Bullet holes in the ceiling of a home in Kibbutz Be'eri. Photo by Ziv Koren

7 October Parliamentary Commission Report

Chaired by Lord Roberts of Belgravia

PREPARED BY THE ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR UK-ISRAEL

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The work of the 7 October Parliamentary Commission is ongoing.

This report is the first publication aimed at preserving an accurate record of the events.

Research and writing for this edition took place from January 2024 to January 2025.

As official inquiries uncover new information, the Commission will continue to verify and update its work.

For the latest updates visit: 7octparliamentarycommission.co.uk

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Foreword | Lord Roberts of Belgravia

Holocaust denial took a few years to take root in pockets of society, but on 7 October 2023 it took only hours for people to claim that the massacres in southern Israel had not taken place. Hamas and its allies, both in the Middle East and equally shamefully in the West, have sought to deny the atrocities, despite the ironic fact that much of the evidence for the massacres derives from film footage from cameras carried by the terrorists themselves - though of course there is also much more from many other sources, as this Report delineates.

The present Report has been undertaken to counter such pernicious views, and to lay down incontrovertible proof - for now and for the years to come – that nearly 1,200 innocent people were indeed murdered by Hamas and its allies, and very often in scenes of sadistic barbarism not seen in world history since the Rape of Nanjing in 1937.

On 4 October 2024, almost a year after the attacks, Khalil Al-Hayya, the most senior leader of Hamas outside Gaza, was asked by Jeremy Bowen of the BBC in Doha, "Why did you kill so many civilians, women and children?" He replied, "We ordered our resistance fighters on 7 October not to target civilians, women and children. The objective was the occupation soldiers who are always killing, bombing and destroying in Gaza. We don't endorse harming civilians. On the ground, there were certainly personal mistakes and actions. The fighters may have felt their lives were in danger." In fact, Israel unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005.

"We've all seen how the fighters visited the houses," Al-Hayya continued, "they spoke to the families, they ate and drank." Pressed on this bizarre version of events, he added, "When they went into some of the houses, none of the women and children they dealt with were terrified. Those videos were published by the Israeli occupation. They weren't published by us."

Asked about the taking of women and children as hostages, something even he could hardly deny, Al-Hayya claimed, "One of the goals of 7 October was to kidnap a small group of Israeli soldiers to exchange them for Palestinian prisoners. But when the [IDF] Gaza division completely collapsed in the face of the resistance fighters, we took a lot of prisoners. It was not our plan to capture civilians, including women and children." Yet as we shall show, Hamas not only planned to take hostages, but abused them in the act.

Specifically asked by Bowen about sexual assault, Al-Hayya stated, "The orders and ethics of all Palestinians and the resistance fighters were humanitarian. We're brought up according to the Islamic religion, culture and national civilisation. We protect them as we protect ourselves. Sexual, or non-sexual, assault has never been proven" When Bowen said that evidence of sexual assault was piling up, Al-Hayya said, "I told you the instructions were clear. There may have been abnormal acts by irresponsible people, but these are just allegations." [1]

By total contrast, our Report details that horrific acts of systematic rape and sexual abuse took place, in contradiction to Koranic teaching, and that everything Al-Hayya said was a lie, as he must have known it was. We have allowed no embellishment of the facts, which are painful and distressing enough as they are. We have gone out of our way not to include information that we suspect is true but cannot be double-checked. We have concentrated on the two days between the unleashing of the assault on the morning of 7 October 2023 and the liberation of the last of the *Kibbutzim*, and we have documented each of nearly 1,200 deaths so that future generations will not be misled about the extent and horror of the massacre.

1 "Watch: Jeremy Bowen Presses Hamas Deputy Leader on 7 October Attacks," BBC News, October 3, 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/videos/cdd4rpv5jp0o.

As a Gentile, I believe that it is vital to prevent the emergence of another, more modern version of Holocaust denial, namely 7 October denial. After the Holocaust, non-Jews like me owe the Jewish people nothing less. This can only be done by the kind of facts-based, evidential work in this Report, which is dedicated to Emily Damari, the British hostage who was held in Gaza for 471 days, and daughter of the superbly brave Mandy Damari who our investigation teams have met in Israel and London.

