



October 17, 2023

Key Points:

- On day 11 of Israel's War with Hamas, rocket fire has again slowed considerably as signs continue to indicate that Hamas may be losing some control. Nonetheless, the IDF warns that the terror group still holds large stocks of weapons.
- US President Joe Biden is scheduled to land in Israel tomorrow (Wednesday) morning Israel Time, in a highly significant show of solidarity and support.
- Across North America, the Jewish world, and of course in Israel itself, people continue to rally to support all those Israelis affected by the fighting.
- Tune in now to watch the livestream of the Emergency Leadership Mission for Israel where political leaders from across the spectrum, donning the [#BlueRibbon](#), are joining Federation leaders and partner organizations at the event. [Watch here](#).

The Home Front

Latest figures show that some 1,400 Israelis have been killed including more than 280 soldiers. Among the dead are over 40 babies. Close to 3,600 Israelis have been wounded. Officially, 199 victims are being held by Hamas, with additional people listed as missing. Among the dead are at least 29 US citizens, while some 15 Americans are listed as missing. At least 6,600 rockets have been launched into Israel from Gaza, with additional firings from Lebanon and Syria.

See [here](#) for a list of the names of those murdered that have been released so far, and [here](#) for a site in Hebrew with the names and photos of fallen soldiers. For infographics with the latest numbers from the conflict, see [here](#).

Hamas has released a disturbing video of one of the hostages – 21-year-old Mia Schem from the town of Shoham near Tel Aviv. In the video, Schem appears to be receiving medical attention from Hamas, likely after being shot in the shoulder. In the clip, Schem says, "Hi, I'm Maya Schem, 21-years-old from Shoham. Currently, I'm in Gaza. I returned early Saturday morning from Sderot; I was at a party. I was seriously injured in my hand. I underwent surgery on my hand at the hospital [in Gaza] for 3 hours. They are taking care of me, giving me medicine, everything is fine. I only ask that they bring me home as soon as possible to my parents, to my siblings. Get me out of here as soon as possible. Please."

The IDF says that it expects further such clips, featuring more of the captives. The IDF spokesperson commented, "This is psychological terror by Hamas against the citizens of Israel..... In this video, Hamas tries to present itself as a humanitarian organization while it is in fact a murderous terror group." He says one must ask, "How did a 21-year-old girl who went to a party to dance, end up being kidnapped by a murderous terror group in the heart of Gaza?"

More and more accounts of the October 7 invasion are emerging. Listen [here](#) to an interview with an Israeli first responder who was on the ground during Saturday's massacre.

Meanwhile, for the fourth straight night, there was no rocket fire from Gaza, although attacks have continued at a significantly slower rate during the day, including towards Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and other cities in the center of the country. No major injuries were reported. In Jerusalem, the sirens sounded just as the Knesset was meeting in special session for the opening of its Winter Session. Members of Knesset had to rush from the plenary and enter shelters mid-session.

During his remarks to the special Knesset session, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said:

"This is a moment of genuine struggle against those who have risen up against us to destroy us. Our goal is victory – a crushing victory over Hamas, toppling its regime and removing its threat to the State of Israel once and for all.

"There are many questions about the disaster that befell us ten days ago. We will investigate everything thoroughly. We have already begun to apply immediate lessons. However, now we are focused on one goal: Uniting our forces and storming forward to victory.

"To this end, determination is required because victory will take time. There will be difficult moments. There will be pitfalls. Sacrifice will be necessary. But we will win because this is our very existence in this region, in which there are many dark forces.

"Hamas is part of the axis of evil of Iran, Hezbollah and their minions. They seek to destroy the State of Israel and murder us all. They want to return the Middle East to the abyss of the barbaric fanaticism of the Middle Ages, whereas we want to take the Middle East forward to the heights of progress of the 21st century.

"This is a struggle between the children of light and the children of darkness, between humanity and the law of the jungle. We saw this in the horrors that the reprehensible murderers perpetrated in Kibbutz Be'eri, in Kfar Aza, in the other communities of the area adjacent to the Gaza Strip, and in the killing field of young people at a festival in Re'im.

"I tell our friends in the enlightened world: Our war is also your war. If we do not stand together in a united front, it will reach you as well.

“We have a message for Iran and Hezbollah: Do not test us in the north. Do not repeat your previous mistake because the price you will pay will be much worse. President Biden told you in English: ‘Don’t do it.’ I tell you in Hebrew: ‘Be careful.’

“We have gone to war. We will win. We will not stop until victory.”

There has been a gradual return to in-person schooling, with additional schools resuming in safer areas in Israel today. Meanwhile hospitals have restarted performing non-elective surgeries in areas not directly affected by the fighting. A large area around the Gaza Strip remains a closed military zone, to which entry by civilians is prohibited. See map [here](#).

In the North, skirmishes continue, even as Israel tries hard to deescalate that front. Today, an anti-tank missile was fired at the Israeli town of Metulla, injuring three people. The entire town of Metulla has now been declared a closed military zone. Earlier, the IDF killed four terrorists who tried to cross the border from Lebanon and plant an explosive device, close to the Israeli town of Hanita. The military says the cell was identified as it approached the border fence and was struck by a drone.

