

Step-by-Step: How the Hamas October 7 Attack Happened, and How Israel Responded

The full account of the October 7 attack, how Israeli defenses collapsed, the atrocities, heroic stories on the ground, political reaction in Israel, and the bold and unprecedented declaration of war followed by an air campaign and a ground offensive

Last updated: November 23, 2023



A burned home in a kibbutz. On October 7, Hamas invaded Israel, murdering over 1,300, injuring almost 3,000 and kidnapping 236 hostages. At least 25 communities, 9 IDF bases and the Nova Party were raided, in the deadliest attack in Israel's history

The Hamas attack

On October 7th, Saturday morning, the day after the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur war, Hamas launched a coordinated attack into Israel, through land, air and sea. **For the first time since that war**

in 1973, Israel declared a state of war a few short hours after the launch of the attack. This surprise

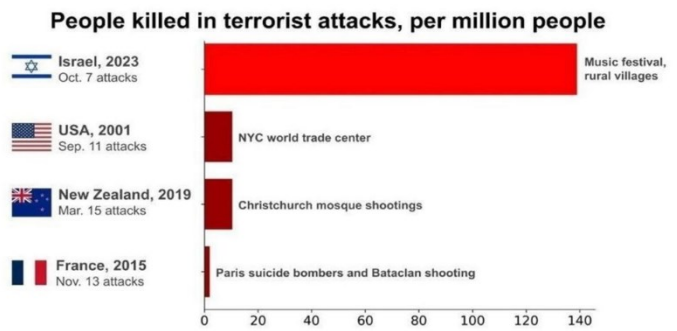
attack caught Israel unprepared in terms of manpower and operational readiness for the scale, magnitude and multiple friction points it included. The attack began at around 6:00 am with a massive unrelenting barrage of rockets - at least 2,200 in the first several hours - launched from the northern area of Gaza into southern Israel and populated areas as far as the Tel Aviv metropolis and Jerusalem.

Although initially seeming like another routine unjustified rocket attack on Israel, albeit intense, it soon became apparent that this was just the kickoff of **the deadliest, most heinously brutal and bloody terror attack the country has ever known, and the deadliest attack on Jews anywhere since the Holocaust**. Over 1,300 people lost their lives, 2,800 were wounded and 236 were taken hostage, both soldiers and civilians, mostly Israeli but including **people from 41 different nationalities** including the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Argentina, Thailand, Russia, and others.

In relative terms to population size, the October 7 attack on Israel claimed 17.1 times more lives per million people than the September 11 attack on the United States, an equivalent to 50,900 Americans dying that day rather than 2,977; and claimed 74.9 times more lives per million people than the November 2015 attacks in Paris, an equivalent to 9,737 French people dying that day rather than 130. It also claimed more lives in a single day than all of the fatal terror attacks in Israel during the 1990s and 2000s, that included the Second Intifada.



Israeli mother kidnapped along with her two babies



The attack exceeded, many-fold the IDF scenarios for possible attacks in the area, scenarios that focused on possible infiltrations to communities on one or a handful of points, rather than all of them combined. No clear intelligence warning was provided prior to the attack, which caught IDF troops on the ground and civilians in Israeli territory completely by surprise. Traditionally, the IDF was used to dealing with infiltrations, following intelligence or surveillance alerts; riots on the fence, which were handled with caution and sufficient manpower at the brigade level; and rocket barrages that mostly gave Israeli civilians sufficient alert time to seek shelter or be intercepted by the Iron Dome system. **The IDF, including the Gaza Brigade, had multiple drills and preparations for attempted takeovers of Israeli towns by Hamas and Hezbollah terrorists, but the multitude of friction points alongside the unprecedented large number of terrorists and the lack of intelligence alert led to a catastrophic result.**

Step-by-step: How it happened

The well-coordinated offensive began with an unprecedented and surprising rocket launching (around 3000) followed by the breach of the border fence, ripped open with explosives and bulldozers, through which **some 2,000 Hamas terrorists or more swarmed into Israel**, by pickup trucks, motorcycles and by foot, with additional terrorist teams arriving by sea and powered paragliders. The incursion was initially undetected by the army's surveillance system, which later findings were able to attribute to a coordinated attack of snipers and some 140 drones, that simultaneously cast bombs

and grenades on cameras as well as the Sentry Tech Remote Controlled Weapon Station, and within a short period of time, possibly just one minute, neutralized almost the entire surveillance system of Israel around the Gaza Strip. According to IDSF specialist Brigadier General (res) Tsvika Haimovich, “most of the surveillance system around the fence are based on optical means or radars located on poles or other strategic points, most of which are not located on the fence itself.” Simultaneously, IEDs that were planted under the cover of the riots during the preceding week were detonated and enabled the breaching of the fence and the gates. Next, bulldozers started ripping apart the fence. All of these allowed the almost uninterrupted flow of vehicles and people through the border, pouring into a multitude of Israeli military bases, communities and the mass gathering at the party near the Re'im community. The attack was spearheaded by the **Hamas elite commando unit, the “Nukhba”**, affiliated with the terrorist group's military wing, Izz A-Din Al-Qassam, “Nukhba” is Hamas' parallel to Hezbollah's Radwan elite unit.