Lest anyone doubt the importance of showing the truth about what happened, let us remember that in the British general election of July 2024 there were several parliamentary candidates who openly attempted to justify the 7 October atrocities.[2] Rami Ruhayem, a journalist based in Beirut who appears on BBC News, also sought to question the BBC reports about the massacres.[3] In the Oxford Union in November 2024, Miko Peled, who calls himself a radical anti-Zionist, described the murders, rapes, and kidnappings of 7 October as "acts of heroism".[4] The Palestinian poet Mohammed El-Kurd, who has equated Zionism with genocide, started his speech by announcing that there was "no room for debate" and ended it by walking out of the chamber. The anti-Israel motion passed by 278 to 59 votes.

After fifteen months of fighting, a second ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas was signed in January 2025. Immediately after the agreement was announced Al-Hayya exposed the full extent of the Hamas ideology – that Hamas and its supporters viewed the atrocities on 7 October 2023 as a "miraculous and unprecedented military and security achievement...[and] will remain a source of pride for [their] people and [their] resistance, passed down from generation to generation."[5]

Our Report will hopefully permit people to see such denials and justifications for what they really are: a perversion of reason and rejection of human decency. We owe it to the victims and their grieving families to set down the ghastly, unvarnished truth about the sheer barbarism that Hamas and its terrorist allies unleashed on 7 October 2023.

Andrew Roberts
Lord Roberts of Belgravia
House of Lords
March 2025

2. Fiona Hamilton, "Muslim Campaign Group Backs Election Candidates Who Justify October 7 Atrocity" (The Times, June 23, 2024), https://www.thetimes.com/article/f0958719-4e3b-4106-840d-04c2e161c818?shareToken=b674ac1e5011f60259c51ea5dbddb558.

3 Alex Farber, "BBC Correspondent Questions 'Facts' of October 7 Attacks on Israel" (The Times, May 2, 2024), https://www.thetimes.com/uk/media/article/bbc-correspondent-questions-facts-of-october-7-attacks-on-israel-3kp8fxpgw.

4 Howard Anglin, "The Shame of the Oxford Union | Howard Anglin | the Critic Magazine," The Critic Magazine, December 2, 2024, https://thecritic.co.uk/the-shame-of-the-oxford-union/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email.

5 "Highlights from the Speech of Dr. Khalil Al-Hayya, Member of Hamas' Political Bureau and Head of Hamas in Gaza, on the Occasion of the Ceasefire Agreement and Prisoner Exchange" (Palestine Resist, Telegram, January 15 2025); "Senior Hamas Official Khalil Al-Hayya upon Signing Ceasefire Agreement: October 7 Will Continue to Be..." (Middle East Media Research Institute, January 15, 2025), https://www.memri.org/tv/hamas-political-bureau-member-hayya-october-7-miraculous-achievement-salute-martyrs-liberate-palestine.

Report Overview

The Hamas-led attack on Southern Israel on 7 October 2023 was one of the largest terror attacks in history, resulting in 1,182 fatalities and over 4,000 wounded. A total of 251 hostages were taken - 210 were alive and 41 were dead bodies.[6] It was the largest single massacre of Jewish people since the Holocaust, and the deadliest per capita terrorist attack, with just over 1 in every 10,000 Israelis killed, and the third overall deadliest terrorist attack in the world to date.[7]

The attack resulted in over 4,000 wounded individuals treated at hospitals, with gunshot wounds, grenade injuries, and burns. Trauma centres like Soroka and Barzilai Medical Centres faced overwhelming numbers of severe cases, treating patients whilst under ongoing rocket fire. The mental health repercussions since 7 October, including PTSD and suicides, have led experts to classify the event as a mass trauma affecting Israeli society.

