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ANTISEMITISM WORLDWIDE REPORT FOR 2024

GAZA, IRELAND

THE HOUR WILL NOT COME

In early 2024, Amazon offered for sale an English translation of the novel *The Thorn and the Carnation* by Yahya Sinwar, then Hamas' leader in Gaza and the mastermind behind the October 7 attack and war crimes. Sinwar authored the novel in Arabic almost two decades earlier, when he was still a relatively unknown Hamas operative serving a life sentence in an Israeli prison for the murder of Palestinians suspected of collaborating with Israel.

The sale of Sinwar's translated work on Amazon sparked protests from pro-Israel organizations and was halted within days. The protesters argued that its content incited violence, was full of antisemitic rhetoric, and promoted terrorism. They also expressed concerns that the profits from its sale would ultimately fund Hamas.¹

After Sinwar was killed by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in October 2024, becoming a "martyr" in the eyes of his supporters, his novel gained renewed attention and was marketed by sympathizers as his final testament. The novel was re-published in Arabic and was translated into Turkish, Kurdish, and Chinese. Within months, *The Thorn and the Carnation* became the top-selling book at book fairs in Amman, Jordan; Sulaymaniyah, Iraq; and Idlib, Syria. It also did well at book fairs in Kuwait, Algeria, and Egypt.²

The English translation was sold in bookstores in Switzerland, Germany, and the United States. Connolly Books in Dublin, which was founded in 1932 and describes itself as "Ireland's oldest radical bookshop," regarded the selling of the novel as a political mission. The store's website praised the author, describing Sinwar as someone who was "martyred while bravely fighting against Israeli genocide in Gaza." Potential readers were invited to "traverse the corridors of his mind, where the seeds for the heroic 'al-Aqsa Flood' operation initiated on October 7, 2023, were sown."³

The book and its author also received positive reviews in media across the world. A month before Sinwar was killed, Sözarn Barday, a lawyer with an interest in human rights in the Middle East, wrote in the South African weekly *Mail & Guardian* that the novel is "an intimate

1 "Amazon Pulls Book by Hamas Leader Sinwar," *JNS*, April 8, 2024, <https://www.jns.org/amazon-pulls-book-by-hamas-leader-sinwar/>, and "Amazon Stops Selling Book by Hamas Leader Yahya Sinwar," *UKLFI*, April 19, 2024, <https://www.uklfi.com/amazon-stops-selling-book-by-hamas-leader-yahya-sinwar>.

2 "Yahya Sinwar's Novel 'The Thorn and the Carnation' is a Best Seller at Jordan Exhibition after His Martyrdom [Arabic]," *Masr Times*, October 19, 2024, <https://www.masrtimes.com/448127>, and Nizar al-Rihani, "Translated into Turkish: The First Edition of Yahya Sinwar's Novel is Sold Out [Arabic]," *Bawabat Tunis*, April 29, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/2whm6spt>.

3 Yahya al-Sinwar, *The Thorn & The Carnation: Combined Edition Parts I & II* [2024], <https://www.connollybooks.org/product/the-thorn-the-carnation-combined-edition-parts-i-ii>.

and heart-wrenching perspective on the Palestinian resistance.” She portrayed Sinwar as demonstrating leadership “through the escalating violence and genocide.”⁴

In Turkey’s *Yeni Şafak* daily, Selçuk Türkyılmaz wrote that “for us, reading and reflecting on [Sinwar’s] book is a duty.” He portrayed Sinwar as a “great warrior” who secured his place in history by sacrificing his life defending Muslim lands. He further described Sinwar’s biography as a source of inspiration for “Palestinians and those living in the heart of the Islamic world.”⁵

Indeed, Sinwar’s novel, largely overlooked by researchers of Hamas before and oddly enough also after October 7, and analyzed below in this article, represents a unique attempt by a Hamas leader to provide a literary expression of his movement’s ideology.

Hamas, the “Islamic Resistance Movement in Palestine,” was founded in the Gaza Strip in late 1987 following the start of the First Intifada. It was headed by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, a charismatic Palestinian theologian confined to a wheelchair who was inspired by the teachings of Egypt’s Islamist Muslim Brotherhood. It emerged as the self-declared Palestinian branch of the Brotherhood, aiming to offer an Islamist alternative to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).⁶

The strategic vision of Hamas, as outlined in its August 1988 charter, considers Palestine an endowment belonging to all Muslims. It calls for the liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea and for the destruction of the Jewish state of Israel. It declares (article 15) that this goal can only be achieved through an armed *jiḥād*, and views *jiḥād* as a personal duty, i.e., a religio-legal duty incumbent upon every Muslim.