As the first order of the day, terrorist squads arrived at military bases along the border - the Erez crossing, the Gaza Brigade base and others - where they proceeded to gun down multiple soldiers there that were caught by surprise, leaving trails and rooms full of bodies, some stripped of their uniforms in order to later use as disguises. In fact, IDSF deputy chairman Lieutenant Colonel (res) Yaron Buskila, himself the Operations Reserve Officer of the Gaza Brigade, testified many of the Hamas terrorists used IDF “B uniforms” and helmets, which made efforts to push them back, significantly more complicated.

Hundreds of other Hamas terrorists, followed by Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Popular Front and a host of civilians who made a “second wave” invasion into Israel following the initial breakout, made their way into the verdant, peaceful kibbutzim and townships populating the civilian belt along the Gaza border. These included 22 towns and villages, large cities such as Sderot and

Ofakim, kibbutzim that border the fence such as Be'eri, Nahal Oz, Kfar Aza and Nir Am, and other townships such as Alumim, Nir Oz and Sufa. In parallel, a large music festival attended by some 4,400 youngsters and secured only by a handful of police officers took place near the kibbutz of Re'im.



Top: ISIS flag found in the Hamas terrorists' belongings. Bottom: Hamas paragliders arriving in Israeli communities

The atrocities

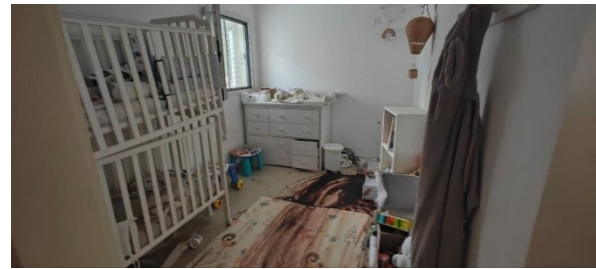
Reports of the infiltration – the full horrific scope of which was not yet determined at that point – was corroborated by dozens of bone chilling pleas for help sent via phone calls and messages to news channels and the relatives from the besieged communities, hiding and locking themselves inside

their bomb shelter rooms, to which they ran upon hearing the Iron Dome siren, while fearing for their lives and hearing shouting in Arabic of dozens of terrorists ravaging their homes and shooting outside. Entrenching themselves inside the shelter rooms, terrorists attempted to shoot the door locks in order to blast them open, and when failed, used burning tires from nearby cars to burn entire houses with their residents inside. People were either burned alive, suffocated from the smoke, or miraculously survived.

While in hiding, they heard the blood curdling screams of their family members and friends—hundreds of children among them—being tortured—often children in front of their parents and vice versa, raped, dismembered, butchered and burnt alive. Babies and toddlers were slaughtered or beheaded in their beds; children were roped together and set on fire. These heinous crimes were committed not only by the terrorists but also by their Palestinian civilian brethren, who more than willingly followed in their footsteps to join the carnage and the pillaging. Bodies stripped naked were taken into Gaza and paraded like trophies in the streets, with the mob spitting on them, kicking them and desecrating them. Other women were marched alive, after having been raped, in the streets of Gaza to the sound of cheers.

Among the deadliest scenes was the [‘Nova peace and love’ music festival](#) near the township of Re'im, attended by some 4,400 youngsters. **364 youngsters were gunned down, making it the single deadliest attack in Israel's history**; women were raped and dismembered right beside the mangled bodies of their friends, and 40 were kidnapped and taken into Gaza. 15 police officers gave their lives. Blood chilling reports by first responders and soldiers who made it to the scene as well as survivors who pretended to be dead say terrorists rounded up the thousands of party goers, ambushed them as they attempted to flee the bullets, and passed vehicle by vehicle, executing the wounded by confirmation of kill at point blank. Those who hid inside bomb shelters were raided and executed by machine gun fire and grenades

that were thrown inside. Unspeakable mass rape cases were carried out.



A children bedroom full of blood

Military reaction during the attack

It took the military many hours to react in a systemic and methodical manner, a delay which was the subject of numerous outcries and criticism. Undoubtedly, future inquiries will reveal the full picture. However, it is safe to say that a central part of the failure relies on the lack of preparedness of the border and the erroneous intelligence assessment as to the probability that such a scenario would take place. Many of the forces, including the senior military leadership, were vacationing or having a holiday break, leaving the bases only partially manned due to the Simchat Torah holiday coinciding with Shabbat.

Additionally, the scale and scope of the Hamas attack took many hours to fully divulge. Local forces, including soldiers stationed in their bases and inside tanks guarding the border, were the first to be targeted, and therefore were unable to report back to their commanders on the unfolding events. Local military and police nerve centers—the Gaza Brigade base in Re'im, the Nahal Oz post, the Urim base, the Sderot central police station and others—were completely raided, with soldiers and officers massacred or taken hostage. On top of that, CCTV cameras were neutralized, as well as surveillance and reconnaissance equipment, and the gravity of the situation was not fully clear until several long hours into the attack.

Next, the sheer quantity of infiltrators and their deployment over an unprecedentedly large area overwhelmed the system and forced troops to manage multiple scenes at once. Not only was the party massacre dispersed over a large territory with

people fleeing and hiding in open-air fields, but terrorists also raided entire towns and cities, which led to a house-to-house clearing operation.