Over 90% of those killed or taken hostage were Israeli citizens, including Jewish Israelis, Arab Israelis, and Bedouins. Many of the Israelis who were killed were also dual nationals. Citizens from 44 nations around the world were killed and taken hostage. The largest group of foreign victims were from Thailand, many of them agricultural workers in the *Kibbutzim* and *Moshavim* (small communal and agricultural villages). Seventeen British nationals were killed and 2 were taken hostage. One of these British hostages was killed in captivity, and the other was released after 471 days in captivity.

A total of 863 civilians were killed on 7 October, accounting for 73% of the dead.[8] The remaining 27% of fatalities were those serving in active duty – either in the military or as first responders.[9] Women and children account for 27% of those killed during the attacks and 49% of hostages taken alive – 316 and 102 respectively. The youngest victim of 7 October was just 14 hours old – her mother had been shot whilst driving to the hospital to give birth and a bullet hit the baby girl's leg whilst in utero. The oldest victim was a 92-year-old Holocaust survivor, who was killed at *Kibbutz* Holit.

The victims were killed through shootings, asphyxiation, burning, grenade explosions, RGP and missile attacks. Many victims were subjected to mutilation, sexual violence, and other forms of deliberate brutality before or after death. Forensic teams faced immense challenges in identifying remains due to the extent of desecration to bodies, with some victims identified months later through fragments like teeth.

Hamas orchestrated and led the attack, with 3,800 of its elite Nukhba forces and members of Izz al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades invading Southern Israel. They were supported by 2,200 individuals from other armed groups, including Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and civilians from Gaza. A further 1,000 individuals stayed in Gaza to operate rocket launchers and provide tactical support.

The exact date of when Hamas began planning the attack is not known, but the concept is believed to have taken shape before 2014, with official preparations beginning from 2021.[10] In 2018, Hamas spearheaded the creation of the "Joint Room for Palestinian Resistance Factions," an alliance designed to coordinate operations against Israel. The alliance included the following groups, each of which participated in the attack on 7 October:

- *Izz al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas),*
- *Al-Quds Brigades (Palestinian Islamic Jihad),*
- *Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine),*
- *Jihad Jibril Brigades (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command),*
- *National Resistance Brigades (Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine),*
- *Nasser Saleh al-Din Battalions (Popular Resistance Committees),*
- *Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades (ex-Fatah),*
- *Holy Warriors' Battalions (Mujahedeen), and*
- *Al-Ansar Brigades (Al-Ansar Movement).*

6 The 41 dead bodies are counted within the 1,182 deaths. Data accurate as to what was publicly known up to January 31st 2025.

7 The Centre for Strategic and International Studies quantified this by looking at attacks from 1970 to 2021 chosen from the Global Terrorism Database (START Maryland University) and supplemented with the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) database for events from 2021 to 2023.

8 Percentage of total killed (1,182) inclusive of dead bodies taken hostage.

9 See the report's methodology for a breakdown of classifications of first responders, and of military fatalities.

10 Jumada Al-Akhirah, "The 'Flood'... It Started with 70 of the 'Elite of the Elite' and 5 Officials Who Planned It (Translated from Arabic)" (Asharq Al-Awsat, January 9, 2024), https://shorturl.at/tH2Bj.

Hamas maintained strict secrecy regarding the 7 October attack, with the operational details withheld from most of its fighters until hours before its execution. Only a small group of senior leaders, including Yahya Sinwar, the leader of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and Mohammed Deif, the head of Al-Qassam Brigades, were fully aware of the plan. Lower-ranking commanders and participants were informed of their roles just days, or even hours, in advance.

The preparation for the attack involved extensive training, including drills of storming mock Israeli communities, breaching defences, and rehearsing hostage taking. There was advanced intelligence gathering, and detailed mapping of the locations they would attack.

When the militants crossed the border, they came armed with advanced RPGs, drones, small arms, and explosives, including thermobaric weapons. The sheer volume of arms was designed to cause maximum destruction. Weapons such as the strip-and-frame charge explosive were specifically created for the attack. The explosive frame was designed to breach the border and to be affixed to home safe room doors in Israeli border communities, to break in.[11]

The perpetrators documented their actions on the day, through GoPro body cameras and mobile phones. They live-streamed and recorded their actions, uploading them to social media sites like Telegram.

