



Hamas-Izrael War, Short Analysis of First Two Phases of War

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Abstract

At the end of 2023, Middle East faced new challenges. Among these new challenges, one of most important is the Hamas-Israel war. To understand the factors of Hamas operational success, and the strategic surprise attack on Israel from Gaza, on October 7, 2023, needs a thorough analysis to understand all its political, intelligence and operational failures aspects. In this article three issues related to new Gaza war will be addressed. Firstly, this article highlights the political background of the bloodiest attack in modern Israel's history happened on October 7, 2023. Secondly, this article seeks to answer the question, how was Hamas able to attack a country with operates one of the best intelligence organizations in the world by an extreme surprise? Finally, based upon the available data, this article analyzes the first and second phases of war.

Keywords: Terrorism, war in Gaza, Israel, Palestine Authorities, Palestine terrorism

Introduction

It is quite likely that international security research institutes, various practitioners of military science, experts of security issues, and think tanks dealing with the Middle East will discuss and analyse what and why happened in Israel on October 7. Furthermore, the extent to which Israel's

military actions in Gaza were proportionate and in accordance with international law will also be a subject of debate. This war between IDF and Iran backed proxy forces would have their regional and international political effects for a long time to come.

The conflict between the Arabs and Israel – although the modern Jewish state has only officially existed since 1948 – has been going on since the beginning of the 20th century in the form of clashes between the Jewish and Arab population in British controlled Mandatory Palestine with varying intensity on the military, political and economic levels. It should be noted that Mandatory Palestine was divided by the United Kingdom in September 1922 into Emirates of Transjordan and Palestine. During two decades after 1922, more than 150,000 Jews immigrated from Europe into Palestine.¹

Just between 1933 and 1936 130.000 Jews settled in Palestine.² The British Army's operations in Palestine during this period were mainly directed against militant Arab groups who were opposed to this mass Jewish immigration. In 1936 and 1937 the United Kingdom's army especially heavily fought against Arab rebel fractions of the Arab Higher Committee, led by Hitler fun Amin al Husayni, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem.

The Israeli-Arab conflict became more violent after the UN partition of Mandatory Palestine and the subsequent declaration of Jewish state in 1948. Five Arab country's army attacked Israel, and the elimination of Israel was almost evident. Interestingly, the Stalinist Soviet Union supported politically and with arms transfer from Czechoslovakia the newly born Jewish state. Stalin also accepted a limited emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union into Israel to invest in what he hoped for would be a socialist Israel. These three steps, political recognition, arms transfer, and the new wave of immigrants were lifesaver for Israel.³

The issue gained world political weight thanks to the Cold War, as the Soviet Union started so support militarily, economically, politically the Arab states against Israel, which enjoyed the unconditional support of the United States of America. However, the disintegration of the bipolar world order and some ultimately ineffective peace initiatives did (Camp David, Oslo I., II.) not put an end to the conflict, in which both sides use means that are objectionable from the point of view of human rights. The result of the conflict is largely played role in the formation of the national consciousness

¹ Banny Morris: 1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War, 2008, Yale University Press. ISBN: 9780300151121. pp. 145-154

² Banny Morris: 1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War, 2008, Yale University Press. ISBN: 9780300151121. pp. 156-158

³ Arie J. Kochavi: The Struggle against Jewish Immigration to Palestine Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 34, No.3, July 1998. pp. 146-167

of the Palestinians, but also the forging of the diverse Jewish people coming from different European even African countries into a nation.

1. Political background of Hamas' massacre on Oktober 7

The Hamas massacre was an extremely shocking, earthquake-like, creepy, and horrifying serial event. The scale of attack and extreme brutality shocked and outraged not just the Israeli sociality but all civilized world. How the Hamas, which has been established in 1987 focusing mainly on caritative activities, transformed into a monster, ISIS alike killing machinery?