There were many heroic responses by local forces which saved multiple lives. Senior officers such as Major General (res) Yossi Bachar from Be'eri and Brigadier General (res) Oren (last name remains anonymous) took active part in rescuing civilians and combating terrorists, using the little ammunition and equipment they had and improvising their reaction, using their decades-long military experience. It took the political echelon and the military little time to order a mass call up of reserve units. Local forces reported battles until the last bullet, and soldiers present in the scene and those arriving from other parts of the country took the initiative and led the combat in a unique, typical-Israeli initiative manner. The air force sent the first combat helicopter a short time following the beginning of the attack, yet it was hardly sufficient to effectively tackle the masses of terrorists who raided the border. Artillery and infantry troops stationed in the scene tackled the infiltrators, and local Rapid Response Squads did their best efforts to combat swarms of terrorists, outnumbered and with little ammunition.

Additionally, the police, including the Border Police and special units such as the YAMAM, alongside special "Tequila" forces dispatched by the ISA, performed commendably well, and saved multiple lives. Evidence emerging in the aftermath of the massacre showed officers moving from house to house, rescuing hostages, negotiating with terrorists, and taking down the infiltrators on the streets.

The unprecedented large number of terrorists who infiltrated Israel led to long days of combat to secure the southern part of the country and clear the territory from terrorists still on the ground. Firefights between Israeli forces and sporadic cases of terrorists hiding in fields, in townships underneath agricultural equipment, and inside homes, continued well into Monday and Tuesday following the Saturday attack. It took the IDF until Saturday evening to secure all towns around Gaza,

meaning residents were waiting for long hours, 8 hours or even 14 in some cases for the military to come to their rescue. On Sunday morning, the IDF firmly held the border with Gaza against any infiltration attempts. **It took 40-45 hours, even longer in some cases, to assure no terrorists remained in Israeli territory and completely seal the border.**



364 Israelis were murdered in the Nova Party near the township of Re'im. The pictures show a disarray of deserted vehicles of the partygoers; youngsters fleeing the scene; and civilians hide behind a tank that arrived in the scene

The sheer scope and scale of the attack sent shockwaves around the Israeli public, leaving it both in sorrow and determined to act. The attack left countless bodies, some of which in an almost

unrecognizable shape, as well as the thousands of wounded, and conflicting or partial reports that characterized the first few hours of the attack, led to a great sense of uncertainty, loss of trust and shock among the Israeli public. Forensic services and rescue and response services were overburdened by the scope of work, making body recognition more complicated. IDF rescue services kept discovering dead bodies in homes, hidden in places such as attics, rooftops, and open fields, many days after the attacks, increasing the number of reported casualties as the days went by. The sight of countless funerals, parents burying their children and grandparents their grandchildren, mass amounts of unidentified bodies even 10 days into the war, entire families wiped out or abducted, almost everyone in Israel has either lost a loved one, had them abducted, or knows people who had their loved ones affected, and the sheer cruelty of the Hamas barbarism, all indicated **a turning point for the Israeli society**, its perception of threats, its security doctrine and its systems' of long-standing strategic containment on all fronts, both domestic and external.

Psychological warfare and troubling videos and images published by Hamas

One of the most prominent psychological elements of this attack, that mobilized public opinion among both the Israeli public, decision-makers, world leaders and global public opinion, was the sheer cruelty of the perpetrators as manifested in spine chilling graphic materials that circulated online taken by them. The means of terrorizing populations by the distribution of documentation has been used increasingly by terrorist groups over the past two decades, most prominently by the ISIS terrorist group with high-resolution videos featuring decapitations, military drills and menacing messages.

In fact, **this was a well-documented terrorist attack as the terrorists were equipped with go-pro body cameras, live streaming their atrocities, and distributing images and videos on Telegram and around social media.**

While the attack was still ongoing, Hamas released high-resolution videos through the Telegram channel of the Iz A-Din El Qassam Brigades, its military wing. Clips featured Hamas terrorists storming into IDF bases, ravaging communities and using paragliders to infiltrate Israeli territory.

In parallel, the Hamas terrorists, alongside those belonging to PIJ, Popular Front, Fatah and other factions, and scores of individual Gazans, distributed amateur videos and images that document their atrocities. These circulated around social media, most prominently on Telegram, and became a central part of the general understanding of the nature of the attack in real time. Graphic videos of onslaught, brutalization and torture of civilians and soldiers in their safe environment shocked public opinion.

In other cases, terrorists forced the victims themselves to broadcast the atrocities in their own social media accounts, to enable their close relatives and friends to watch the torture, mutilation and execution in real time. In one case, an Israeli woman named Mor Bayder testified she discovered about her grandmother's murder through her Facebook profile. The terrorist burst into her Nir Oz home, murdered her and uploaded the picture. In another case, terrorists burst into the Elyakim family's Nir Oz home and held them hostage. Through the Facebook page of the mother, Dikla Arava, they documented the terrorized family members at gun point. At one point, Tomer, their 15-year-old son, was forced to be accompanied to the terrorists around the township in order to solicit residents to leave their homes, assuring them that they would not be harmed if they obey. Then, these residents were shot to death. Gruesome videos show innocent parents attempting to shield their children before being executed on the spot. Tomer and his two parents were thought to be taken hostage, with videos showing them being dragged to the Gaza Strip, but later their bodies were discovered. Their other two daughters were taken hostage, with video footage showing them sitting on mattresses in an undisclosed location.

Israel's response: Declaration of war, ongoing aerial campaign, preparations for ground operation



Israeli soldiers fight in the ruins of the Gaza Strip during the ground offensive (IDF Spokesperson)

First stage: Declaration of war, mobilization of reserve army

Immediately upon reports of infiltration, the IDF and security forces mobilized regular service units and declared an unprecedented summon to reserve duty. Defense Minister Yoav Gallant announced a wide-scale reserve call-up.