Many attackers used GoPro body cameras, mobile phones, and even the phones of their victims to livestream their actions. Videos and images were uploaded in real-time by Hamas and other groups to platforms like Telegram and sometimes directly to victims' accounts. This footage showcased graphic killings, abductions, and desecration of bodies, often accompanied by celebratory captions. Footage depicted hostages being mistreated, corpses desecrated, and victims in their final moments.

The Hamas-led attack began with an unprecedented barrage of rockets, aimed at southern Israel and the larger metropolises across the country. This was followed by 119 breaches in the border fence between the Gaza Strip and Israel over the course of the attack, and simultaneous incursions by air and sea.

The attack began at 06:29 on the Jewish Sabbath and festival of *Simchat Torah*, with a massive rocket barrage sent by Hamas and allied groups. A total of 3,873 rockets were fired into Israel on 7 October, followed by another 987 on 8 and 9 October.[12] This triggered alerts across 498 communities and affected 75% of Israel's population. The number of rockets was unprecedented and stopped residents from leaving the Gaza Envelope (an area in the Southern District of Israel located within 4.3 miles of the Gaza Strip), ensuring that the maximum number of civilians remained in the area when the border was breached.

A coordinated attack was simultaneously underway at the border. The attackers used drones, snipers, and explosives to disable surveillance and defensive systems. By the end of the day, the border had been breached at 119 points, enabling the entry of thousands of militants into Israel. The attack also included air and sea breaches, with Hamas using paragliders to cross the border under the cover of rocket fire and deploying naval commandos in dinghies and fast boats to infiltrate Israel's coastal defences near Zikim Beach.

Hamas-led forces attacked 32 civilian communities - *Kibbutzim* and *Moshavim* - in Israel's Gaza Envelope, killing 416 in a matter of hours. Of the 251 total hostages taken during the attack, 183 were from these villages.

Once the border had been penetrated, the attacking forces breached community defences and caused widespread destruction. *Kibbutzim* such as Be'eri, Kfar Aza, and Nir Oz were the worst affected. Be'eri and Kfar Aza experienced the highest death tolls, with 99 and 62 civilians killed respectively.[13] Nir Oz saw the most kidnappings, with 75 people taken hostage, alongside 7 abducted bodies. The communities were attacked by Hamas, other armed groups, and Gazan civilians. They destroyed homes, committed atrocities, systematically looted, and set fire to properties. Fierce battles ensued at some locations, with some areas only reclaimed by Israeli forces on the evening of 7 October and others remained contested for days. By 11 October, 89% of the communities in the Gaza Envelope had been evacuated, displacing tens of thousands of people.

11 7 October Parliamentary Commission delegation with Lord Roberts, Meeting and Interview with LTC Idan Sharon-Kettler briefing at Tzfirin Base, Israel, August 29, 2024.

12 Figures provided by the IDF Spokesperson Department.

13 The total number of civilians killed at Be'eri was 103. This includes 4 attendees who were escaping the attack on the Nova Festival (as per the methodology of this report they have been counted as victims of the Nova Festival). The total number of civilians killed also includes kidnapped bodies - 7.

Hamas-led forces also launched coordinated attacks on three cities in the western Negev: Sderot, Ofakim, and Netivot, which resulted in 88 fatalities.

Sderot suffered the most significant casualties and destruction. Ofakim also faced heavy losses, and was the deepest penetration point from Gaza, 13.5 miles eastwards into Israel. The ground infiltration into Netivot was thwarted, but people were killed by rocket fire. The attacks on these cities reflected a similar brutality seen in the assaults on rural communities, including heavy civilian casualties and property damage. The scale of Hamas' objectives is underscored by their unsuccessful plans to target larger cities like Ashkelon and Tel Aviv.