Permanent peace agreements with Israel are framed in the charter (Article 11) as a betrayal of Islam. Therefore, it states that no Arab state or leader has the right to relinquish even an inch of it.

The charter is an antisemitic document envisioning a world without Jews at the End of Days (Article 7). It depicts Jews as a collective as the enemy of Muslims (Article 32) and describes them as Nazis (Article 20). Echoing *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the charter accuses Jews of controlling world media and orchestrating through financial means conspiracies against humanity in general and Muslims in particular, including instigating the French Revolution and the Bolshevik Revolution and forcing the start of the First World War and the Second World War (Article 22).⁷

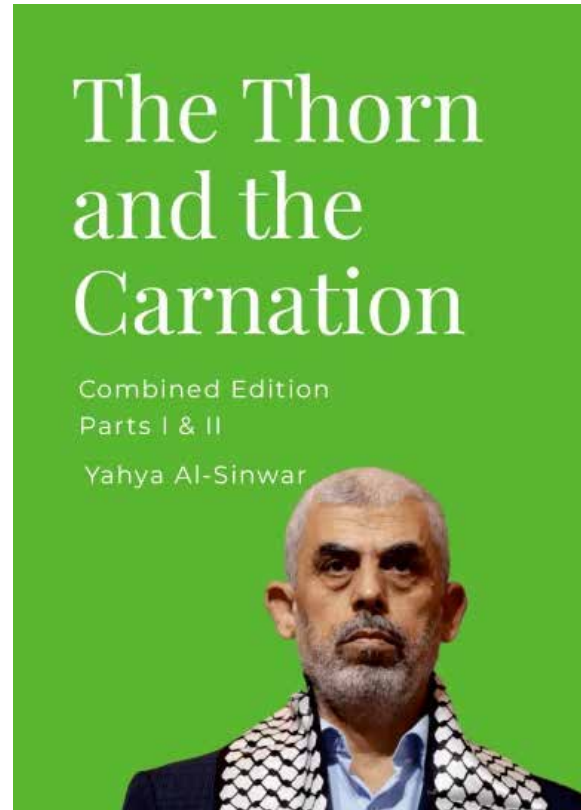
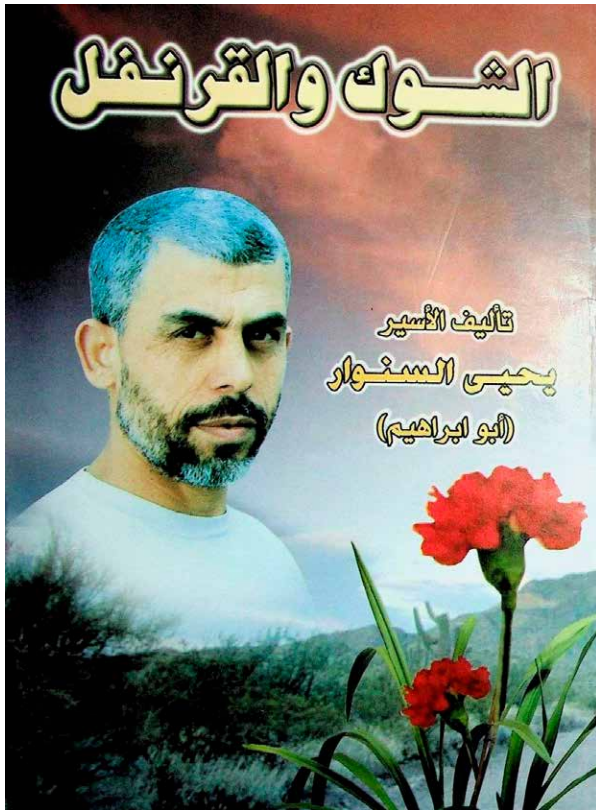
Over the years, Hamas leaders translated these ideological tenets into a political terrorist, annihilationist program. When Yasser Arafat engaged in negotiations with Israel and signed the

⁴ Söznar Barday, “The Thorn and the Carnation: A Novel by a Palestinian Leader During His Incarceration in Israeli Prisons,” *Mail & Guardian*, September 20, 2024, <https://mg.co.za/friday/2024-09-20-the-thorn-and-the-carnation-a-novel-by-a-palestinian-leader-during-his-incarceration-in-israeli-prisons/>.