Reportedly, over 350,000 Israelis reported reserve service, a rate that in some units reached as high as 130%, 150% or even 200% of the required call-ups. **The Commissioner of the Police, Lt. Gen. Yaakov Shabtai, immediately announced the call-up of**

all special forces into the area, and the Border Police announced all forces were mobilized. As early as 10:00 am, the Commissioner announced they were “at a state of war”, pouring forces in the area alongside the formation of checkpoints on main roads and around central Israel to prevent terrorists from infiltrating deep into Israeli territory. The Commissioner also instructed all local Rapid Response Squads to be on high alert and for all residents to lock themselves up at home. At 6:42am, Commander of the Police Southern District Major General Amir Cohen gave an immediate **“Philistine Horseman” order**, constructing roadblocks that prevented the attackers from trickling deep into Israeli territory.

Next, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant issued a statement, calling the Hamas move “a major mistake” when launching “war against the State of Israel”. Later that evening, Minister Gallant denounced the **“brutal, criminal attack by Hamas on Israeli citizens... [Hamas] will pay the price.”** He continued to recall that during his service as the head of the Southern Command, **“the political echelon held me back from snapping Hamas’ neck. This phenomenon will not continue. We will change the face of reality in the Gaza Strip for the next 50 years. We will act with full force.”** Later he pledged, **“we will wipe Hamas off the face of the earth.”**

Next, **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced, “we are at war.** I instructed the defense establishment to first clear the townships from the terrorists who infiltrated... Next, I ordered a large-scale reserve call-up **to strike back at a scale the enemy has never known.”** In later speeches, Netanyahu said, **“We are fighting in all force, on all fronts. We switched to offensive – any Hamas member will pay with their lives. Hamas is ISIS, and we will crush and destroy it much like the world has crushed and destroyed ISIS.”** He added, **“I can see the burning fire in the eyes of our combatants... I cannot recall such all-encompassing, sweeping fire even in the days of the Yom Kippur War. Our unique spirit is binding us together into an iron fist, and this is what will break**

Hamas into pieces.” He concluded, **“this is the moment of truth, war on our home.”**



Right to left: IDF Chief of Staff Lt Gen Herzi Halevi, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant (Kobi Gideon, GPO)

IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi issued a statement on October 8, saying “this is war time. Israel is now fighting back against a heinous and brutal attack by Hamas. We are hunting anyone who took part in it. The IDF will win and obtain the required objectives. We are in for complicated days of fighting, we will maintain readiness on all fronts and carry out attacks all around the Gaza Strip.” Later he said, **“the IDF is fighting against merciless terrorists who carried out inconceivable acts. Yahye Sinwar instigated this atrocious attack, therefore he and the entire system he commands will pay with their lives ... We will strike them and dismantle their system. The IDF under my command understands the gravity of the hour and the scope of mission on our shoulders.”** He added, **“The IDF has the responsibility for the security of the country and its citizens, and we failed to meet it that Saturday. We will investigate, but now it’s time for war... I am proud to be leading commanders and soldiers who are bold and determined to fight decisively.”** **Israeli President Isaac Herzog also referred to the attack** in the Knesset, emphasizing the depth of the grief around the nation affecting Jews, Muslims, Christians, and Druze, irrespective of their background or beliefs: **“We are all one Israeli people.”** He firmly added that the nation should not leave the ongoing conflict the same way it entered, **“neither in the political, security or social levels.”**

Objectives of the war as outlined by cabinet

On October 8, the **Cabinet officially declared Israel was at a state of war**, for the first time in exactly 50 years since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, as per Article 40 to Basic Law: The Government.

On October 16, **the War Cabinet issued a document outlining the four objectives of the war:**

1. Toppling of the Hamas regime and the destruction of its military capabilities
2. Removal of the Gaza Strip terror threat on Israel
3. Ultimate effort to free the hostages.
4. Defense of the country's borders and its citizens

The statement that **Hamas must be completely destroyed** was made by all senior ranks of the Israeli political and military echelon: Prime Minister Netanyahu, Defense Minister Gallant, Chief of Staff Lt. Col. Halevi and others.

Later reports said Netanyahu explicitly pledged to the families of those taken hostage that one of the objectives of this war is the safe return of the hostages home. Other unverified reports said Netanyahu stated in a Knesset committee that “nobody believes we should govern two million Palestinians.” Netanyahu’s team refused to confirm that report.

The three-step plan: Minister of Defense Gallant expresses plan for Gaza

During a meeting held by the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, chaired by MK Yuli Edelstein, Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant presented a three-step plan for the Gaza Strip:

1. **Military campaign**, characterized by strikes, and later by ground maneuvers, whose objective is the destruction of militants and damaging infrastructure in order to topple and eradicate Hamas;
2. **Continuation of low-intensity combat**, and the destruction of pockets of resistance;
3. **Creation of a new regime in the Gaza Strip**, removing responsibility from Israel over life in the Gaza Strip and the introduction of a new security reality for the citizens of Israel and residents of the south.

Emergency government

On October 11, leaders of the opposition party “HaMahane HaMamlakhti”, MK Benni Gantz and his partner MK Gadi Eisenkott, both former Chiefs of Staff of the IDF, decided to join together with the government to form an emergency coalition.

Under the agreement, **a special War Cabinet was formed which** includes Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant, Minister of Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer, MK Benny Gantz, and MK Gadi Eisenkott. Other members of Gantz’s party became ministers.

