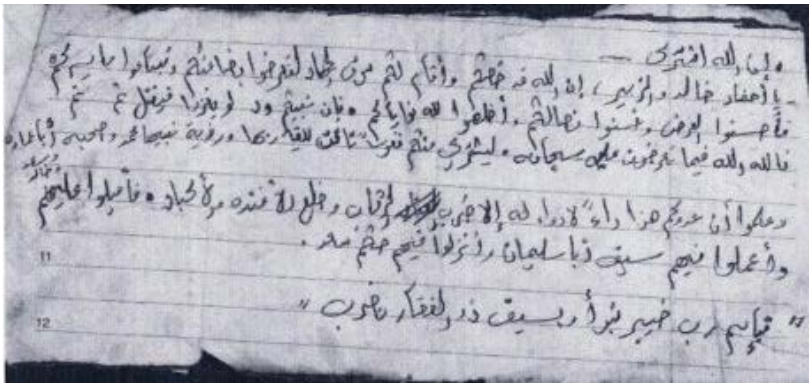
From al-Sinwar's handwritten document

Additional captured documents found in the possession of Hamas operatives who participated in the terrorist attack and massacre showed how the leadership and command level of the military wing instructed the operatives on the ground to act like barbarians towards Jews, both soldiers and civilians, justifying the actions as being carried out in the name of Islam.[11]

[10] Surah 59, verse 8.

[11] For further information, see the January 2024 ITIC report, Documents brought back from the Gaza Strip indicate that Hamas premeditated its atrocities against Israelis and to kidnap and maltreat them.

- A handwritten note was found in the pocket of a commander of the Hamas military wing who was killed in the fighting on the Israeli side of the border. He urged his operatives to kill as many Jews as possible, to behead them, to tear out their hearts and livers, for "Islam:"



The note in which a commander in the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades called on his subordinates to slaughter Jews.

- One of the documents was a Hamas battle order to carry out a massacre in Kibbutz Alumim, including instructions to cause the maximum number of casualties, to take hostages, and to establish a presence inside the buildings. The order emphasized that everyone found in the buildings was to be systematically killed, and if they could not be subdued, the houses were to be burned with their inhabitants inside. It was further clarified that the stated goal was "kill, kill, kill," and that civilians were to be used as human shields until reinforcements from additional Hamas fighters arrived (Israeli TV station Kan 11, October 14, 2025).
- In a document found in a Hamas terrorist vehicle in Kibbutz Re'im, code names for operations appeared, including *aswad* (black) to signify the murder of all hostages, *ahmar* (red) to signify the fall of a Hamas captive, and *autobus* to signify the use of hostages as human shields. The document also included instructions for setting fire to homes, vehicles, and fields (Israeli TV station Kan 11, October 14, 2023).
- Additional documents gave details of plans for attacking kibbutzim, including mapping gates, estimated response times, and division of forces into explosives units, operatives, and command units. Documents were also found presenting methods for killing with knives, information on the weaknesses of Israeli tanks, and descriptions of infiltrating communities and kidnapping civilians using elite forces, some of which had been trained in Iran (*The Washington Post*, October 22, 2023).
- The Hamas attack on the communities near the Gaza Strip border and in the western Negev on October 7, 2023, followed al-Sinwar's instructions, both in terms of the terrorists' atrocities and documentation, as images of the murders, massacres, and abductions near the Gaza Strip

and in the western Negev were broadcast live on Hamas channels and on the social media accounts of Hamas terrorists who took part in the attack and massacre, some of whom posed as journalists, such as Hassan Aslih.[12]



Hassan Aslih next to a burnt tank on October 7, 2023 (Shehab TV, October 7, 2023)

- Reports published in Israel and abroad provided testimonies from survivors about the atrocities committed during the attack and during Hamas captivity, with a focus on sexual assaults and rape:
  - A report by the Association of Rape Crisis Centers from February 2024 presented testimonies of sexual crimes committed during the attack, based on official information sources, media publications, interviews with first responders who arrived at the scene, and additional information provided to the crisis centers. According to the report, in all areas of the attack, women, girls, and men were viciously raped, sometimes under threat of weapons, with some incidents involving attacks on wounded women, gang rapes, and rapes in front of an audience. The testimonies further indicated that the atrocities were sadistic, including the mutilation of the genitals of the victims' corpses, as well as mutilating them during or after the rapes. The report noted that testimonies also indicated sexual assaults on hostages who were taken into Hamas captivity.[13]
  - In July 2025, a report by the Dinah Project[14] was published, focusing on sexual violence during the October 7, 2023 attack and during captivity, based on testimonies published

[12] For further information, see the December 2023 ITIC report, **Photojournalists in the service of Hamas in the Gaza Strip**. Hassan Aslih was eliminated on May 13, 2025.

[13] For the full report see https://www.1202.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/%D7%93%D7%95%D7%97-D7%A2%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%AA.pdf

[14] The Dinah Project is composed of six senior professionals in the fields of law and gender studies who are working to present to the world the sexual assaults and gender-based crimes committed during the October 7, 2023 attack and against hostages held by Hamas.

in open sources, including media outlets, social media, conferences, and studies. The core of the report was based on testimonies from rape survivors, former hostages, eye witnesses or those who heard accounts, and rescue personnel. The report emphasized that the use of sexual violence during the attack was widespread and systematic, and Hamas terrorists used it as a tactical weapon, including at the Nova music festival, the IDF base in Nahal Oz, and in the kibbutzim of Nir Oz, Kfar Aza, and Re'im. Clear behavioral patterns were also identified, including victims found partially or fully naked with their hands tied, gang rapes that ended in execution, and violence on genitals. The report described how sexual assaults continued during captivity, including the tearing of clothing, coercion to perform sexual acts under threat of weapons, and shaving of all body hair of male captives.[15]

- A cross-party committee of the British Parliament and House of Lords, chaired by Lord Roberts of Belgravia, published a 315-page report based on personal testimonies of survivors, bereaved families, and hostages, along with Israeli security, medical, academic, and civil society officials. The report revealed details of the atrocities committed during the October 7, 2023 attack, describing severe cases of rape and sexual torture of women, some while alive and some postmortem; brutal harm to women, children, and men, including Holocaust survivors, newborns, pregnant women, and the elderly; and executions of children in front of their parents and vice versa. In many cases, the report stated that the bodies were in such poor condition that identification was only possible through dental records (Roberts Report, January 2025).[16]
- An article in the British *Guardian* revealed evidence of systematic rape and violence by Hamas terrorists during the attack, based on 1,500 testimonies and 50,000 visual images. The article described severe cases of rape, abuse, desecration of corpses, and that sexual humiliation of women of all ages, from young girls to elderly women. Testimonies from ZAKA[17] personnel, rescue teams, and soldiers reported seeing naked women, wounded

[15] For the full report see https://thedinahproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/The-Dinah-Project-full-report-A4-pages_web.pdf

[16] For the full report see https://static1.squarespace.com/static/67bf0490d422da027d74c55c/t/6836f46e78bd6902fb4bb4aa/1748431999591/7+October+Parliamentary+Commission+Report+-+The+Roberts+Report.pdf

[17] ZAKA is a humanitarian volunteer organization based on Jewish values, providing emergency response, rescue, and recovery operations worldwide. They operate post-disaster response teams in Israel, organized by police districts.

in their genitals, some with sharp objects inside their bodies, and women who were gang raped and then murdered immediately afterward. Experts noted that the testimonies point to crimes against humanity and that Hamas operatives had been instructed in advance to view captives as spoils of war, according to radical Islamic interpretation (*The Guardian*, January 18, 2024).