



## The Gaza Terror Offensive

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*THIS ARTICLE WILL BE REGULARLY UPDATED.  
THE MOST RECENT UPDATES WILL BE AT THE TOP.*

**October 9-11, 2023**

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By the evening of October 10, after four days of fierce fighting, the IDF had regained control of the entire area captured by Hamas on the first day except for small stay-behind teams that were attempting to hide till the sweeps through the area passed them by in order to either conduct further ambushes or attacks at a later date. While part of the IDF force was completing the reclosure of the border throughout October 10, the rest was fighting remnants of Hamas forces still in Israeli territory. October 11 was spent combing through the area again and again to find the stay-behind teams and to search for Israelis, dead or still in hiding.

By the evening of October 11 the number of Israelis confirmed killed since the beginning of the war early on the morning of October 7 was approximately 1,200 with 3,000 wounded. The vast majority of the casualties were the civilians murdered on the first day. From the second day on there have been fewer Israeli casualties per day, but the IDF, police and other agencies are still finding bodies of civilians killed on the first day so the number is not yet final. The search operation is difficult because the Hamas terrorists planted bombs and mines in the villages they captured, along the roads leading to them, and in the fields around them. There are also at least 130 hostages who were taken into Gaza.

*PHOTO OF HAMAS IEDS –*

*Different colored arrows denote different types, anti-armour or anti-personnel*

By morning of October 11, Hamas and the other groups had fired approximately 5,000 rockets at cities, towns and villages across the southern half of Israel. More salvos were fired throughout the day but I have not yet seen a final number.

The Israeli air force has been given the mission of destroying every single known Hamas or other militia group's site and has conducted the most massive bombing of Gaza ever. After warning the population to move out of the areas to be targeted and allowing time for them to do so, the bombing began, and by the evening of October 11, 2,687 targets had been struck. Photographs of the damage to the relevant areas have been published. Hamas and the other groups are deliberately

ensconced and enmeshed in the civilian population to prevent the IDF from attacking them or to provide graphic photos of killed Gazan civilians if it does. The IDF has “played the game” by providing warnings of its impending attacks to enable the civilians to move out, which of course also provides early warning for Hamas to move its personnel out too or compel the civilians to stay (in some cases in the past they have actually brought more civilians in to serve as human shields to prevent the air strike).

This time, after the warnings were given, more than 187,000 Gazans evacuated the designated areas. However, the Gaza Ministry of Health claims that by noon on October 11 approximately 1,055 Gazans had been killed and 5,185 wounded. As usual, they claim the majority are civilians, but deep analysis during previous confrontations has shown that this is usually untrue.

This number apparently does not include the Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad personnel that crossed the border into Israel and were killed there. There have not been final numbers published on these, but it is clear that of the approximately 1,500 terrorists who crossed, many hundreds were killed and many others were captured. The captured wounded are in Israeli hospitals, where there have been complaints that placing them next to wounded survivors of the massacre is unacceptable.

Israel has informed Gaza that it will shut down its supply of electricity and water. It has already shut all traffic into and out of Gaza so the supply of fuel has stopped. Gaza has its own electricity plant and water sources but they are not enough for the population’s needs. Gaza depends on Israel to augment that insufficient capability with Israeli-generated electricity and water.

Meanwhile, skirmishes continue along the border. Hamas is still sending attack units into Israel, though these are being defeated.

The IDF mobilization of 300,000 has been completed. As with all such mass undertakings it did not go without a hitch, though relatively speaking some of the complaints aired in social media were exaggerated. On October 10, the government authorized the mobilization of 60,000 more. The mobilization is not only of Israelis living in Israel; a few thousand Israelis abroad are struggling to get back to enlist. Thus, for example, a couple of hundred Israelis in South America are trying to raise money to charter a plane to bring them home after the airlines on which they had tickets stopped flying to Israel.

The mobilization of reserves is not only for Gaza. Some units were deployed on the border with Lebanon in case Hezbollah decides to join the war. Others have been deployed on the border with Syria in case the Iranians and their proxies join the war on that front. The forces in Judea and Samaria have been reinforced considerably too.