In a press conference, Netanyahu said **“the people of Israel are united, and today its leadership is also united.** We set aside all other considerations, because our country’s fate is on the line. We will work together, shoulder to shoulder, for the sake of Israel’s citizens... The people’s unity is an immense force multiplier, and the unity government we are forming today out of a sense of national responsibility is sending a powerful message both internally and externally.”

MK Benny Gantz said, **“Israel finds itself in one of its gravest hours. We need to eradicate the enemy by all means and without delay. Our standing here, shoulder to shoulder, sends a clear message to our enemies – and more importantly, to all of Israel’s citizens.** Gaza can feel [our power], and if needed, Lebanon will too. Our partnership is not political; this is a shared fate. At this time, we are all Israel’s soldiers.”

Second stage: Aerial campaign and preparation for a ground offensive



Israeli air strike on the Rimal neighborhood, Gaza City

In response to the attack, the IDF has called up **hundreds of thousands of reserve officers and soldiers and prepared military plans for the Gaza Strip, to be confirmed by the War Cabinet. The current aerial campaign is compounded by mounting preparations for a ground offensive, deemed by all IDSF experts and public figures as inevitable.**

Aerial campaign: The Israeli Air Force has launched one of **the most extensive air campaigns in its history, attacking over 10,000 targets in thousands of air strikes, reaching between 100 and as many as 450 targets within 24 hours.** The target bank, backed by precision intelligence and guided missiles, includes Hamas military and governance infrastructure, militants firing rockets, rocket launch sites, weapon silos, training camp sites, and others.

Among other targets, the Hamas intelligence compound was downed, alongside a Hamas command and control center in the Islamic University, a network of reconnaissance cameras planted on solar thermal collectors on rooftops and designated to spot aircrafts, a command center owned by Hamas' northern brigade, and other military targets.

A first-ever use of the **“Steel Sting” Precision Mortar system** was deployed, a laser-guided and GPS-guided 120mm bomb designated to target military posts, launch pads, and sections in buildings with increased lethality but decreased risk for uninvolved civilians, especially in densely-populated areas. The Maglan commando unit made the debut launch, a low-cost alternative for aerial strikes. The strike targeted rocket launchers “with precision”. “We are also ready to launch from

within the Gaza Strip during ground maneuver,” said the squad commander, a reserve officer.

The IDF has reported the elimination of thousands of terrorists. Among the senior Hamas officials targeted by the IDF were Belal Alqadra, commander of the Nukhba Southern Khan Yunis Assault Company and one of the perpetrators of the October 7 attack in Nahal Oz; Muhammad Abu Shamla, a senior Hamas Naval Operative in the Rafah Brigade; Muetaz Eid, the Commander of Hamas’ Southern District’s National Security; and Merad Abu Merad, Head of the Hamas’ Aerial Array in Gaza City.

Furthermore, **the ISA (Shin Bet) has reportedly established a designated unit named NILI**, named after the former Jewish underground espionage network, **whose role is to take down any and all Nukhba and other terrorists who took part in the October 7 attack**. Two of them, Ali Qadi and Belal Alqadra, were already eliminated. This is consistent with the long-standing Israeli policy of hunting down any terrorist who harmed Jews, such as the *Wrath of Gods* operation ordered by former Israeli prime minister Golda Meir to bring justice to all perpetrators of the 1972 Munich Olympic Games massacre, that resulted in the murder of 11 Israeli athletes; and countless operations to hunt down terrorists, such as the elimination in Nablus of Hasan Qatnani and Maad Masri, who murdered three members of the Dee family – the mother and two of her daughters; and the elimination in Jenin of Abd al-Fateh Harusha, who murdered the two Yaniv brothers in Huwara nine days beforehand.

Civilian population in Gaza

In order to avoid civilian casualties, dubbed “collateral damage”, the IDF has issued warning strikes, sent at least 4.3 million SMS messages, made at least 5.9 million pre-recorded calls and at least 19,000 phone calls, and dropped at least 1.5 million pamphlets in order to give preemptive alert to the civilian population to evacuate. The IDF has ordered all residents of the northern part of the Gaza Strip to evacuate southward, and as of November 19, **around 1,000,000 Gazans have successfully evacuated**.



Over 1 million Gazans successfully evacuated southward and away from the war zone (Photo: social media)

Civilian casualties are “the price of waging a war”, in the words of US President Biden. The IDF is consistent in its doctrine of avoiding harm to civilians, although since Hamas’ strategy is urban combat from within a densely-populated civilian setting, these casualties cannot be avoided altogether. The Israeli senior leadership and the IDF Spokesperson have repeatedly stressed that “Israel is not at war with the people of Gaza”, but with the terrorist group Hamas.

Reports on the Gaza death toll usually abide by numbers issued by Hamas, under the title “Gaza Ministry of Health”, which raises concerns over the international forum’s unwillingness to treat Hamas propaganda with suspicion. Figures such as 7,000 fatalities, of which 70% are children, women, and elderly, are being quoted at face value and taken as facts, both in [UN reports](#) and various media reports. This sensational outcry raises serious doubts over the UN and other forum’s abilities to serve as honest brokers in the conflict, taking an Israeli-skeptic position while Hamas “cooks the books” and enjoys a PR campaign fully accepted as facts, while Israel is being pressured to end its military campaign to topple Hamas and its ability to ever rebuild itself.