⁵ Selçuk Türkyılmaz, “The Unending Struggle from Emir Abdelkader to Yahya Sinwar,” *Yeni Şafak*, October 20, 2024, <https://www.yenisafak.com/en/columns/selcuk-turkyilmaz/the-unending-struggle-from-emir-abdelkader-to-yahya-sinwar-3693096>.

⁶ Uriya Shavit and Ofir Winter, *Zionism in Arab Discourses* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 36-39.

⁷ “The Hamas Charter (1988),” Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Center for Special Studies, https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/pdf/PDF_06_032_2.pdf, 15, 17-18, 21-22, 25-27, 34-35.



Oslo Accords in 1993, establishing mutual recognition and endorsing at least rhetorically the two-state solution, Hamas vowed to thwart the diplomatic process by force at any cost. The movement launched a violent terror campaign that included suicide bombings, kidnappings, shootings, and stabbings, killing hundreds of Israeli men, women, elderly, and children.

Hamas justified the killing of Israeli civilians on religious grounds, arguing that Israeli society was militaristic, rendering every Israeli a de facto soldier whose blood was permissible to spill.⁸

In 2006, following Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, democratic elections were held for the Palestinian Legislative Council, in which Hamas won. The following year, the movement forcibly seized control of Gaza, becoming the enclave's ruling authority. Since then, the Palestinian territories in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have been divided between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, respectively.

The Middle East Quartet, the international body overseeing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, comprising the United Nations, the United States, the European Union, and Russia, set three conditions for Hamas in 2006 to be recognized as a legitimate political actor: recognizing Israel, renouncing terrorism, and accepting previously signed agreements between Israel and

⁸ "Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and His Impact on the Dissemination of Radical Islam," The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, October 23, 2022, <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/sheikh-yusuf-al-qaradawi-and-his-impact-on-the-dissemination-of-radical-islam/>.

the PLO.⁹ Hamas flatly rejected these conditions, arguing that it would not abandon its core principles or disregard the will of the Palestinian electorate who voted for the movement.¹⁰

In the years that followed, Hamas solidified its rule in Gaza. However, between 2013 and 2017, it faced strategic difficulties due to strained relations with Egypt. The Egyptian government accused Hamas of supporting terrorism in the Sinai Peninsula, which had claimed the lives of thousands of Egyptian security personnel.¹¹ Cairo tightened border restrictions at the Rafah crossing, increased efforts to uncover and destroy smuggling tunnels between Gaza and the Sinai, and even threatened to classify Hamas as a terrorist organization.

In July 2015, after the assassination of Egypt's attorney general by jihadist operatives trained in Gaza, the Egyptian government intensified its campaign against Hamas, branding it the "military wing of the Muslim Brotherhood." Hamas found itself increasingly isolated both regionally and internationally, facing financial hardship and eroding public support among Palestinians.

Against this backdrop, Hamas began reconsidering its policy and rhetoric to ease external and internal pressures, even drafting a new charter. Following internal debates, the movement retained the 1988 charter while publishing a supplementary ideological vision called "The Document of Principles" in May 2017. This document did not replace the original charter, which remained officially intact. Still, it favored more secular-nationalist terms such as "armed resistance"; denied any formal ties to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood; distanced itself from explicitly antisemitic rhetoric by claiming that "the struggle against the Zionist enterprise is not a religious struggle against Jews"; and expressed willingness to accept a temporary Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital based on the 1967 borders, without recognizing Israel, the Oslo Accords, or any permanent settlement based on the two-state principle.¹²

While this document did not facilitate reconciliation with the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, it paved the way for tactical understandings between Hamas and Egypt. However, the document offered no substantive change regarding its stance toward Israel. Hamas leaders had proposed since the late 1980s a temporary *hudna* (ceasefire) in exchange for a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, but never shifted away from their ultimate goal of liberating all of Palestine from the river to the sea, rejection of Israel's existence, and opposition to any permanent peace agreements.¹³

Sinwar played significant roles during formative periods in Hamas' history, both in its early days and during the challenging transitional phase of consolidating its rule in Gaza after his release from prison. Born in 1962 in Khan Yunis to a family of refugees from Majdal (Ashkelon),

⁹ "Quartet Says Aid to Palestinian Government Will Be Reviewed in Light of Key Conditions," United Nations, January 30, 2006, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2006/01/167612>.

¹⁰ Gilead Sher, Liran Ofek, and Ofir Winter, "The Hamas Document of Principles: Can a Leopard Change Its Spots?" *Strategic Assessment* 20, no. 2 (July 2017), 85-98.