Residents in some of the Israeli villages along the Lebanese border have been evacuated further south.

### **OTHER EVENTS**

The border with Lebanon has become active though much less than Gaza. An infiltration by a terrorist team from Lebanon to Israel was intercepted, two members of which were killed with one managing to flee back to Lebanon. Unfortunately an IDF deputy brigade commander was also killed in that skirmish. There have been a number of cross-border fire-attacks of various sizes and types of weapons from small arms to mortars, anti-tank missiles, and rockets. The IDF has responded with artillery and air strikes.

There have been sporadic Palestinian attacks throughout Judea and Samaria with a few casualties on each side. Israel has responded by stepping up its counter-terrorist operations, focusing on Hamas personnel – dozens have been arrested and a few have been killed or wounded while resisting arrest or trying to attack the IDF patrols.

### **WHY NOW?**

The answer to this question is not clear and the available information is conflicting. There is no clear evidence or any smoking gun at this point.

### **WHY THE HAMAS SUCCESS?**

A few more tactical details have emerged.

Hamas attacked the Israeli surveillance system and communications system with explosive drones.

The initial attack was successful but not as one-sided as originally thought. The Hamas forces took heavy casualties fighting the vastly outnumbered Israeli troops along the border, but overwhelmed them. I sat with the father of one of the soldiers from the Golani infantry brigade who was killed fighting and listened to the description of one of these initial battles by a friend from his unit who was wounded and evacuated. They were one of a small group of soldiers in a slightly

rear camp who heard shooting in the distance, grabbed their weapons and rushed to the nearby village, where they ran into a numerically superior force from Hamas entering the village from the other direction. They fought in the streets for a few hours until finally there were no longer any Israeli soldiers able to fight. The young soldier who told us this was 10 months in the army, as was the son of my friend who was killed a couple of hours after the wounded soldier was evacuated.

While the fighting was proceeding near the border, other Hamas units drove quickly in all-terrain pickup trucks between the embattled strongpoints and villages, heading for the next row of villages, camps and the nature party.

Judging from the amount of supplies they brought with them, they were not planning a raid, but a conquest. They intended to stay and hold the ground they had captured.

During the day IDF units from all over Israel were rushed to the area, with speed taking precedence over organization. These units rushed to counterattack the Hamas troops. Gradually more units arrived in a more organized fashion and began fighting to take back the villages and extricate the survivors.

The new information shows a very well-thought out plan, executed by surprise and exploiting that surprise by rushing into Israel at high speed (motorcycles and all-terrain pickup trucks) against a numerically greatly inferior defense force dispersed over a very wide front.

However, given that Hamas intended to hold on to the ground it had won in the first rush, not only massacre the population, this second portion of their plan failed. I can only assume that since the Hamas leadership are well aware of the overall ratio of forces they did not expect their force to hold the ground indefinitely, but apparently they did intend to hold it longer than they succeeded in doing.

### **WHAT NEXT?**

I am not privy to the decisions by the rival leaders so the answer to this question must be regarded as conjecture.

The number of casualties inflicted on Israel in a single day is the worst in its history. This is definitely the most catastrophic event Israel has suffered. This success by Hamas cannot be tolerated. It requires that Israel inflict in return a much more massive defeat on Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. This is what Israel's leaders, including the opposition, are saying. The size of the mobilization

is unprecedented since 1973 (in absolute numbers the greatest mobilization ever, but Israel's population in 1973 was only about one-third what it is today, so in relative terms the 1973 mobilization was bigger). Taking the statements and the mobilization into consideration it is clear that Israel intends to conduct an all-out offensive against Hamas. However, the exact methods and timetable have not been divulged.

The questions I raised in my previous paper have not been answered yet, and will not be for some time:

- Will Hezbollah and Iran join the fighting?
- How long will the West support Israel – especially since fighting in Gaza will inevitably inflict severe casualties and general suffering on the population at large?