The IDF has created **humanitarian corridors at designated times and places to allow the people of Gaza to successfully evacuate southward**. For example, on November 8, a large convoy of 50,000 Gazan civilians was documented along the central

Saleh Al-Din avenue in Gaza, connected to the northern and southern part of the Gaza Strip. The following day, between 50,000-75,000 additional ones moved through that route. **In an unprecedented turn of events, IDF forces have safeguarded the Gazan civilians who were evacuating from Hamas snipers, roadblocks, and IEDs that targeted these civilians.**

IDF spokesperson Daniel Hagari said that “ Hamas is cynically abusing the civilian population while shooting from within civil sites such as kindergartens, schools, and mosques, while intentionally aiming at Israeli civilians.” IDF Spokesperson to International Media, Lt. Col. (res) Jonathan Conricus, said the IDF was encouraged to see “Gaza residents heeding that warning... we do our best efforts to avoid civilian casualties.”

Already on the first day of the offensive after **Prime Minister Netanyahu issued a warning and implored the residents of Gaza to leave the area** (“I’m hereby telling the residents of Gaza, get out now, because we will operate everywhere [in the Gaza Strip] and with our full might”.

Hiding behind civilians, placing its military infrastructure in densely-populated civilian areas and using civilians as human shields has been a long-standing tactic by Hamas to both attempt to avoid Israeli airstrikes while garnering international support and pressure on Israel to cease its strikes. Numerous verified cases over the years have demonstrated Hamas’ abuse of UNRWA facilities, schools, hospitals and other civilian sites for terrorist purposes. Meanwhile, the Gazan population suffers from intimidation, as confirmed by the IDF and multiple third-party sources, with Hamas ordering them not to evacuate their homes. There is footage that even showed a car convoy of Gazan civilians being bombarded by Hamas in order to prevent them from evacuating. “We are telling the people of northern Gaza, stay in your homes,” said Iad Al-Buzum, spokesperson for the Hamas Interior Ministry. “The occupier wants to uproot us from our country. We shall die before we leave.” The Gaza governmental media ministry ordered residents to “ignore” the evacuation warnings of the IDF.

Hamas’ use of humanitarian aid designated for Gazans

Multiple evidence shows Hamas terrorists have been using humanitarian aid to terrorist ends, at the expense of Gazans. For example, Hamas [dismantled multi-million dollar water/sewer pipeline networks](#) contributed by UNICEF and the EU in order to build rockets and to create other militant equipment. Of the shared investment into rebuilding Gaza’s infrastructure, Hamas contributes [only 5%](#) of its budget while international organizations and the PA (including the Hamas contribution) foot 65% and 35% of the bill, respectively. The latest October 16 incident in which [UNRWA accused Hamas terrorists](#) of stealing fuel and medical supplies from its facilities only illustrates the invalidity of any humanitarian aid in a Hamas-controlled Gaza.

There were multiple similar reports over the years of Hamas’ stealing of humanitarian aid intended for Gazans and their abuse of this equipment for terrorist ends, including in 2009, when UNRWA [reported](#) Hamas forces seized aid supplies including blankets and food packages, a 2016 [report](#) by the Shin Bet that Hamas infiltrated charity groups and stole \$7.2 million USD per year, intended for food and aid programs, and a 2016 [report](#) that Hamas steals 95% of the cement coming into Gaza for military purposes.

Fuel: UNRWA and the UN issued multiple warnings concerning the dwindling fuel supplies designated mainly for hospitals, but also for general civil use. The Shifaa, Indonesian, Qatari, and other hospitals in Gaza issued similar warnings. However, **these warnings are based on false information propagated by Hamas in an effort to mobilize international public opinion against Israel, induce empathy, and put pressure on Israel to mitigate its military response and allow Hamas to rearm and reorganize.** By providing fuel to Gaza, Israel will practically be supplying its enemy with the means to continue fighting against it, which it cannot allow itself to do for obvious reasons. UN warnings are based on reports by “Palestinian

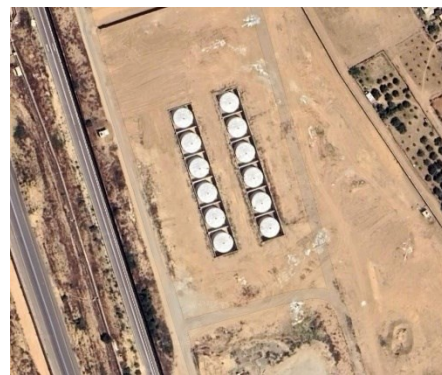
sources” or UNRWA, but in practice are based on a Hamas pressure campaign.

In response, the IDF [released](#) satellite imagery of 500,000 liters of fuel stored near the Rafah crossing, advising UNRWA to “ask Hamas” for fuel. Later, the IDF [exposed](#) that of the seven million liters of fuel purchased, only 65% made it to the power station, while the other 35% was sold by Hamas. Instead of selling the energy at its true value of \$0.85, Hamas sells it at \$1.23, pocketing at least \$3.05 million in profits.

The IDF has also released phone calls, one between a Hamas commander and the director of the Indonesian hospital in Gaza, in which it [refers](#) to

taking fuel from the hospital for Hamas’ use “for the sake of the country”; and another with an official in the Gaza healthcare system, who [confirms](#) that half a million liters of fuel are stored under the Shifa hospital for Hamas’ own use.

Israeli displaced people: In Israel, an unprecedented number of over 100,000 Israelis were ordered to evacuate from their towns, those located in immediate proximity to the Gaza and Lebanon borders. Having been lodged mostly free of charge in hotels and in homes of families who volunteered to host them, these hotels are now state subsidized.