It is well-known that Hamas was founded by Ahmad Yassin and from the very beginning he considered the organization as the armed wing of the Muslim Brotherhood. Yassin opposed the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, and in his opinion, "Palestine is a Muslim land, which an Arab leader has no right to give up," and "Israel must disappear from the face of the Earth."⁴

Hamas is not the only terrorist organization in Gaza. Currently, 17 different terrorist organizations are known in the Gaza Strip, which have a rather diverse ideological background.

For example, the Palestine Islam Jihad, created in 1979, is more militant faction; it operates primarily in Gaza, but also has some underground cells in Cis-Jordan. Interestingly, Hamas was created at the beginning as a rival organization, counterbalancing Iranian influence among the Palestinians in Gaza, because the Palestine Islam Jihad operated completely under Teheran influence. Need to know, the Palestine Islam Jihad has been established by two former Palestinian members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Fathi Shikaki and Abd al Aziz Awda.⁵ Several terrorist organizations have indeed grown out of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, in addition to the ones already mentioned, for example there is also the Egyptian Islamic Jihad which in 2001 merged with al Qaida.

In 1992, after the Gulf war, Teheran decided to support Hamas with around 30 million USD annually and to provide weapons and training for Hamas terrorists.⁶ The enemy of my enemy is my friend logic worked in this

⁴ Bridgett Kendall: Sheikh Yassin: Spiritual figurehead, BBC, 22 March 2004. Downloaded from

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/middle_east/2001/israel_and_the_palestinians/profiles/1695470.stm on 11 January 2024

⁵ Holly Fletcher: Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Council on Foreign Relations, 10 April 2008. Downloaded from <https://www.cfr.org/background/palestinian-islamic-jihad> on 12 January 2024.

⁶ Daniel Levin: History of Iran, Hamas and Islamic Jihad Ties. United States Institute for Peace. 11 October 2023. Downloaded from

<https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2018/jul/09/iran-hamas-and-palestinian-islamic-jihad> on 12 January 2024

case as well. Iran was able to cross the religious divide, as both Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad are Sunni organizations, and to build its regional Islamist power, Teheran provided financial and military support to both organizations.

In 1997, Hamas proclaimed a jihad against Israel, and Ahmad Yassin gave his authorization for the execution of previously unknown new forms of terrorist attacks, such as suicide bombings, even those carried out by women or children.

In 2005, when Israel liquidated its 21 colonies, the Israeli government had high hopes for lasting peace. Even so, some Israelis believed that the Gaza strip under the leadership of Arafat led Palestinian Authority will be able to convert that enclave into “Singapore in the Middle East”. Unfortunately, Hamas the “children” Muslim Brotherhood had a different agenda. Hamas, the so-called “resistance movement” was initially, a charitable organization, but later established its military wing and started to organize suicide bombings against Israeli targets.

Hamas gained popularity among the Palestinians in Gaza by creating schools, medical centres, even hospitals that provided free services for poor families. The money came from rich Gulf states and individuals. Hamas’ policy still was based on the old three NOs, dated back to Arab League summit held in Khartoum on August 29, 1967. "The Three No's" were: No peace with Israel, No recognition of Israel, and No negotiations with Israel.

Furthermore, the final communiqué of the summit underlined the right of Palestinians not just to retake the whole of Palestine, “from the sea to the river” but also, to destroy the State of Israel.⁷ For Hamas, Arafat led Fatah became a “traitor” when they started to negotiate with the Israeli government. Hence, from 2005, they also confronted Palestinian Authority law enforcement officers in Gaza and galvanized a mass movement among the Palestinians against Israel and Fatah.

Hamas took full advantage of Fatah's corruption, carelessness, and unpopularity due to charitable activities of Hamas. Hamas turned into its advantage two major events in 2000: namely the failure of the Camp David negotiations in July 2000 and Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the al-Aqsa Mosque in September.