Israeli Response

IDF Chief-of-Staff Lt.-Gen. Herzl Halevi said in a statement this morning that, “The IDF will win thanks to sticking to the mission, fortitude, and courage. The IDF will win because our war is just. The IDF will win thanks to the resilience of the people from which it comes. It will win thanks to its abilities and because we trained for this task. We will win, and in all actions, we will act according to the spirit of the IDF and its values.” See [here](#) for a message of Halevi to IDF troops.

Israeli airstrikes against Hamas targets in Gaza continued overnight. Among the victims was the “head of crossings” in Gaza, Fouad Abu Btihan, and Osama al-Mazini, a senior member of Hamas's political bureau and the head of Hamas's Shura Council. Mazini was in charge of negotiations which led to the prisoner swap in which IDF soldier Gilad Schalit was released from Hamas captivity. See footage [here](#) of additional IDF strikes overnight.

Following the IDF warning issued to Gazan civilians to evacuate the north of the Strip, Israel estimates that more than 650,000 of the area’s one million residents have left their homes. At least 100,000 residents remain in Gaza City itself. A United Nations (UNWRA) employee in Gaza published a post on social media yesterday where he said that Hamas had looted United Nations fuel and medicines. The post was later deleted, probably under duress.

Israeli media is also reporting that at least 4,000 Gazans who were working in Israel have been held in a special facility while security services determine whether they had assisted Hamas in the attacks.

International Response

Earlier today, the head of the US Military’s Central Command (CENTCOM) landed in Israel. Gen. Michael Kurilla met with IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, and others at the Kirya, Israel’s military headquarters where, in an unusual move, US military representatives took part in an IDF operational meeting.

Kurilla said he has come to “gain a clear understanding of Israel’s defense requirements, outline US support efforts to avoid expansion of the conflict, and reiterate the Department of Defense’s ironclad support for Israel.”

In a similar move, yesterday US Secretary of State Antony Blinken attended a meeting of Israel’s Security Cabinet, the first time a non-Israeli has ever taken part in these confidential discussions.

Last night, Prime Minister Netanyahu spoke by phone with Russian President Vladimir Putin. According to the Prime Minister’s Office, Netanyahu made it clear that Israel “had been attacked by brutal and abhorrent murderers, had gone to war determined and united, and would not stop until it had destroyed Hamas’s military and governing capabilities.”

Meanwhile German Chancellor Olaf Scholz arrived in Israel today on a solidarity visit, as did New York Governor Kathy Hochul. Romania’s Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu arrived in Jerusalem early this morning, accompanied by Defense Minister Angel Tîlvar, becoming the first world leader to visit since fighting began.

Yesterday, the Wexner Foundation announced that it is cutting ties with Harvard University over “the dismal failure of Harvard’s leadership to take a clear and unequivocal stand against the barbaric murders of innocent Israeli civilians by terrorists last Saturday.” The prestigious Wexner Foundation Fellowship includes a period of study at Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of government. A letter from the foundation to Harvard Board of Overseers severing ties, goes on to say that many Israel fellows “feel abandoned” by the university. “Other university presidents have said precisely what we should have heard immediately from President [Claudine] Gay,” read the letter, citing Ben Sasse, the president of the University of Florida, who said in a statement yesterday: “What Hamas did was evil and there is no defense for terrorism. This shouldn’t be hard.”

“In the absence of this clear moral stand, we have determined that the Harvard Kennedy School and The Wexner Foundation are no longer compatible partners,” the organization’s leadership wrote. “Our core values and those of Harvard no longer align.”

Efforts on the Ground

Israelis of all stripes have come together to support soldiers and bolster morale in the country.

Some 600 people, mainly families with small children, are leaving the southern town of Ofakim (that was attacked by Hamas last Saturday) for a week, to stay at hotels in Eilat as part of an initiative by local technology companies. Israeli tech giants Fiver and HiBob, as well as other firms, are leading the effort to provide some respite to residents of the town, which saw some 50 people killed on the first day of the war. Ofakim, a city of 34,000, located 15 miles from the Strip, does not fall under the national evacuation plan for communities on the southern and northern borders ahead of the Gaza ground operation.

With the danger real for so many soldiers on the front waiting to enter Gaza, numerous engaged (and other) couples have chosen to hastily wed before the next stage of the war begins. Many partners have traveled to the front for these ceremonies, and the IDF put together [this](#) short clip showing some of the weddings.

Also see [this](#) letter from the leadership of the Weizmann Institute for Science, calling on scientists across the world to stand up to terrorism and support Israel at this dark hour.

See [here](#) for an article on how much the Israeli economy is suffering as a result of the war.