Left: Hamas officials beat civilians who try to take humanitarian aid from a truck
Right: 500,000 gallons of fuel stores by Hamas and prevented from the civilian population (IDF Spokesperson)



Left: Pamphlet dropped by the IDF urging civilians to evacuate
Right: Hamas rocket launched from nearby a kindergarten (IDF Spokesperson)

Third Stage: Ground offensive combined with air power



Israeli tanks launch the ground offensive on Hamas in Gaza (IDF Spokesperson)

In the early stages of the war, as the full scale of the atrocities, number of hostages, and damage to Israeli communities and IDF bases has been gradually revealed, it has become increasingly clear that a ground offensive in the Gaza Strip will not only be of the essence, but unavoidable. Hundreds of thousands of reservists have been incorporated into the standing army units and were called up to train and prepare for the expansion of the war into the ground phase. Security analysts and political leaders, as well as IDF senior commanders, have made it unmistakably clear that the ground offensive was only a question of time. The IDF has also made a clear recommendation of a ground offensive to the political echelon and the War Cabinet, while crafting operational plans and training the forces.

Israel has been prudent to begin its ground maneuver incrementally, testing the terrain while avoiding pompous declarations that could potentially draw international attention and pressure. It has also gotten the international community and the media used to reporting precision IDF ground raids, rather than an all-out one-time invasion. Several precision raids were carried out, such as the one that became public

knowledge on [October 13](#), in which infantry and armored forces entered into Gaza to bring back dead bodies of Israelis taken hostage and target Hamas anti-tank capabilities; and on [October 26](#), in which infantry, armored and engineering forces performed a limited incursion on the ground and left. The IDF has made a point of clarifying these raids were target-specific and limited in scope.

Finally, on October 27, after three long weeks of waiting, the IDF has “expanded the ground offensive” and has gradually released news of increasing numbers of troops in the Gaza Strip. Reports of heavy aerial bombardments providing cover for ground units that began penetrating areas in the Gaza Strip began surfacing.

In general, the IDF has been consistent in not releasing any information on the location of its troops on the ground and its operational plans for the war. This kind of information could risk the lives of soldiers on the ground and summon criticism. In general, IDF troops have been **focusing on the northern part of the Gaza Strip**, encircling Gaza City from the north along the shoreline and from the Israeli border south to the city, while allowing **humanitarian corridors** that enable residents to evacuate southward.

During their operational activity, ground forces have taken control of several Hamas military bases, of weapon stockpiles hidden in mosques, schools, UN facilities, and playgrounds; and taken down multiple terrorists, destroyed ammunition and took hold of invaluable intelligence material and operational plans of Hamas. The Hamas parliament and much of its headquarters were taken over and destroyed. The IDF spokesperson described how the forces are “taking down terrorists in face-to-face firefights”, and how they destroy thousands of terror targets, “above ground and underground”. During raids on hospitals such as Rantisi multiple evidence were found for the dual use of these facilities for civilian-military purposes: firearms, RPG missiles, underground tunnel shafts, even evidence that Israeli hostages were held there. Notably, the IDF has begun a raid on the Al Shifa hospital, a significant Hamas symbol and iconic of its rule in the Gaza Strip, finding multiple evidence for military-civilian use of the facility and the holding of Israeli hostages there. At least 2 bodies of Israeli hostages, executed in captivity – Noa Marziano and Yehudit Weiss – were

found in nearby structures to Al Shifa. While operating, the IDF supplied as of November 18 at least 6,000 liters of water and 2,300 food packages, and a limited amount of fuel to enable the ongoing medical activity.

This activity does not come without loss in life. As of November 23, 71 IDF soldiers have fallen since the beginning of the ground offensive. These included soldiers who were killed in firefights with terrorists and soldiers who were hit by anti-tank missiles such as Kornets in their Namer armored personnel carrier or other military vehicles, among other incidents. In many instances, attack drones attempt to crash into gathering places of troops, and RPG missiles are shot into residential buildings where forces are staying.

In spite of that, the IDF strategy of “combination of powers” that integrates air and ground power in addition to precision intelligence and tip-of-the-spear technology is reported to be working impressively well, with high-level coordination between different types of battalions, with air coverage and high morale among the soldiers.



The IDF operates in the Gaza Strip (IDF Spokesperson)

Hostages - a new and unprecedented type of challenge

Israel is now being forced to handle an unprecedented situation, with 222 hostages known to have been kidnapped into Gaza. Unlike previous cases of Israelis taken hostage, mostly soldiers, Israel is now dealing with an extremely complicated predicament with hundreds of civilians, including children and elderly, held hostage in numerous locations, scattered around the Gaza Strip with no access to the Red Cross and no means of communication with their loved ones. These include dozens of foreign nationals, and some holding dual citizenship. Yet not only is Hamas holding hostages, but also the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Popular Front, and scores of civilian Gazans who infiltrated Israel with the masses, significantly complicating the release efforts.

Brigadier General (res) Gal Hirsch was appointed by Prime Minister Netanyahu to oversee the efforts on the missing and kidnapped. According to estimates, half of the kidnapped are no longer alive, whether bodies taken hostage or people who died of their wounds while abducted.

Hamas attempted to portray itself as humane and accessible by releasing hostages, two at a time. First released were Yehudit and Natalie Raanan, two Israelis who also hold American citizenship, on October 22. Next, on October 24, two elderly women were released, Yoheved Lifshitz (85) and Nurit Cooper (79), Israeli citizens. Reportedly Qatar and the US are involved in the release efforts.