¹¹ Jony Essa and Ofir Winter, "On the 40th Anniversary of Israel's Withdrawal from Sinai: Is the Peninsula Becoming Integrated into Egypt?," *INSS Special Publication* (May 19, 2022), <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/sinai/>.

¹² Sher, Ofek, and Winter, "The Hamas Document of Principles," 85-98.

¹³ Shavit and Winter, *Zionism in Arab Discourses*, 53-54.

CASE STUDIES

he studied Arabic at the Islamic University of Gaza in the early 1980s. He was arrested by Israel in 1982 and 1985 for his student activism and sentenced to short prison terms.¹⁴

With the establishment of Hamas, Sinwar was responsible for its internal security apparatus, *al-Majd*, which was tasked with identifying and killing collaborators with Israel. From this unit, the movement's military wing later emerged. He was arrested again in 1988 and convicted in 1989 of murdering four Palestinians.

During his imprisonment, Sinwar learned Hebrew, engaged in translation from Hebrew to Arabic, wrote two so-called research books, and authored *The Thorn and the Carnation*, which he smuggled out of Eshel Prison in Beersheba in late 2004.

According to testimonies from Israeli prison guards, Sinwar instilled fear in fellow Palestinian inmates and acquired a special status among them. After his release in the 2011 Gilad Shalit deal, he rapidly climbed Hamas' ranks and was elected the movement's leader in Gaza in 2017 and 2021. Following the assassination of Hamas' political bureau chief, Isma'il Haniyya, by Israel in July 2024 in Tehran, Sinwar was chosen as his successor, a role he held until he was killed in a confrontation with IDF forces in Rafah in October 2024.

The Thorn and the Carnation is a fictional novel, yet there are clear parallels between the author's life and his characters. The blend of fiction and reality is anchored in the novel's chronological storyline, which transitions between real milestones in the conflict with Israel, including wars, agreements, intifadas, and terror attacks.

The book tells the story of a Palestinian family uprooted from its home in 1948, migrating to the Gaza Strip and struggling with life in the al-Shati refugee camp under Israeli occupation. The mother raises alone three children and two nephews who are separated from their fathers against their will. The sons are divided between different Palestinian resistance factions and disagree on their paths. Ahmad, the first-person narrator, is a science student who gradually leans toward Hamas, influenced by his cousin Ibrahim. The latter is the novel's second protagonist, symbolically named after both Sinwar's father and future son. Ibrahim is a Hamas operative and a student at the Islamic University of Gaza, working to instill the movement's ideology among those around him.¹⁵

The Thorn and the Carnation is primarily a political essay, an ode to the violent struggle against Israel rather than an antisemitic manifesto designed to incite hatred toward Jews as such. However, precisely for this reason, the Jew-hatred that emerges from many of its pages is so revealing. It reflects, unintentionally, the deep immersion of antisemitic perceptions into Hamas's discourse and ideology, and indeed, among a significant portion of the Palestinian public that supports the movement.

¹⁴ Amira Howeidy, "Yahya Sinwar's Novel is a Tale of Palestine, and of His Own Past," *New Lines Magazine*, October 3, 2024, <https://newlinesmag.com/review/yahya-sinwars-novel-is-a-tale-of-palestine-and-of-his-own-past/>.

¹⁵ Jacky Hugi, "Even Before Anyone in Israel Knew of His Existence, Sinwar was in Prison and Writing Books [Hebrew]," *Maariv*, August 17, 2024, <https://www.maariv.co.il/journalists/article-1125239>.

The antisemitic motifs expressed through the novel's characters include depicting Jews as the eternal enemies of Muslims, attributing to them inherent, vile characteristics, and calling for their killing, even their annihilation.

A common antisemitic motif in Islamist discourse is the portrayal of Jews as the eternal enemies of Muslims, linking the Prophet Muhammad's 7th-century conflict with the Jews of the Arabian Peninsula to Hamas's present-day struggle against Jews in Israel. A particularly popular Islamic tradition that recurs throughout Sinwar's book is the Battle of Khaybar in 628, during which Muslims defeated the Jews of the city and forced them to surrender half of their property to avoid conversion to Islam.