Hamas had just participated in the First Intifada in 1987, but the organization had already initiated and led the Second Intifada in 2000. The Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigade, established in 1991, is the military wing of Hamas and has launched continuous attacks against Israeli civilians and military targets. Attacks against civilian targets mostly included rocket

⁷ Tamara Zieve: This week in History: The Arab League Three Nos. Jerusalem Post. 26 August 2012. Downloaded from <https://www.jpost.com/Features/In-Thespotlight/This-Week-In-History-The-Arab-Leagues-three-nos> on 10. 01. 2024.

attacks and, since 1993, suicide bombings. After death of Arafat, Mahmood Abbas became president of the Palestine Authority. In 2006 they held legislative election but surprisingly Hamas received 44.45% of the vote and won 74 of the 132 seats.⁸ This electoral victory of Hamas divided the otherwise not very united Palestinian leadership. Moreover, the following year, the rift became final, when Hamas militarily liquidated Fatah in Gaza. At the same time, Tehran increased its arms deliveries and financial support, already supporting Hamas with 250 million USD in 2006.

At the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, a short-term decrease in Iran's support was caused by statements of Hamas supporting the Sunnis in Syria. Hamas was expelled from Syria, and it was Qatar that took in the terrorist organization's top management.

In 2019, the Iranian financial support to Hamas reached already 360 million USD per year.⁹ By 2023, Iran's arms exports, transfer of weapons manufacturing technology, training and high-level financial support have turned Hamas into a powerful terrorist organization, which has completely become a regional servant of Tehran in its political goals.

2. Factors behind a successful surprise attack by Hamas

In 2006, Hamas surprisingly won the Palestinian legislative election and took control of the Gaza Strip in the following year from the secular rival Fatah. After the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, Israel declared Gaza under Hamas a hostile entity, introduced a series of sanctions, and implemented a strict blockade with Egyptian assistance. Since then, multiple wars have taken place between Hamas fighters and Israel, including in 2008-09, 2012, 2014, and 2021.¹⁰

On October 7, the Palestinian militants launched an attack on Israel, in combination of massive barrage of rockets fired from the Gaza Strip with armed militiamen breaching security barriers. This surprise attack happened almost a same day when 50 years ago the Egyptian and Syrian forces launched a coordinated attack against Israel during the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur. According to Ely Karmon, the strategic goals of Hamas in its attack on Israel were the disruption of the normalization process between

⁸ Al Jazeera, Hamas wins huge victory, 26 January 2006, Downloaded from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2006/1/26/hamas-wins-huge-majority> on 11 January 2024

⁹ Michael Banchner, Toi Staff: Iran said increasing Hamas funding to \$30m per month, wants intel on Israel. *the Times of Israel*, 5 August 2019 Downloaded from <https://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-agrees-to-increase-hamas-funding-to-30-million-per-month-report/> on 12 January 2024.

¹⁰ For historical context on Israel's war against Hamas, see Prof Dr Mária Bordás: *Islamic Caliphate in the 21st Century (?) - Issues of State Effectiveness in the Middle East and Africa*, 2015 Ludovika Kiadó, pp 151-157.

Saudi Arabia and Israel and the weakening of the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.¹¹

Many analysts questioned how this could happen when Israel has one of the best intelligence services in the world, the Gaza Strip was monitored at a very high level, and a high-tech defence system was installed around the zone.

Of course, the full picture is not yet known and presumably the post-war commission of inquiry investigation is still to come, but based on the available information, the causes can be classified into three large groups.

1. Excessive reliance and faith in technology;
2. Incorrect threat assessment on the level of Israeli political, military and intelligence leadership;
3. Successful deception operations by Hamas;

Regarding the first point, it has been clear that Israel has used extensive human networks in Gaza and several types of electronic intelligence to detect any of a potential attack, including Signals intelligence (SIGINT) is intelligence gathered by interception of signals, communication (COMINT) or electronic signals (ELINT). Even there were some signals that Hamas preparing an attack, for example training for Hamas in Iran, Lebanon even in Gaza, the intelligence services failed to avoid the October 7 attack.