In an almost unprecedented case in Israeli history, one hostage was released alive in a ground raid. YAMAM police forces (Israel's National Counter Terror Unit), operating in Gaza for the first time in history, in cooperation with ISA forces, successfully freed Ori Magadish, a 20-year-old soldier who was held captive in an apartment in Gaza. After staying in an IDF facility in the south, meeting both Chief of Staff Halevi and Head of the ISA Bar, interrogated and hospitalized, Madagish was released to her home.

Prisoner swap deals were considered an open wound in Israeli society. One of the best-known

deals between Israel and terrorists to release a hostage was the 2011 Gilad Shalit deal, in which Israel agreed to release 1,027 Palestinian security prisoners to Judea and Samaria as well as Gaza in return for the soldier who had been kidnapped in 2006 in an incident that triggered the Gaza campaign simultaneous to the Second Lebanon War. Among the released prisoners was Yahiyeh Sinwar, the current leader of Hamas in Gaza who served 25 years in Israeli prison for the murder of Palestinians he suspected to be collaborators with Israel, and Ali Qarachi who oversaw the October 7 massacre. Other releases inflicted heavy trauma on the Israeli public given the recidivism of the released (50%), raising serious concerns in Israel as to the policy of prisoner swap, in particular of such proportions. The Shalit deal alone led to the death of hundreds of Israelis in countless attacks, including the three Israeli teenage boys who were kidnapped and murdered in June 2014, the murders of Danny Gonen, Malakhi Rosenfeld, and countless other Israelis.

The IDF Spokesperson has announced that Israel is holding the bodies of over 1,000 terrorists who participated in the October 7 massacre. Multiple terrorists were arrested. This could potentially serve as a bargaining chip with Hamas over the release of the Israeli hostages, although it is more likely the Hamas demands the release of security prisoners, the ceasing of air strikes in Gaza, some sort of cease-fire arrangement, or benefits to the Gaza Strip such as fuel and goods, rather than swap Israeli hostages for killed or arrested terrorists.

The heavy price that Israel had to pay in return for hostage releases further emboldens the dilemma in which the Israeli leadership finds itself in: on the one hand, the urgency to bring the hostages home as swiftly as possible; on the other, paying a heavy price and compromising national security cannot be tolerated. This dilemma will shape the upcoming period of the war.

Response by the Israeli public

At the Homefront, the people of Israel, sadly well-seasoned in war and attacks against the country, have come together in a breathtaking grassroots effort in a scope and scale hardly - if ever - seen in any country of the world since WW2. US President Biden called the reaction and solidarity of Israelis “stunning.” Within minutes of the news, the strong civilian backbone comprising of people of all walks of society – religious and non-religious, Sephardic and Ashkenazi, Jewish, Arab, Druze, Bedouins, men, women, children, elderly and more, set aside political and other differences - even setting aside the fragmenting nine-month dispute over the judicial reform - and rose to the moment in a staggering display of national unity to help and volunteer, establishing hundreds upon hundreds of makeshift logistics centers across the country to mobilize desperately needed resources of all kinds to the troops deployed on the southern and northern borders for over two weeks, and to the displaced civilians who were left with nothing in the wake of the carnage which decimated their communities and left their homes in charred ruins. The entire country has sent out the message to its soldiers that it stands united behind the IDF.

People, hotels and guest centers across the country opened homes and facilities to welcome the refugees from the ravaged communities in the South and the citizens from evacuated towns within the confrontation area. Dozens of charities and NGOs across Israel’s philanthropic map joined a huge fundraising effort, channeling tens of thousands of shekels to a myriad of needs in the civilian and security spheres.

While hundreds of thousands of men and women have been called up to reserves duty, those left behind, from every community and walk of life, are finding ways to help – either by staffing the volunteer

centers, where they assist in unpacking and sorting donations of gear and food, packing and labeling packages, driving out to deliver the desperately needed supplies across the country, to units in confrontation areas, and even to the southern and northern borders - often times at personal risk.

Restaurants and communities are cooking warm meals for the displaced and soldiers, and many food business owners are going to military gathering areas and units out in the field to cook them food so they can have warm meals out in the field, where they have been sleeping for over two weeks. Thousands of people have taken upon themselves to go to the units to help any which way they can – giving haircuts, cheering up the troops, assisting in the field – among them many performers, who perform for the soldiers in the field.

More still find the time to arrive at hospitals around the country to donate blood at the behest of the hospitals and ques for hours with hundreds – sometimes thousands – of others, to donate blood. The show-up rate for reserve service broke records, and in some units reached as much as 130%, 150% or even 200% of the required quota, with young Israelis reporting at the bases even prior to receiving an official Order 8 call-up for reserve service. Designated flights, also irregularly permitted to fly on Shabbat, saw hundreds of Israelis returning home from their overseas trips to draft. With Israeli flags put on windows and ad spaces, countless civil initiatives handing out food, goods, and assistance to soldiers on the front lines and evacuated citizens, and multiple signs read “Together We Will Win”, the sentiment around the country is one of determination combined with eagerness to see a successful campaign, the release of the hostages, and an end to the threat from Gaza.



Publication by the Hostages and Missing Families Forum that calls for the immediate release of all 236 hostages



IDSF-Habithonistim volunteers hand out donations to soldiers, including ceramic vests, food, T-shirts and tents