In descriptions of violent clashes between Palestinians and the IDF, the book repeatedly invokes the chant "Khaybar, Khaybar, O Jews, Muhammad's army will return!" in various contexts: Gaza youths celebrating after damaging the tires of Israeli military vehicles;¹⁶ Arab and Muslim demonstrators rallying in support of the intifada in their capital cities outside Palestine;¹⁷ and a young man named Muhammad, preparing for a suicide attack in Gush Etzion, calling his proud mother for a final farewell and leaving his cellphone line open so she could witness the moment of his martyrdom:

*He shouted 'Allah Akbar, I am heading to Khaybar' and threw his bombs one by one. Then he stormed the main hall, firing... A firefight ensued, with the forces rushing to the scene. Muhammad fell and repeated: 'I testify that there is no God but Allah, and I testify that Muhammad is His messenger.' Then a wail escaped his mother's lips as she said: 'Praise be to Allah, who honored me with his martyrdom.'*¹⁸

The book presents the inherent and unchanging evil of Jews as an explanation for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, selectively drawing from Islamic sources. For example, Baruch Goldstein's 1994 massacre of 29 Muslim worshipers in the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron is depicted as representative of Jewish behavior rather than as an individual act of terrorism that was widely and unequivocally condemned in Israel at the time.

According to the novel, Goldstein's attack occurred just after the imam recited a Quranic verse condemning Jewish violence and evil from the days of the First and Second Temples: "We decreed to the Children of Israel in the Scripture: 'Twice you will spread corruption in the land and become highly arrogant'" (Quran 17:4). The moment after, the novel describes how a settler, "a tall man with a wild, dirty beard," snuck into the mosque and opened fire on the worshipers.¹⁹

The novel's opposition to the Oslo Accords is also justified through the alleged treachery that characterizes Jews as a collective. In one debate in the book, Hassan, a Hamas supporter, challenges Mahmud, a Fatah supporter: "Since when have [the Jews] honored agreements and treaties?" He then cites a verse from the Quran, commonly interpreted as referring to the

¹⁶ Yahya al-Sinwar, *The Thorn and the Carnation* (2004), https://archive.org/details/20240101_20240101_0853, 204. [Arabic]

¹⁷ Ibid., 326.

¹⁸ Ibid., 332-333.

¹⁹ Ibid., 286.

Jews' betrayal of their covenant with Muhammad and their support for the infidels: "How is it that whenever they make a covenant or pledge, some of them throw it away? In fact, most of them do not believe" (Quran 2:100).²⁰

Mahmud, however, refuses to be convinced, accusing Hassan of irrationality and of conflating the Jews of the past with those of today. In response, Hassan asserts that it is only a matter of time before Fatah members realize that Jews have deceived and manipulated them, just as they did to Muslims in the early days of Islam, when they "killed innocent people and fought against Allah and His messenger." He insists:

*This is what Allah has told us about them. We know them, their souls, and the way they operate. They do not honor covenants or agreements... Do you not understand that history repeats itself, and the Jews are the Jews? You will see, Mahmud. You will see, and I will remind you – if we survive.*²¹

The terms "Jews" and "Israel" are used interchangeably throughout the novel. However, the hatred toward Jews does not stem solely from their role as representatives of the oppressive and occupying "Zionist entity," which has allegedly violated Palestinian national rights. Instead, it is rooted in their very religious identity.

One example presented in the book is an attack in Gaza on an Israeli military vehicle, which later turned out to have been manned by Israeli Druze soldiers. Although Druze are described in the book as violent and immoral, having allegedly abused young Palestinian women, the Hamas adherents in the story express disappointment and sorrow when they realize they had targeted Druze instead of Jews. "If only they had been Jews!!" Ibrahim sighs to himself as he watches the victims' mothers, sisters, and wives weeping on television.²²

The novel's portrayal of Jews as the perpetual enemies of Muslims, depicted as inherently vile and incapable of peaceful coexistence, leads to a desire for their mass extermination. Toward the book's conclusion, just before Israel assassinates him, Ibrahim recalls "The Promise of the Stones and the Trees," a Prophetic tradition cited in Hamas' charter that encourages the killing of Jews on Judgment Day: "The Prophet of Allah said: The Hour will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews, and the Muslims will kill them, until the Jews hide behind stones and trees, and the stones and trees will say: 'O Muslim, O servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him,' except for the Gharqad tree, for it is the tree of the Jews."²³

This tradition, ultimately, was Sinwar's personal wish and mission.

The seeds of devastation sprout from the pages of the novel, where literary expressions align with the operational agenda that materialized on October 7: the glorification of sacrificing life in the path of *jihad* against Israel as a sacred value and a supreme goal, despite its high costs; the aspiration to kill as many Israelis as possible, indiscriminately targeting soldiers and civilians alike; approval of kidnapping and hostage-taking attacks as a means to secure

²⁰ Ibid., 301.