The IDF Spokesperson reiterated today that the IDF has all required equipment for its soldiers. Some 17,000 additional kevlar body armor plates arrived in Israel earlier. These were purchased by the Ministry of Defense and will be fitted in the coming days. Some equipment that had been sent by donors to the IDF was tested and found to be unsuitable for battle conditions and could, if distributed to soldiers, put their lives in danger. He reiterated that only the Ministry of Defense is authorized to procure equipment for the IDF, either from its own budget or from the emergency fund created by the Association for the Israeli Soldier (and its US branch, FIDF). See more [here](#).

With tensions high in the Arab sector, the mayor of Lod, a mixed Arab-Jewish city, sent out this message:

“Dear residents of Lod, Jews and Arabs, please read this important post to the end. It will relieve many worries and tensions. I have consoled our resident, whose father, Khaled Abu Farhan, was brutally murdered on Saturday in the city of Sderot, while he was working there as a security guard.

“His pleas in Arabic to the terrorists were of no avail and they brutally murdered him and abused his body.

“Najia, a health fund employee, told me that she did national service, and her brothers are IDF fighters, who are currently fighting the murderous Hamas. She asked me to convey the following message to you: There is no struggle between Jews and Arabs here. There is a war between Israelis - Jews, and non-Jews who seek peace and goodness - and the bloodthirsty Hamas terrorists, who desire the destruction of the State of Israel.

“To the Jewish public, I want to say: You may be Nejia's neighbors, and when you saw her this morning in the elevator or in the supermarket, you immediately thought that she was someone "from Hamas who wants to harm us" and not the representative of an entire family that contributes to the State of Israel and wants to destroy Hamas just like us. Believe me, the vast majority of Lod Arabs are anxious about the war, call me endlessly about problems in the shelters and understand that Hamas does not distinguish between Jews and Arabs. There have been many calls and offers of help. We are all in the same boat.

“I would like to say to the Arab public: in recent days, Hamas has been spreading calls to the Arabs of Israel including to the Arabs of Lod to go to demonstrations in support of Hamas and start riots here. These messages cause serious concerns among the Jewish public. And rightly so. We were already in this tragedy two and a half years ago in Operation Guardian of the Walls. I am talking to many of you, and you have no intention of taking

part in any demonstrations or working against the state. The wonderful country, which Hamas wants to destroy, provides us all with security, education, welfare, and many other good things, even if it is incumbent upon us as a country to reduce the gaps in Arab society. And so, we do.

“I ask you, also in this post, to register your disgust for the terrible massacre that happened on Saturday, that you do not intend to participate in any solidarity with Hamas. And understand how brazenly they ask you to sympathize while they fire missiles, which have already killed and injured many in the Arab society.

“I would like to thank all of us: for a week now, all of us, Jews, and Arabs, have been behaving with great responsibility, with sadness, with pain, and with a great effort to maintain the common fabric of life.

“The coming weeks will be another test for all of us. Along with the highest preparedness of the police and the municipality, I would like to wish that the exemplary silence so far will be maintained. With God's help and inshallah!”

The Israel Trauma Coalition (ITC)

In hospitals nationwide, ITC trained resilience professionals are working around the clock to provide emotional first aid, support, and self-care to their colleagues.

The Bedouin community, especially the tens of thousands of people living in “unrecognized” or unofficial villages, with no system of emergency alerts or shelters, are particularly vulnerable during this war. In one unrecognized village, a family was directly hit by a Hamas rocket and all four members of the family were killed instantly. The number of Bedouins killed during the war stands at 20, of which at least five were from the town of Rahat. ITC and the Bedouin Resilience Center are working to train therapists and teachers in psychosocial care and support working in schools and providing on-line and telephone support. Guidelines in Arabic, culturally adapted for the Bedouin community, have been distributed to all the communities.

Across the board, there is a desperate need to provide targeted training, support, and self-care tools to trauma teams from specific population groups. For example, Ukrainian therapists who made Aliyah within the last 5 years are being trained by ITC to provide psychosocial services to Ukrainian and Russian speakers in Israel.

Jewish Federations

Jewish Federations have launched an unprecedented \$500 million campaign to support Israel. See more [here](#).

Jewish Federations along with 50 partner organizations have launched [#BlueRibbonsforIsrael](#), a unity campaign in support of the safe return of the hostages taken by Hamas terrorists in Israel. It symbolizes solidarity with the hostages, their families, and all who care about their safety. [Learn more here](#).

For those in Israel – or with family or friends there – who are looking for help, critical information about the situation on the ground, or other assistance, see [this](#) resource page put together by Jewish Federations.

See also [this](#) Jewish Federations information page on requests for personal protective equipment which are circulating and [this](#) update regarding volunteering.

Readers can access a Jewish Federations toolkit of resources [here](#). For full details about the home front and military operations, see [this](#) update.

The Community Mobilization Center is monitoring major developments in Israel and North America related to Israel's war to defend herself against Hamas, and will rapidly disseminate resources to help mobilize and support our local communities as they work to build and sustain civic and political support for Israel in this conflict. Read the latest communication from the Community Mobilization Center [here](#).

Our Israel Office, having activated emergency protocols, is working closely with our partners on the ground, and is close contact with the Government of Israel and the IDF. We will continue to update as the situation develops.



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