Reportedly, members of Israel's domestic security service, the Israel Security Agency, also called "Shin Bet", responsible for monitoring of Hamas activity in the Gaza Strip on the eve of October 7, assumed at first that the Palestinian organization was only conducting an exercise. Additionally, the English Translation of the Official Strategy of the Israel Defence Forces from 2015 mentioned that "Hamas is interested to maintain peace and quiet and not to bring about escalation", it means that IDF must have believed that Hamas had no interest in carrying out terrorist attacks against Israel anymore.¹²

Moreover, Unit 8200, sometimes also named as "Israel SIGINT National Unit" suspended controlling the Hamas' communications in 2022 because they deemed it is unnecessary and the unit even was not operational near to the Gaza borderline on the morning of October 7.¹³ It is worth

¹¹Ely Karmon: The Goals of Hamas' Terrorist Attack on Israel from Gaza. International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT). October 2023. special report Downloaded from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep53546> on 02 February 2024

¹²Graham Allison: Deterring Terror English Translation of the Official Strategy of the Israel Defense Forces, Belfer Center Science and International Affairs, Cambridge, MA, USA. page 11.

¹³TOI Staff : Top Israeli intel unit wasn't operational on October 7 due to personnel decision, Time of Israel, 28 November 2023 Downloaded from

mentioning that the Unit 8200 is the largest and one of the most secretive unit of the Israeli defensive Forces; this organisation is responsible for different clandestine operations, collecting signal intelligence (SIGINT) and code decryption, counterintelligence, cyberwarfare, military intelligence, and surveillance as well. Moreover, this unit is the foremost technical intelligence agency in the world.¹⁴

Nevertheless, the head of Shin Bet, Ronen Bar, thought that Hamas might attempt a small-scale attack. He ordered a group of elite counterterrorism forces to deploy to Israel's southern border, who soon found themselves in the middle of a battle with thousands of Hamas gunmen.¹⁵

Other extremely interesting question, why did Israel's Iron Dome air defence system fail? It was well-known that the Iron Dome missile defence system can destroy about 90% of the rockets and missiles that Hamas and other terrorist organizations were firing into Israel. To understand the failure of the Israeli air defence strategy on tactical level we first need to understand the basics of air defence systems. Any air defence system has a sub-system of detections, commonly known, as radars.

According to the Raytheon, the ELM-2084 MS-MMR Multi-Sensor Multi Mission Radar System which was using for in the Iron Dome air defence weapon system, is capable to detect effectively an missile lunch or hostile artillery shell, between 50 and 90 km, however the effective over distances is from 4 to 70 km).¹⁶ The Iron Dome is a highly advanced missile defence system made up of 10 mobile batteries deployed across Israel, and Each battery includes launchers with Tamir interceptor missiles. Each battery can defend up to 155 square kilometres and are strategically placed around cities and populated areas.¹⁷

A battery includes three to four launchers, and each launcher can hold up to 20 interceptors. This is simple math, the system can capture and

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/top-israeli-intel-unit-wasnt-operational-on-october-7-due-to-personnel-decision/> on 21 January 2024

¹⁴ John Reed: Unit 8200, Israel's Cyber Spy Agency. *Financial Times*, 10 July 2015. Downloaded from <https://www.ft.com/content/69f150da-25b8-11e5-bd83-71cb60e8f08c> on 02 February 2024

¹⁵ Ronen Bergman, Patric Kingsley: How Israel's Feared Security Services Failed to Stop Hamas's Attack. *The New York Times*, 10 October 2023. Downloaded from <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/10/world/middleeast/israel-gaza-security-failure.html> on 24 January 2024

¹⁶ Israeli Aerospace Industries: ELM-2084 MMR. Downloaded from <https://www.iai.co.il/p/elm-2084-mmr> on 02 February 2024

¹⁷ Annika Burgess: What is Israel's Iron Dome air defence system and did it fail during the Hamas attack? ABC Net. 09 October 2023. Downloaded from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-10-10/what-is-israel-iron-dome-air-defence-gaza-rockets/102952172> on 02 February 2024

destroy a maximum of 800 targets in the case of missiles launched in the first series, assuming 100% capture.

All air defence systems can only track, and target within their limitations. In other words, all systems can be overwhelmed. Their limit is called the saturation point, and the Palestinian terrorists understood this weakness.