At least publicly, Hamas is not backing-down. Its rocket units are still firing into Israel, its offensive ground units continue to launch attacks into Israel, and its defensive units are preparing for the expected Israeli ground offensive. On the first day of the war, Ismail Haniya, one Hamas's leaders and a previous president of the Hamas Gaza government, was interviewed in Al-Jazeera in Arabic on "Operation Al-Aqsa Deluge":

*...he called the operation a "great triumph" and said that that the enemy had suffered a political, military, intelligence, security, and moral defeat. He stated that **the operation had begun in Gaza and would spread to the West Bank, Jerusalem, Israel within the pre-1967 borders, and to the resistance and Palestinian people abroad.** This, he said, was not only a Palestinian battle but that of the entire nation, and went on to call on the sons of the nation to join the battle. Stressing that "We are on the verge of victory," he concluded: "Get out of our Jerusalem and our Al-Aqsa Mosque... This land is ours, Jerusalem is ours, everything is ours. ... I say to the sons of our Palestinian people and Arab and Islamic nation: Today, you are on the verge of a great triumph and a manifest victory.*

**October 7-9, 2023**

**WHAT HAS HAPPENED?**

The Hamas offensive began shortly before 06:29 on October 7, 2023. By 10:00 IDF radars had detected approximately 2,200 rocket launches at dozens of Israeli cities, towns and villages between Gaza and the Tel-Aviv-Jerusalem-Beersheva line. During the day, Hamas and the other Palestinian militias fired many hundreds more; the exact number has not yet been reported.

The firing was conducted in salvos with multiple launchers in an attempt to penetrate the Iron Dome defense system. Many rockets landed in open areas, but even assuming a 95% success rate (the highest Iron Dome has ever achieved), that still means dozens of rockets that managed to hit inside Israeli cities, towns and villages. The number of fatalities and wounded is not very high relative to the size of the bombardment solely because of Iron Dome and the early-warning system that enabled most Israeli civilians to reach bomb shelters in time.

Simultaneously with the beginning of the rocket bombardment, Hamas troops began crossing the border into Israel at variety of locations. The majority had approached the border in tunnels, climbed out just before the underground wall built by Israel, and then, using explosives, broke through the above-ground obstacle of a steel-rod fence and advanced into Israel. Observation cameras monitoring the fence were shot up with small arms and RPG rockets. One group attacked and captured the civilian crossing into Israel at Erez where 20,000 Palestinian civilians cross daily into Israel to work and where hundreds of trucks transit with goods. A small group crossed the border using paragliders (parachutes with small propeller engines) and a final group attacked from the sea, landing on an Israeli beach. (Of this group only a few got through; most were intercepted by Israeli navy patrol boats and strike-drones).

All together, within the first couple of hours, more than 1,000 Hamas troops crossed the border into Israel in approximately 15 to 30 locations (different sources have provided different numbers) and then fanned out in groups to attack Israeli civilians and military positions. They entered two Israeli towns and 12 villages (at least), driving through the streets shooting at passersby and breaking into houses to kill the residents. In three locations they captured buildings and held the

occupants as hostages. The biggest such case included 50 people of all ages at Kibbutz Be'eri who were herded into the communal dining room.

One group reached a large nature-party (like a rave party but held outdoors in nature) where approximately 3,000 young Israelis, mostly in their twenties, had gathered to dance. They attacked them with grenades and assault rifles, then chased the fleeing group, hunting down people who had sought to hide in the low brush. This is probably the location where the largest number of casualties was inflicted. The IDF and police units reaching this area have spent the past two days fighting off remaining teams of terrorists and collecting survivors and bodies.

One large and a few small IDF bases along the border were also attacked in the first rush, pinning down the outnumbered troops at those locations to fight for survival rather than assist the civilians who were simultaneously under attack.

The first responders in the civilian residential areas were local response teams of IDF reservists living in the villages (usually 10 to 20 people per village). They grabbed their weapons and ran out to face the attackers together with a few on-duty policemen in the towns. Here and there, Israelis with private weapons (pistols) also attempted to face the Hamas teams, who were armed with assault rifles.

