

# Hamas vows to avenge slaying

A successor to the fallen leader was appointed but remains unnamed

By Joel Greenberg  
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

JERUSALEM — Tens of thousands of Palestinians poured into the streets of Gaza City on Sunday for the funeral of Abdel Aziz Rantisi, the slain leader of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, as the militant group chose a successor without revealing his identity.

Rantisi, who was killed in an Israeli helicopter missile strike near his home Saturday, was the second Hamas leader to be assassinated in less than a month after Sheik Ahmed Yassin, a founder of the group, was killed in a similar strike March 22.

Israel has vowed to hunt down the entire Hamas leadership, and fears of another assassination prompted the group not to disclose whom it had chosen to replace Rantisi.

"All I can say is that all positions in the leadership of Hamas are occupied," said Mahmoud al-Zahar, a senior Hamas leader. "Last night there was a meeting of the council, we selected, and the position is filled."

Al-Zahar did not comment on media reports that he was chosen.

At the funeral, Rantisi's body, wrapped in a green flag of Hamas, was borne on a stretcher from Gaza's main mosque with the remains of two bodyguards killed with him when his car was struck by two missiles Saturday night.

"Yesterday they said that they killed Rantisi to weaken Hamas," Ismail Haniyeh, a Hamas leader, told a crowd of thousands at the mosque. "They are dreaming. Every time a martyr falls, Hamas grows stronger."

Mourners reached out to touch Rantisi's lacerated face, and others showered his body with flower petals as it was carried down Gaza's main boulevard to Martyrs Cemetery.

"Rantisi, lion of Hamas," the crowds chanted. "We are all Rantisi. With our souls and blood we will sacrifice for you, Rantisi." Mourners waved Hamas flags, the black banners of Islamic Jihad and the yellow colors of the mainstream Fatah group as they marched for hours through the streets. Armed men unleashed bursts of gunfire into the air.

In the West Bank, demonstrators clashed with Israeli soldiers and held protest marches in several towns and villages.

A 14-year-old was shot in the head

and critically wounded in a stone-throwing clash at the village of Deir Abu Mashal, near Ramallah, and in Bethlehem a teenager throwing bottles at soldiers was shot in the stomach, Palestinians said.

In Nablus, demonstrators burned effigies of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and President Bush, calling for revenge.

Inside Israel, the security forces remained on high alert for retaliation, with a beefed-up police presence in major cities. Israelis have been bracing for a major attack since Yassin was killed, and in recent weeks several attempted bombings have been thwarted.

At the weekly meeting of his Cabinet, Sharon congratulated the security forces for killing Rantisi and said he would pursue parallel tracks of diplomacy and more strikes on Palestinian militants.

"This policy of making an effort to advance a political process on the one hand, and on the other hand to hit the terrorist organizations and their leaders will continue," he said.

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# Troop casualty rate rivals Vietnam War

Casualties in Iraq spiked in the first part of April, with 98 dead this month

By Drew Brown  
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

WASHINGTON — With fighting in Iraq now at its worst, the number of U.S. troops killed by enemy fire has reached the highest level since the Vietnam War.

The first part of April has been the bloodiest period so far for U.S. troops in Iraq. There have been 98 deaths by hostile fire so far this month, more than in the opening two weeks of the invasion, when 82 Americans were killed in action.

The last time U.S. troops experienced a two-week loss such as this one in Iraq was October 1971, two years before U.S. ground involvement ended in Vietnam.

There are 135,000 U.S. troops in Iraq. Nearly 700 American troops have died since the beginning of the war. As of Sunday, 503 had been reported killed in action. At

least 3,630 more have been wounded.

The Vietnam War started with a slower death rate. The United States had been involved in Vietnam for six years before total fatalities surpassed 500 in 1965, the year President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered a massive buildup of forces. There were 20,000 troops in Vietnam by the end of 1964. There were more than 200,000 a year later.

By the end of 1966, U.S. combat deaths in Vietnam had reached 3,910. By 1968, the peak of U.S. involvement, there were more than 500,000 troops in the country. During the same two-week period of April that year, 752 U.S. soldiers died, according to National Archives records.

Gunfire has been the biggest killer of U.S. troops, followed closely by improvised explosive devices. The two account for more than 250 deaths.

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### Horoscope by Linda C. Black

**TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (April 19).** You're fiercely determined to succeed, and the odds are good that you will. Set goals you can't achieve in one year, just to keep things interesting. To get the advantage, check the day's rating: 10 is the easiest day, 0 the most challenging.

**Aries (March 21-April 19)** - Today is a 9 - You're like a laser beam when you get on track. A door that was closed will burst open through the sheer force of your enthusiasm.

**Taurus (April 20-May 20)** - Today is a 6 - Your nerves may be just about shot, but don't give up. The worst is over. Well, almost. Don't ask for any big favors quite yet.

**Gemini (May 21-June 21)** - Today is a 7 - Start winding down the operation, and don't overshoot your mark. Your energy level is diminishing, and there are complications ahead. Proceed with caution.

**Cancer (June 22-July 22)** - Today is a 6 - The good news: The most difficult part of this testing phase is almost over. The bad news: You may discover that a benefit you thought you'd win was all in your imagination. Don't worry, there'll be others.

**Leo (July 23-Aug. 22)** - Today is an 8 - You're greatly expanding your awareness. Use what you're learning to become a better leader. You may have to take charge soon.

**Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)** - Today is a 5 - Deep breaths in through the nose and out the mouth will help. Meditate

on green rolling hills and the time you can spend there.

**Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)** - Today is a 7 - Once you and your partner have made the commitment, the interesting part begins. You'll get to figure out how much you can spend, and on what, where and when. It'll be fun.

**Scorpio (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)** - Today is a 6 - Just when you're feeling swamped, somebody will come to your rescue. This is a person you've helped in the past.

**Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)** - Today is an 8 - Once you've made the commitment to someone you love, the work will be much easier. There'll still be some tough parts, of course, but you know it's for a good reason.

**Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)** - Today is a 5 - For the past few days it may have felt as if you were being dragged down. You were, actually, but you didn't sink, and now you'll emerge more loveable. You'll see.

**Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)** - Today is an 8 - Loved ones may worry that you're spending too much time with your nose stuck in books, but the one who really matters understands. He or she may be in there with you, figuratively speaking.

**Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20)** - Today is a 7 - Conditions are changing dramatically as you enter a studious phase. You'll find that you can concentrate more easily over the next few weeks, starting now.

### RUBES by Leigh Rubin



Another frustrating evening in the piranha household

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