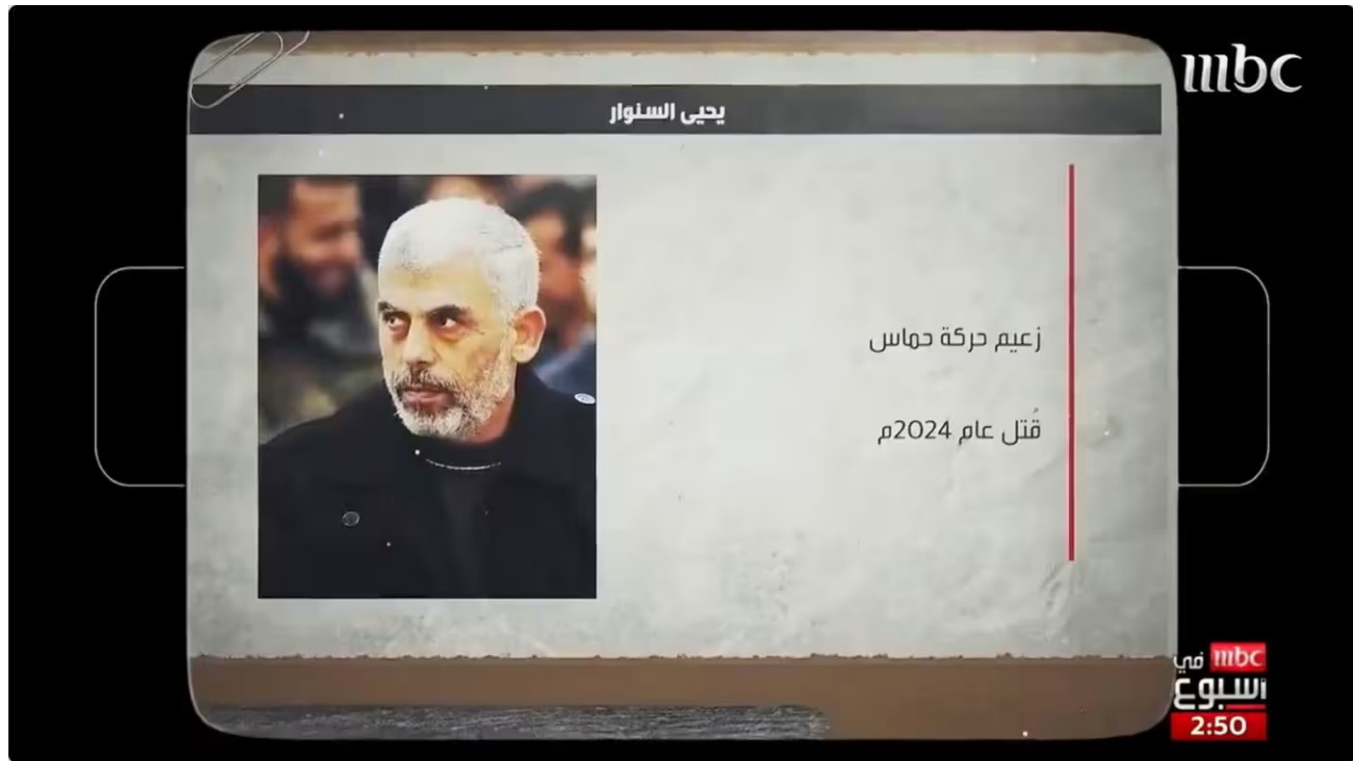


Middle East war

Saudi broadcaster MBC under fire over 'terrorist' label for slain Hamas chief

Middle East's biggest media group withdraws report on Yahya Sinwar after regional backlash



Saudi Arabia's media regulator says the report about the death of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar is 'in violation of the kingdom's regulations and media policy'

Ahmed Al Omran in Jeddah YESTERDAY

Saudi Arabia's media regulator has ordered an investigation into officials from the Middle East's largest media group after one of its television channels broadcast a report describing the slain Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar as a "new face of terrorism".

Without naming the channel, the General Authority for Media Regulation said in a statement on X that the [report](#) by Saudi-owned MBC, which sparked a strong backlash on social media from pro-Palestinians across the region, was "in violation of the kingdom's regulations and media policy".

The investigation into MBC, a conglomerate founded in London and now majority-owned by the government, highlights the delicate balance Riyadh is seeking to strike in the Middle East conflict: the Hamas and Hizbollah militants being pounded by Israel are its historical foes, but Saudi Arabia is also conscious of the outrage among Muslims and Arabs in the kingdom and across the region at the ferocity of Israel's year-long assault on Gaza.

Saudi Arabia is worried that the war could further destabilise the region and has repeatedly condemned Israel's conduct of its military offensive in Gaza since the latest conflict was triggered by Hamas's attack on southern Israel last October. At the same time, Riyadh has long considered Iran and the militant groups it backs, including Hamas and Hizbollah, to be malign forces in the region.

Riyadh has made no official public comment on Sinwar since Israeli forces killed him in southern Gaza last week. The MBC report was broadcast shortly after Israel confirmed his death.



In addition to Sinwar, the report named others it designates as terrorists, including Osama bin Laden, the Saudi leader of al-Qaeda killed by the US © EPA-EFE

In neighbouring Iraq, the country's media regulator also said it has moved to suspend MBC's

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licence over the same report after protesters stormed the MBC offices in Baghdad. Videos circulating online appeared to show the protesters filming themselves chanting anti-Israel and anti-Saudi slogans as they broke into the offices while smashing computers and other equipment on Friday night.

MBC, which is listed on the Saudi exchange and operates studios and offices across the region, aired a 15-minute long news report that described Sinwar, the architect of the attack on October 7 last year, as the latest in a long list of names that belong to political Islamist groups that Saudi Arabia designates as terrorist.

In addition to Sinwar, the MBC report mentioned Osama bin Laden, the Saudi leader of al-Qaeda killed by the US; the Iranian general Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated in an American air strike; and Hizbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah, who was killed by Israel last month.

Under Saudi law, it is illegal to express sympathy with designated terrorists. But in Iraq, which is dominated by political parties backed by Iran, people such as Soleimani and Nasrallah are revered and considered martyrs.

"Given the MBC satellite channel's violation of media broadcasting regulations via its repeated violations and its attacks on the martyrs, leaders of victory, and heroic resistance leaders who are fighting the battle of honour against the usurping Zionist entity, we confirm taking all necessary legal measures and suspending it from operating in Iraq," the Iraqi regulator said in a statement published by the state news agency.

Saudi Arabia was in advanced talks with the US over a potential deal to normalise relations with Israel before Hamas's attack a year ago. But Riyadh has now insisted that Israel would have to end its war in Gaza and take irreversible steps towards the establishment of a Palestinian state before any agreement. It has also become increasingly frustrated with the conduct of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

MBC Group has a market capitalisation of more than \$4bn. The channel, which did not respond to a request for comment, has since deleted the controversial report from its social media feeds.