The IDF units in the area were initially busy trying to fend off the surprise assault, so the first organized IDF response took a few hours as units located in other areas of Israel were rushed to the Gaza border. On arrival, they began trying to understand what was happening and determining how to allocate themselves to deal with the situation, including formulating a means of protecting villages not yet attacked in the initial strike. They began gradually counterattacking inside the villages captured by Hamas forces, combing the areas to find and kill the terrorists. Once a Hamas force was deemed destroyed, the IDF units evacuated Israeli residents who had locked themselves inside their homes during the onslaught. They also surrounded Hamas teams holding hostages.

The IDF units have been going through residential areas house by house, room by room, searching for terrorists to kill or capture and collecting Israeli survivors and bodies. The evacuated residents are being sent north to central Israel where they are being hosted by kibbutzim (communal villages), public facilities (converted schools), and private citizens who are donating rooms in their homes. Other units combed the areas between the villages to search for scattered civilians – especially



from the nature-party – and other Hamas teams that might be hiding there waiting for an opportunity to strike when things seemed to calm down.

All the hostages held in Israeli territory have been rescued, but approximately 130 Israelis (the figure claimed by a Hamas spokesperson), including civilians both male and female, the elderly, young children, and soldiers were kidnapped and taken into Gaza. Hamas claims it has placed them in underground installations.

By the early afternoon of October 8, the number of confirmed Israeli casualties had reached at least 700 killed (some expect it to rise to over 1,000) and 2,240 wounded (some with grave injuries, so they might yet die) who have reached hospitals. There are at least another 700 Israeli citizens whose names are known but who are unaccounted for (some might be dead and not yet discovered; others might be among the kidnapped; others might still be in hiding somewhere and out of touch). There are probably more missing whose names are not yet known.

Hamas casualties are currently estimated to be at least 400 killed and almost 2,000 wounded. These figures include those hit inside Israel and those hit in Israeli counterstrikes in Gaza. Dozens more have been captured. Since these numbers were declared, there have been numerous skirmishes as IDF troops continue to comb the residential and open areas to a distance of several kilometers from the border with Gaza.

In an amphibious raid into Gaza, Israeli naval commandos captured a senior commander of the Hamas naval commando force.

**The Israeli government has declared war** and ordered the IDF to conduct a mass mobilization of reserves. It also ordered the beginning of an aerial offensive response on Hamas targets in Gaza. The initial strikes were delayed to allow Palestinian civilians living in the buildings and vicinity to evacuate as urged by the IDF using various means of communication – radio, telephone calls, etc.

By the evening of October 8, it was reported that about 75,000 Gaza residents had relocated to designated safe areas, clearing the declared areas for free action by the IDF. In the late evening of that night, the Israeli air force struck approximately 800 targets in Gaza and the navy struck some more. They included residential buildings used by Hamas for hiding command posts, combat positions and storage sites, two banks, numerous weapons storage sites, and some launchers of Hamas and other armed groups. In addition, Hamas troops moving to and from

the border, between combat positions and launch sites, etc., were detected by surveillance drones and attacked.

The mobilization of reserves is not only for Gaza. Some IDF units are heading to the border with Lebanon in case Hezbollah decides to join the war; others are reinforcing the forces in Judea and Samaria or replacing regular units being sent to Gaza. Residents in some of the Israeli villages along the Lebanese border are being evacuated.

### **OTHER EVENTS**

Shortly after 07:00 on October 8, Hezbollah fired a number of mortar bombs at an Israeli strongpoint on the border with Lebanon. The IDF returned fire with artillery. At time of writing, it is not clear whether this exchange was a harbinger for an escalation or an isolated incident.

In Egypt, an Egyptian policeman opened fire on a bus of Israeli tourists, killing two and wounding a few more. He also killed an Egyptian.

In east Jerusalem Arab residents began rioting. There have also been sporadic attacks throughout Judea and Samaria.

### **WHY NOW?**

The answer to this question is not clear.

Several excuses were quickly published – such as the fact that Jews were allowed to pray on the Temple Mount, which Hamas sees as an infringement of an exclusive Muslim privilege. But only two days passed from that event till the attack. The extent and level of organization of this offensive prove that it had been planned and prepared for a far longer period of time.