Reportedly, on October 7, the Hamas and the Palestine Islamic Jihad launched around five thousand rockets into Israel.¹⁸ With thousands of rockets pouring in from Gaza, Israel's Iron Dome batteries often reached saturation points that allowed rockets to pass through without being intercepted due to the physical limitations of the system itself. For overwhelming the iron Dome system, Palestinians used home-made Qassam rockets and Type-63 (old Soviet BM-12) 107mm mini rocket launchers having 12 tubes. They used asymmetric assets against the most sophisticated air defence around the world, in this case quite effectively.

First and Second Phases of War

After the October 7 attack, Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel, formally declared war on Hamas in Gaza on 8 October 2023, and the first phase of war began. Practically, the first phase was marked by mass airstrikes, targeting terrorist installations, mainly concentrated on northern Gaza. The targeted and destroyed terrorist installations were weapons production plants, Hamas Intelligence Headquarters, rocket launcher sites. In addition to air campaign, Israeli Defence Forces mobilized 300 000 reservists.

According to the Israeli Prime Minister's Office the military goals of the "Operation Iron Sword" are the destruction of the military and governmental capabilities of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.¹⁹

Before the land operation started the IDF conducted extremely high intensity of air reconnaissance activity in combination with high precision air strikes. The precise number of airstrikes is unknown, however, according to

¹⁸ Alex Hollings and Stavros Atlamazoglou: Was Israel's IRON DOME overwhelmed, overhyped, or right on target? Sandboxx 12 October 2023. Downloaded from <https://www.sandboxx.us/news/was-israels-iron-dome-overwhelmed-overhyped-or-right-on-target/> on 23. January 2024

¹⁹ TOI Staff: Security cabinet says Israel will destroy military, governmental abilities of Hamas, Islamic Jihad. The Times of Israel, 8 October 2023. Downloaded from https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/security-cabinet-says-israel-will-destroy-military-governmental-abilities-of-hamas-islamic-jihad/ on 28 January 2024

Turkish information, the executed strikes could be around 12,000, this number does not include the artillery strikes.²⁰

On 9 October, Israel announced so-called “total blockade”, including water, electricity, fuel, food, and medicine supply.²¹ Moreover, nearly 60,000 Israelis were evacuated from the Gaza envelop towns, and Israeli military units, including some armoured brigades, have been tasked to guard the destroyed fence and entering point to Gaza to establish a security zone around the Gaza Strip.

On 13 October, the IDF issued an evacuation warning for the northern Gaza to leave a place within 24 hours. Finally, on 27 October, the IDF launched a large-scale ground invasion into northern Gaza by deploying armoured and mechanized units. Surprisingly, the IDF first attacked the Hamas positions on the seaside. The Israeli army first gave the civilians the opportunity to leave the area and only later cut the Gaza Strip into two parts. The army of the Jewish state was in no hurry to capture the densely populated, tunnel-filled city of Gaza and Bei Hanoun. However, on 1 November, after difficult and complex negotiations and Qatar’s mediation, at least 355 foreign passport holders – including confirmed British, US, French, Italian and Austrian nationals – and 76 wounded Palestinians crossed into Egypt via the Rafah border crossing point.

Clashes between terrorists of the Izz el-Deen al-Qassam Brigades and the IDF regularly took place near of hospitals, schools. Unfortunately, many youths, adolescents and women lost their lives due to the inhumane policy and tactics of using human shields by Hamas.

Fierce fighting between Palestinian terrorist and the IDF continued through the middle of November but on 22 November, Israel and Hamas reached a temporary ceasefire agreement.

Again, Qatar was the main negotiator, mediator. However, the success was an outcome of joint effort of Qatar, Egypt, and United States.²² In the Israeli government the ceasefire was opposed by three ministers from the extremist, anti-Arab, Jewish far-right parties such „Jewish Power”. The signed ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian terrorist groups, including Hamas, Palestine Islamic Jihad, Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine, in the Gaza Strip took effect from 24 November 2023 to 30 November 2023.

