



October 8, 2023

Key Points:

- Cabinet has officially declared war. More than 600 Israelis have been killed. Some 2,000 Israelis wounded. At least 5,000 rockets fired at Israel. An estimated 100 Israelis are being held hostage in Gaza.
- The Jewish Agency for Israel's Fund for Victims of Terror (FVOT) is the first responder in the recovery process of families and individuals who have been impacted by acts of terror and violence, providing immediate grants to assist victims, as needed, within 48 hours of an attack. The Agency estimates that it will need to provide at least 350 short term grants and 750 long term grants.
- JDC is providing support to those in the line of fire, including elderly, people with disabilities, children and families at risk, and other vulnerable populations adversely impacted during this war and in past conflicts.
- Jewish Federations stand in total and complete solidarity with Israel. We are working closely with our partners on the ground and have opened an emergency fund to support these efforts. <https://jfeds.org/israelfund2023>

In what many have begun to call Israel's 9/11 (see the Jerusalem Post's [cover story](#) today) the Jewish state has entered the second day of its war against Hamas. Clearly, the numbers above point to one of the blackest days in the country's history.

Jewish Federations issued a [statement](#) on the current fighting. Several Federations have already scheduled solidarity gatherings. We encourage Federations to organize such gatherings to help build support for Israel in your communities. [Here is an outline](#) on how to create an event. For additional help, please contact [Alexandra Coffey](#).

Our Israel Office has activated our emergency protocols, is working closely with our partners on the ground, and is in close contact with the Government of Israel and the IDF. We will continue to update as the situation develops. Funds raised and designated to the [Jewish Federations of North America Israel 2023 Emergency Fund](#) will be allocated to the most pressing needs, or distributed as designated by a Federation or donor.

Jewish Federations will hold a webinar with the latest developments today, **Sunday, at 12 Noon ET**. [Register here](#).

Surprise Attack

Yesterday, on the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah in Israel, at around 6:00am, hundreds of Hamas Palestinian terrorists infiltrated Israel from Gaza, by sea, air and land, tearing down border fences and entering Israeli towns in the region in vehicles and on foot. (See our update from yesterday [here](#)).

Dozens of terrorists infiltrated numerous Israeli cities, kibbutzim and towns, and in many cases, went door to door, executing men, women, children and the elderly. Hamas troops drove into as many as 22 locations in southern Israel, including towns and other communities as far as 15 miles from the Gaza border. Many of the victims were young people attending a large outdoor party.

Some 100 civilians are believed to have been captured and taken into the Gaza Strip and are currently being held hostage by Hamas forces. Video footage released by Hamas shows men, women and children being loaded and unloaded from cars and motorcycles, hands bound and looking very scared. The Red Cross and other international bodies have been denied access to the Israeli hostages.

Israeli television and social media have been awash with shocking footage of civilians being taken hostage, including women holding babies in their arms. Similarly, dozens of recordings of calls made by frightened civilians saying they are locked in their rooms and that there are terrorists inside their homes.

Later, Israeli troops entered the areas under attack and numerous fierce battles took place with the armed terrorists. In some cases, stand-offs and gunfights continued until late into the night, including in numerous situations where hostages were being held. Intense battles took place at a police station in Sderot controlled by large number of terrorists that saw severe levels of gunfire; at a major hostage situation in the town of Ofakim; and to free a number of Israelis who were held hostage for hours by Hamas gunmen inside the dining hall at Kibbutz Be'eri. As of the time of writing, the IDF says that these hostages were rescued safely and that it is close to regaining control over all Israeli territory, although searches for terrorists continue.

While most victims' names have not yet been released, fatalities include numerous Arab Israeli citizens as well as IDF troops, firefighters and police officers. One soldier who fell was the commanding officer of the Nahal Infantry Brigade, [Col. Jonathan Steinberg](#). Another victim was Mayor of Sha'ar Hanegev (the San Diego Federation's partnership region) Ofir Libstein, who fell in a gun battle defending his town. See more on the victims [here](#).

Rockets Fired

With 5000 rockets fired at civilian targets, millions of Israelis ran multiple times to shelters, as explosions were heard across the country, on an ongoing basis, throughout the day. Rocket fire continues today.

The majority of rockets either fell in open areas or were intercepted by the Iron Dome system, but some reached their intended targets, hitting homes, businesses and a hospital. Numerous Israelis were killed and injured in the attacks. See [here](#) for footage of a rocket that landed in a populated Tel Aviv street.

Schools are closed throughout the country today, and gatherings of more than 50 people have been banned.

One rocket was fired at Israel by Hezbollah forces from Lebanon. Israel hopes to avoid escalation into a two-front war but this is clearly a concern. Also today, an Egyptian policeman opened fire on a busload of Israeli tourists in Alexandria, killing two Israelis and one local guide, and injuring others.

Israeli Response

Last night Prime Minister Netanyahu addressed the nation on live television, saying, that Israel is experiencing “events never seen before.” He vowed to use all of the IDF’s power to hit Hamas, and warned Gaza civilians to “get out now.” See his full remarks [here](#).