Some believe Hamas felt it had to pressure Israel to improve the dire economic situation in Gaza. However, Israel has been acting to improve Gaza's economic situation (including allowing 20,000 Gazans to cross the border every day to work in Israel). This attack will worsen Gazans' economic situation, not help it. So this too is not a feasible argument.

Another theory is that this action was fomented by Iran. Hamas and Hezbollah officials have stated that Iran backed it, assisted in the planning, and approved the

offensive. They have no particular reason to lie about this, though crediting Iran could be a ploy of psychological warfare – enhancing Iran’s image as a Middle Eastern power to be feared by its enemies.

Iran’s envoy to the UN has denied Iranian involvement. However, Iran’s backing, physical support in funds and weapons, and urging have been documented behind the surge in terror attacks in and emanating from Judea and Samaria over the past two years. In 2019 there were 1,346 terror attacks against Israelis in or emanating from Judea and Samaria; in 2020 there were 1,320. In 2021, the number leaped to 2,135 and in 2022 increased again, to 2,613. From January to August 2023 there were 1,502 attacks against Israelis. Though there were several intense cycles of fighting on the Gaza border during the same period, most of the time that border was almost quiet.

There is some logic to possible Iranian involvement in the current attack. Iran is deeply displeased with the progress in discussions on an agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia – an agreement initiated very much as a treaty of cooperation against the common Iranian threat. Just last week, Khamenei, Iran’s Supreme Leader, stated that Saudi Arabia is “betting on a losing horse”. The theory goes that the current attack was to prove Israel’s weakness and give the Saudis second thoughts.

However, there is a weakness to this theory. A combined attack with Hezbollah would seem to have been a better way of proving Israel’s limitations. A Hezbollah offensive could yet be in the offing, but Israel is now more awake to the possibility and is preparing for it. Logic seems to dictate that a simultaneous offensive (like the simultaneous Egyptian-Syrian offensive in 1973) would have been a better course of action. There could, of course, be reasons why Iran might prefer a disjointed offensive – to pull the IDF into Gaza and then attack from Lebanon while it is being taxed in the south, for example. Or there might have been problems of coordination.

To sum it up – we do not yet know.

### **WHY THE HAMAS SUCCESS?**

This is an issue that will require a very intensive inquiry after the war.

**The supreme source of the failure is totally that of the intelligence services,** which had concluded that Hamas was more interested in the economic well-being of its population than in furthering its ideological agenda by initiating a war that would damage that population's well-being. In line with this supposition, the government made various decisions to help the Gazan economy. But more importantly, the IDF assumed that the current scenario was simply not on the table and convinced the government that that was the case. How Hamas managed to plan, organize, and assemble its forces without Israeli intelligence services discovering it will need a very deep analysis once the war is over.

While the details differ and will only come to light in an inquiry, in principle, this is the 1973 fiasco all over again.

The second failure is a long-term one, and not just a failure of this government but of Israeli society in general and IDF senior commanders over the past 20 years. It stems from the insufficient manpower available on a routine basis to man the IDF's missions. This has always been a problem and has objective roots in the size of our population, the percentage of budget Israel can allocate to defense, and the extent of damage to the economy that is created by mobilizing reserves.

But this problem has been exacerbated by a 25-year shift in strategy concocted at the IDF's most senior levels, based on new Western concepts of what wars are and how they are conducted. The result was a deliberate reduction in size of IDF reserves in general and the number of days per year that they serve. This created a built-in shortage of available troops per mission the IDF is required to conduct.

This shortage was dealt with by constantly shifting troops and taking risks in areas considered less imminently threatening. The recent need to reinforce IDF units in Judea and Samaria due to the escalation of attacks there caused the IDF to reduce its forces along the Gaza border – and why not, since IDF intelligence assessed that Hamas was not going to conduct a major offensive in the foreseeable future (see intelligence analysis above).