²⁰Abdel Rauf Arnaut: Israel has launched over 12,000 airstrikes in gaza since October 7. 02.11.2023. Downloaded from <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israel-has-launched-over-12-000-airstrikes-in-gaza-since-oct-7-army/3041404> on 04 February 2024.

²¹ Al Jazeera: Israel announces ‘total’ blockade on Gaza, 9 October 2023. Downloaded from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/israel-announces-total-blockade-on-gaza> on 25 January 2024

²² Amr Hazawy: The Political Impact of the Israel-Hamas Ceasefire. Carnegie. 06 December 2023. Downloaded from <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/12/06/political-impact-of-israel-hamas-ceasefire-pub-91177> on 24 January 2024

The central element of the agreement was the exchange of Israeli and other hostages held by Palestinian terrorists for prisoners who had committed various crimes held in Israeli prisons.

Even though there was hope that the ceasefire would become permanent, unfortunately, the ceasefire collapsed on the 1st of December. The main reason was the terrorist attack in Jerusalem on 30 November and the renewed missile attacks by Hamas.²³ However, the seven-day ceasefire, had some positive outcome because the Palestinian terrorist groups realised 150 hostages, including 78 Israeli women and children, and 240 Palestinians were also released from Israeli jails. Next day, on 1st December, the third phase of war has started.

Conclusion

Before the October 7 attack, the Israeli intelligence apparatus, military commanders, security officials and more importantly, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself, regarded Hamas as a second-tier threat, ranking below Iran and its premier proxy, Hezbollah.

Hence, despite intense surveillance of Gaza, Hamas was able to plan its elaborate assault in full secrecy, hacking through Israel's high-tech "smart fence" with bulldozers, motorbikes and bolt-cutters.

Reportedly, Israeli intelligence and security officials tried for months to alert Benjamin Netanyahu, the country's prime minister, to the fact that the political turmoil brought on by his domestic policies was undermining national security and giving Israel's enemies more confidence. Despite these warnings, Netanyahu disregarded them and persisted in pursuing his policies, which likely left Israel vulnerable and exposed to an attack.

In this regard, Israel's political and security leadership has a lot to answer for. Although the full details have not yet been revealed, serious findings have already come to light. Potential warning signs were ignored, dismissed, or downplayed, and misplaced security priorities could have made the attack even more lethal. In addition to a comprehensive investigation into what went wrong, the Israeli public will demand a full accounting from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for his own role in the disaster.

On October 7, the prime minister moved quickly to declare war on Hamas in Gaza, later repeatedly stressing that Israel will not stop its military operations until it accomplishes all its objectives, chief among them being the destruction of Hamas. Three months after the launch of the Israeli ground invasion of the Gaza Strip, as a new phase of the war just begun, it was still

²³ Emanuel Fabian: Four killed, 5 injured in Hamas-claimed terror shooting at Jerusalem bus stop. Jerusalem Post, 30 November 2023. Downloaded from <https://www.timesofisrael.com/three-killed-6-injured-in-terror-shooting-at-jerusalem-entrance-bus-stop/> on 05 February 2024

not clear if the main objective of the military response was even realistic, and what have the IDF achieved so far in Gaza.

Israel should realize that the slaughter of at least 1,400 Israelis by Hamas death squads represented a catastrophic collapse of Israel's existing security strategy. The failure of Israel's intelligence and security forces and their overseers within the government cannot be overemphasized. The old deterrence model—which assumed that Hamas could be contained through technological defence and occasional, limited deterrence operations in the Gaza Strip—has failed. We still do not know, when and how the war will end but once the war finished, Israel must deal with more serious issues.

The first is how to stabilize Gaza. Israel cannot be responsible for running Gaza, but the Israeli government must act responsibly and allow stakeholders and partners to take care of the needs of the Palestinian civilian population there and prevent the re-emergence of terrorist threats.

Secondly, Israel must develop a new security approach, a new policy to protect its borders and keep its people safe.

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