²¹ Ibid., 308.

²² Ibid., 276.

²³ Ibid., 333.

the release of Palestinian prisoners; and the ambition to thwart peace and normalization agreements between Israel and its Arab neighbors through violent means, while rejecting the political path associated with the Palestinian Authority.

Hamas named the October 7 attack, directed primarily against southern Israel, as the “al-Aqsa Flood.” By placing Jerusalem at the forefront, Hamas sought to give the campaign a religious-Islamic character, expressing its vision and ultimate strategic goal: recruiting Arabs and Muslims to the liberation of the entire sacred land of Palestine, with al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the third holiest site in Islam, at its heart, through an uncompromising religious war.

This ideology is fully reflected in Sinwar’s novel. The narrator shares a formative event from his youth as a high school student in Gaza, when he first visited al-Aqsa Mosque in the late 1970s, at a time when access from Gaza to Israel was largely unrestricted. The tour was organized by the “Islamic Bloc,” later Hamas’ student movement, and was guided by cousin Ibrahim.

On the way to Jerusalem, their bus stopped in the Latrun area, where Ibrahim, teary-eyed, lifted a handful of soil, claiming it was soaked in the pure blood of the Prophet Muhammad’s Companions, who, according to tradition, fought there in 637 under the command of Abu ‘Ubayda Ibn al-Jarrah during the conquest of the land. He expressed his wish that the soil would mix with the blood of today’s Palestinians, the rightful successors of those ancient Muslim warriors, until liberation was achieved.²⁴

The peak of the journey came, of course, when the students entered al-Aqsa Mosque. They prayed at the site, listened to the Friday sermon, visited the Dome of the Rock, and heard the story of the Prophet’s night journey to the city.

While absorbing the sanctity of the place, they noticed an intolerable injustice: Israeli soldiers controlled the access to the site, deciding who could enter and who could not. At that moment, they were filled with rage, wondering how the enormous Islamic nation that stood behind the Palestinians, despite its wealth and armies, had failed to liberate al-Aqsa from the “gangs” that had seized it. Then, the narrator testifies, they realized that “the struggle had other dimensions than we had known. It was not just about territory and displaced people, but a war of faith and religion.”²⁵

For the protagonists of the novel, the outrage over the oppression in al-Aqsa and what they call Palestine had to be translated into violent action, into *jihad* for the defense of the holy site and the liberation of the land, with a willingness to sacrifice life in the footsteps of Islam’s heroes, from the Prophet Muhammad’s time, through Saladin during the Crusades, to the present day.²⁶

At times, the ideal of sacrifice took on faces and names, such as when a friend or relative of Ibrahim and Ahmad lost their life in the struggle against Israel. In one case, the grief over the death of a friend named Yasser was mixed with joy that God had honored him with martyrdom (*shahada*), and the mourning tent was filled with ululations, sweets, and large, colorful posters of

²⁴ Ibid., 130-131.

²⁵ Ibid., 132.

²⁶ Ibid., 142-143.

the fallen fighter.²⁷ In another instance, Ibrahim's wife is described as having "a smile that never left her face" upon receiving the news of her husband's assassination by an Israeli airstrike.²⁸

For Sinwar, Palestinian lives, let alone Israeli lives, are not sacred. In fact, the October 7 massacre pales in comparison to some of the fantasies voiced by the characters in *The Thorn and the Carnation*. The book describes how, during the 1991 First Gulf War, there was anticipation in Gaza that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein would launch chemical warheads and wipe out half of Israel's population (about five million people at the time). Thus, when the air raid sirens first blared, Palestinians cheered for the Iraqi leader: "With spirit and blood, we will redeem you, O Saddam... O Saddam, beloved, strike, strike Tel Aviv." However, when they learned that the missiles carried only conventional explosives, frustration set in: "It was as if ice water had been poured over us."²⁹

Having been disappointed in their hopes of killing millions of Israeli civilians with chemical weapons, the characters in Sinwar's novel settled for smaller-scale murders, yet their objective remained the same: to make the occupiers "curse the day they came to our land and took over our sacred sites."³⁰