Text from the interrogation of a Hamas terrorist captured by the IDF has been published, and it illustrates the extent of the complete failure of Israel's intelligence services. According to him:

- ◆ Hamas had been preparing this attack for more than a year.

- ◆ Hamas was encouraged by the political demonstrations in Israel, seeing them as a sign of Israeli weakness.
- ◆ The past weeks' riots conducted by Hamas were a deception to enable them to prepare their attack and hide the preparations.
- ◆ The attack force included 1,000 men who broke through the border fence at 15 locations (as noted above, other sources claim more locations).
- ◆ This terrorist and his unit were surprised that the IDF was not waiting for them. They operated inside Israel for about five hours before they met armed resistance.

### WHAT NEXT?

At time of writing (early afternoon on October 8), a few active terrorists remain inside Israel. The IDF is still busy clearing its territory of remnants of these Hamas teams. The question is, what comes afterwards?

I am not privy to the decisions of the rival leaders, so my answer to this question must be regarded as conjecture.

Hamas is understandably overjoyed at its success, which is the worst defeat inflicted on Israel since October 6, 1973.

The quote from Moshe Dayan at the beginning of this article, stated nearly 70 years ago, encapsulates Israel's situation and the necessary strategy it must implement, albeit adapted to today's conditions. It is not a foolproof strategy or an easy one to implement successfully, but it is probably the only one that has the potential, if successful, of ensuring a better situation in future. What it cannot achieve, just as it did not achieve it when implemented by Dayan himself and his successors, is eternal peace. Better vigilance and better preparation for future threats will have to be implemented too.

The Israeli government has declared its intention to conduct a major counter-offensive on Hamas in Gaza, the objective of which is to inflict mass casualties and destruction to the Hamas organization, personnel and equipment. But it has not indicated the methods or timeline (other than to say it will be a long war).

Experience has shown that a purely aerial offensive, as conducted in the past, even if significantly intensified, cannot achieve this objective. So it appears that a ground offensive will be conducted sooner or later, even if at first there is a prolonged aerial offensive to prepare the way. This will require preparation and will bring IDF units into dense urban terrain that favors the Hamas defenders who have considerably fortified it and trained in it. It therefore risks suffering heavy IDF casualties. It also risks inflicting major casualties to Palestinian civilians and prompting severe criticism by Israel's only major international supporter, the US.

It will also take a long time to complete, and international support is unlikely to last very long. During Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, after a month in which 135 Israelis were killed in terrorist attacks, the US government initially accepted Israel's need to conduct the operation and then demanded that it halt it midway. Another example occurred during the 2014 war with Gaza, when the US government and Europe tried to force Israeli concessions to Hamas. They were blocked by Egypt, which controls one of the borders of Gaza and views Hamas as a hostile ally of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Obama went so far as to deny Israel replenishment of a key armament item it had requested. After the public calls of commiseration have subsided, it is an open question how the US and Europe will actually act. As of right now, the US government is stating full support for Israel.

Furthermore, the longer the IDF is busy fighting in Gaza, the less it will be prepared for fighting on the Lebanese and Syrian fronts, having lost personnel both killed and wounded and used up stocks of supplies and funds for purchasing more. Thus the risk of another front opening up grows over time.

The final question that must be answered is this. Even if the Israeli counter-offensive is completely and rapidly successful, what then? Hamas rules Gaza because the majority of the population believes in its agenda. In the last democratic election to the Palestinian Authority parliament in January 2006, Hamas won the majority of seats. That is why Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, has consistently refused to conduct elections ever since. He is fully aware, and this is backed by the polls, that Hamas would gain an even higher proportion of seats. So if Hamas is thrown out of power in Gaza, who will replace it? Will the IDF have to stay there and conduct a non-stop counter-guerrilla campaign while attempting to provide administrative services to the population? That is the last thing Israel wants. The alternative is to withdraw and let the various factions fight each other for control. But given what is known about the opinions of the Palestinian populace, either

Hamas will recover its organization and position or its only strong rival, the even more extreme Palestinian Islamic Jihad, might.

These are the questions Israel's government and military must answer to achieve a better situation at the end of this catastrophic debacle.

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