Opposition Leader Yair Lapid has indicated his willingness to join an emergency government, together with National Unity Party leader Benny Gantz. Political discussions are underway. See [this](#) opinion piece, “A wounded, weakened Israel is a fiercer one.”

The Israel Defense Forces has initiated a massive call-up of reserve forces (see footage [here](#)). The army said four divisions of reservists were being deployed to the Gaza border, joining 35 battalions that were already there. Electricity to the Gaza Strip has been cut.

The IDF hit over 500 targets in numerous air strikes, dropping 16 tons of munitions on terror sites, killing at least 230 people on the ground. Targets hit include 17 military compounds, four headquarters, and four high-rise towers the IDF said were used by Hamas. See [here](#) for footage of a strike on multiple terror cells in the area of the security fence in the Gaza Strip over the past day. According to many reports, the IDF is preparing for ground forces to enter the Strip.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that all Israeli citizens around the world who wish to return to Israel should know that Ben Gurion Airport is open for incoming and outgoing flights. Some foreign airlines have canceled flights to Israel.

For those in Israel, the IDF’s Home Front Command has an app that can be downloaded [here](#) that gives information, advice and instructions to people on the ground. The site does not work outside of Israel.

International Reactions

- US President Joe Biden called Prime Minister Netanyahu to offer Israel full support. Later, Biden appeared together with Secretary of State Antony Blinken and spoke about Israel saying, “We will not ever fail to have their back, we’ll make sure that they’ll have the help their citizens need and they can continue to defend themselves.” See full text [here](#).
- Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, posted on X that, “Canada strongly condemns the current terrorist attacks against Israel. These acts of violence are completely unacceptable. We stand with Israel and fully support its right to defend itself. Our thoughts are with everyone affected by this. Civilian life must be protected.”
- French President Emmanuel Macron also strongly condemned the attacks, saying, “I express my full solidarity with the victims, and their families and those close to them.”

- Numerous buildings around the world have been lit up with Israeli flags in solidarity with the Jewish state, including the Empire State Building in New York, the Italian Parliament and the [Brandenburg Gate](#) in Berlin. See more [here](#).

Unfortunately, other reactions, as expected, have praised the terrorist attacks:

- Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas announced that the Palestinian people have the right to defend themselves against the “terror of settlers and occupation troops.”
- An adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei congratulated Hamas terrorists saying, “We will stand by the Palestinian fighters until the liberation of Palestine and Jerusalem.”

Federation Partners on the Ground

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC):

JDC immediately activated their emergency response team and protocols across Israel. In the south of the country, they have widespread, existing operations and programs providing support to those in the line of fire, including elderly, people with disabilities, children and families at risk, and other vulnerable populations adversely impacted during this war and in past conflicts. They will conduct ongoing assessments of emerging needs and deploy interventions to address them. About fifty JDC staff live in the Southern region, including ten on the border.

The Jewish Agency for Israel:

The Agency's Fund for Victims of Terror (FVOT) is the first responder in the recovery process of families and individuals who have been impacted by acts of terror and violence, providing immediate grants to assist victims, as needed, within 48 hours of an attack. The Agency estimates that it will need to provide at least 350 short term grants and 750 long term grants.

There are currently 3,856 new olim living in twelve Jewish Agency absorption centers in the region under rocket threat. The overwhelming majority are new olim from Ethiopia, Ukraine and Russia. Yesterday, a rocket landed close enough to the Barnea Absorption center that damage was done to the building and one of the apartments had to be evacuated (that same absorption center had a rocket fall in its parking lot in May of 2021). The Jewish Agency plans to take 2,000 olim from those absorption centers for a five-day respite period to allow residents to sleep through the night without fear of running all night and day to shelters. For those olim who do not want to leave their homes, the Jewish Agency will provide respite activities within the absorption centers for children and teenagers.

There are currently 2,700 residents of Amigour elderly care facilities in Israel's South, in sheltered housing units which makes it possible for them to remain in their homes during rocket attacks from Gaza. However, because of the age of the residents, they must remain in their homes to be close to shelters and cannot leave to procure groceries and other household items. Amigour is providing all of the basic necessities directly to its residents.

The Israel Trauma Coalition (ITC):

Residents of Southern Israel including ITC Resilience center teams have been following the directives of the Home Front Command and remain in their homes. As a result,

trauma services are being provided remotely including through hot lines, with therapists taking calls.

ITC says they are preparing for hundreds of families dealing with funerals and thousands of wounded.

Communication problems, with lines down, is exacerbating the problem with people scrambling to find information about their loved ones. With a national call up of reserves, many wives and children have been left alone to cope with the situation. A center has been opened in Ramle to deal with victim's identifications, and police are calling on families with missing family members to go to their local police stations with photos and DNA samples of their missing relatives.

ITC says they are witnessing tremendous distress among First Responders, and emergency volunteer teams especially in areas where infiltrations occurred. In addition, numerous paramedics have been killed or injured.

World ORT:

Most students at the Kfar Silver Youth Village were home for the holiday and were not in the region. ORT was able to evacuate the village's remaining Na'ale students and shinshinim and staff to the country's north. A small number of staff remain in the village to care for the animals.