The novel glorifies a series of shooting, bombing, and suicide attacks from the early Oslo years through the Second Intifada, including the shooting of a father and his children at a hitchhiking station in the West Bank as they traveled to a religious school in Jerusalem;³¹ the October 1994 bombing of Dan Bus Line 5 on Dizengoff Street in Tel Aviv, which killed 22 and injured 104;³² the January 1995 Beit Lid junction bombing, which killed 22 and wounded 66;³³ the June 2001 Dolphinarium nightclub bombing in Tel Aviv, where 21 young people were killed and about 120 injured;³⁴ the Sbarro restaurant bombing in Jerusalem, where 16 were killed and 140 wounded; and the first mortar and Qassam rocket attacks on settlements in the Gaza Strip and Israeli communities surrounding it.³⁵

The Palestinian attacks deep inside Israel's territory, including major cities like Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Netanya, and Ashdod, are portrayed in the book as proof of Palestinians' ability to inflict heavy damage on their enemy despite its military superiority. According to the narrator, these attacks resulted in many achievements: they sowed panic among the occupiers, deepened divisions in Israeli society over the peace process, emptied Israeli streets, shuttered shops, and left cafés and restaurants deserted. Only a handful of Israelis dared use public transportation. Sandbags appeared in shopping centers, and Israeli cities resembled military outposts with checkpoints and thousands of soldiers and police officers.³⁶

²⁷ Ibid., 250-251.

²⁸ Ibid., 334.

²⁹ Ibid., 228-229.

³⁰ Ibid., 262.

³¹ Ibid., 285.

³² Ibid., 295-296.

³³ Ibid., 298.

³⁴ Ibid., 326.

³⁵ Ibid., 328, 331.

³⁶ Ibid., 330-331.

Anyone looking at the devastation in Gaza following the October 7 War may wonder whether Sinwar would have carried out the massacre had he known its consequences in advance. Based on his novel, the answer seems to be positive.

His protagonists justify the heavy toll paid by Palestinians for their terrorist acts during the Second Intifada. At one point, Ibrahim scoffs at calls for Hamas to lay down its arms and allow Palestinians to live in peace, joking that after Israel assassinated Hamas operatives, invaded Palestinian cities, and left them in ruins, the only thing left for Israel to do was rebuild them, so it would have something to destroy again in the future.³⁷

Another issue that draws a direct line between the novel and the October 7 attack is Sinwar's keen interest, as expressed in his book written while in prison, in hostage-taking and bargaining attacks to secure the release of Palestinian prisoners. The Jibril deal, in which 1,151 Palestinian prisoners were released in 1985 in exchange for three IDF captives in Lebanon, is described in the novel as a moment of joy in the Palestinian territories, as well as a boost to the national struggle.³⁸

The novel also provides a detailed account of two kidnapping operations for which Hamas was responsible: the 1992 abduction of Border Police officer Nissim Toledano, intended to secure the release of Sheikh Yassin, which ended in Toledano's murder and the expulsion of 415 Hamas operatives to Lebanon;³⁹ and the 1994 kidnapping of soldier Nachshon Wachsman, aimed at securing the release of 500 Palestinian prisoners, including Sheikh Yassin, which ended in a failed IDF rescue operation.⁴⁰

One of Sinwar's objectives in launching the October 7 attack was to derail the normalization agreement that was on the verge of being signed between Israel and Saudi Arabia.⁴¹ The agreement was expected to grant Israel recognition from the country where Islam originated, draw additional Arab and Muslim states into the circle of peace, and shatter Hamas' hopes of uniting the Muslim nation in a struggle to eliminate the Jewish state.

The novel Sinwar authored extensively addresses the divide between the Arab and Palestinian strategic choice of peace on one end and Hamas' unwavering commitment to armed struggle and rejection of any permanent settlement with the Jewish state on the other. The roots of this divide trace back to the peace initiative of Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat. According to the novel's account, the speech delivered by Sadat at the Knesset in November 1977 sparked shock and opposition among the Palestinian people. In an act of protest, Palestinian terrorists assassinated Egyptian journalist Yusuf al-Siba'i, a close associate of Sadat who had accompanied his delegation on the visit to Israel.⁴²

Several of the novel's conversations depict the intense debate between PLO activists, seeking peace agreements with Israel for pragmatic reasons, and Hamas activists, who adamantly reject

³⁷ Ibid., 327, 330-331.

³⁸ Ibid., 159.

³⁹ Ibid., 245-246.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 293-295.

⁴¹ "Hamas Attack Aimed to Disrupt Saudi-Israel Normalization, Biden Says," *Reuters*, October 21, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/hamas-attack-aimed-disrupt-saudi-israel-normalization-biden-2023-10-20/>.

⁴² Al-Sinwar, *The Thorn and the Carnation*, 111.

political compromises and prefer to establish a sovereign reality not bound by permanent agreements that go beyond *hudna*. They state: “Israel is an oppressive state that was established on our land and should cease to exist.”⁴³

The novel’s protagonists categorically reject the claim that the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian entity necessitates acceptance of Israel’s existence. In a conversation between Mahmud, a PLO supporter, and Ibrahim, the latter insists that a Palestinian state can be established without recognizing Israel’s territorial rights over any part of the land.

Several years before the Israeli implementation of the disengagement plan and Hamas’ takeover of Gaza, Ibrahim, one of the novel’s protagonists, had already predicted that the killing of hundreds of Israelis by Palestinian resistance will pressure Israel into a unilateral withdrawal from Gaza and the West Bank, paving the way for a Palestinian state in the liberated territories, without requiring Palestinian recognition of the Jewish state.⁴⁴ When Mahmud asks about the difference between a withdrawal conditioned on recognizing Israel and an unconditional withdrawal, Ibrahim replies that if Israel leaves the Palestinian lands without an agreement and under the pressure of resistance, the door to continuing their struggle will remain open whenever circumstances allow.⁴⁵

Not accidentally, Sinwar does not mention in the novel the names of Yasser Arafat or other Fatah leaders, and ignores events such as their dramatic return to the West Bank and Gaza, while mentioning Hamas leaders like Ahmad Yassin and Yahya ‘Ayyash and the major terror attacks carried out by the movement. The Egyptian columnist Sami al-Buhayri wrote in January 2025 in this context that reading *The Thorn and the Carnation* “proved to him beyond any doubt that Hamas, like all extremist ideological organizations, will not accept any [Palestinian] partner in governance.”⁴⁶

The novel also demonstrates Hamas’ refusal to accept the agreements signed between the PLO and Israel and the authorities granted to the Palestinian Authority based on those agreements. The technical argument presented in the book by Hamas-affiliated characters for this position is that Palestinian opposition factions do not consider themselves bound by agreements they did not sign, especially since the PLO did not consult them before signing or had them approved through a referendum.⁴⁷

According to the novel, this argument adds to Hamas’ fundamental rejection of the agreement’s terms, which include ending violent resistance, establishing relations of cooperation, coordination and security liaison with Israel, and, worse of all, recognizing the so-called Zionist entity’s right to control most of Mandatory Palestine under broad international guarantees.⁴⁸ In one episode, Ibrahim is summoned for interrogation at the Palestinian Preventive Security offices. An official

⁴³ Ibid., 267.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 268.

⁴⁶ Sami al-Buhayri, “Reading Yahya Sinwar’s Book ‘The Thorn and the Carnation’ [Arabic],” *Elaph*, January 7, 2025, https://elaph.com/Web/ElaphWriter/2025/01/1557847.html?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=elaphnetwork&utm_campaign=elaphnetwork.

⁴⁷ Al-Sinwar, *The Thorn and the Carnation*, 289.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 290-291.

explains the new reality in which there is one legitimate Palestinian Authority, which has signed internationally backed agreements with Israel, and warns him that he will be arrested if he does not comply with its regulations. In response, Ibrahim accuses the official of collaborating with Israel's scheme to divide the Palestinians into two groups: one committed to the agreements and the other to the resistance. At the same time, he emphasizes that Palestinian national goals will not be achieved through negotiations but only through armed struggle, as "our enemies understand only the language of the rifle and fire."⁴⁹

In one of the debates presented in the novel, Mahmud, the PLO supporter, accuses Hamas of carrying out attacks in order to take unjustified credit for prospective Israeli territorial withdrawals enabled by the Oslo Process. The response he receives is that there is no reason for Palestinians to wait for an Israeli withdrawal based on bilateral agreements since the Zionists are bound to "flee under the pressure of resistance" from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank anyway.⁵⁰

When examining the ideological continuity between the novel and the October 7 massacre, one concludes that the seeds of that attack were sown not only in Sinwar's operational planning but also in his literary work. Thus, to the series of failures by Israeli decision-makers, intelligence agencies, and academic researchers before October 7, one must add the insufficient attention given to a literary text that could have served as a stark warning.

That a novel written by a murderous antisemitic psychopath is being sold and glorified today on the streets of European capitals without any penalty is another warning sign that is being ignored.

– Dr. Ofir Winter, with contribution from Niv Shayovich

⁴⁹ Ibid., 297-298.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 297, 301-302.

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