The Nova Music Festival, held near Kibbutz Re'im, became the deadliest site of the attacks, with over 370 people killed, most of them young attendees under 30 years old.

The death toll made the attack on the festival "the deadliest concert attack in history."[14] At the festival site those who stayed were gunned down in their hiding places under the stage, behind the bar, in mobile toilets and waste containers. About 50 to 60% did not die at the festival site itself but were killed as they fled the attack. Many were ambushed in their cars with automatic weapons fire and RPGs or were killed by grenades thrown into roadside rocket shelters where they had sought safety along the highway. Others were shot in fields, wooded areas, or stretches of desert as they fled the party site on foot.

Hamas operatives strategically seized key junctions along Route 232, the main highway in the Gaza Envelope. The highway killings took place at more than 30 separate locations, primarily at 3 major road junctions and in roadside rocket shelters along Route 232.

The highway was the attempted escape route for many fleeing attacks on the *Kibbutzim*, *Moshavim*, and two music festivals in the area – Nova and Pysduck. The attackers set up ambush positions at major junctions, turning the area into a confined killing zone. At the junctions and along the roadside, terrorists indiscriminately fired on vehicles and killed occupants as they attempted to pass. They used automatic weapons and grenades to target every car.

Hamas gunmen and other armed groups also launched a series of coordinated attacks on Israeli military bases and outposts in the Gaza Envelope. More than 150 soldiers were killed, and dozens were taken hostage. The attack on Nahal Oz Base accounted for a third of these casualties with 50 soldiers killed, including 15 unarmed female field observers, and 10 more taken hostage.

The simultaneous assaults on the bases not only inflicted heavy losses on the IDF but also exacerbated the devastation in the surrounding civilian areas. Bases that were supposed to act as the first line of defence for *Kibbutzim*, *Moshav*im, and cities were rendered ineffective. This allowed the attackers to continue their rampage across the region with minimal resistance. Reinforcements were delayed, and communication networks were disrupted by deliberate sabotage, further compounding the chaos of the day. Civilians and non-combat personnel seeking refuge were caught in the crossfire. Rescue operations faced significant challenges due to the sheer scale of the assaults.

The atrocities committed by Hamas and allied groups on 7 October marked a day of unprecedented violence. There are numerous accounts of deliberate killings, hostage abuse, sexual violence, and desecration of both the living and the dead.

Civilians were targeted with calculated and unreserved precision. Victims, spanning all ages from infants to the elderly, were often shot at point-blank range, burned alive, or killed by grenades. The systematic destruction included the deliberate annihilation of entire families in *Kibbutzim*. Elsewhere, children were orphaned as their parents were killed in front of them as they hid.

The attackers abducted 251 hostages, including civilians, soldiers, and corpses from various locations. Hostages endured abuse during this process including binding and beatings. Children as young as 9 months and elderly people were forcibly removed from their families.

Women and girls were particularly vulnerable during the attacks. Reports detailed gang rapes, sexual mutilation, and assaults on both living and deceased victims. There was a pattern across various locations attacked on 7 October of "fully naked or partially

14 David Browne, Nancy Dillon, and Kory Grow, "They Wanted to Dance in Peace. And They Got Slaughtered," (Rolling Stone Magazine, October 15, 2023), https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/hamas-israel-nova-music-festival-massacre-1234854306/.

naked bodies from the waist down [that] were recovered – mostly women – with hands tied and shot multiple times, often in the head."[15] This was particularly prevalent at the Nova Festival.

The attackers looted homes, destroyed property, and set buildings ablaze, compounding the suffering of survivors. *Kibbutzim* and neighbourhoods were left in ruins, with fires burning for days. Forensic evidence highlighted the widespread use of incendiary weapons and flame accelerants, leaving many homes unrecognisable and further hindering the identification of the dead.

15 Pramila Patten, "Mission report: Official visit of the Office of the SRSG-SVC to Israel and the occupied West Bank 29 January – 14 February 2024," (Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, March 4, 2024), https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict wp-content/uploads/2024/03/report/mission-report-official-visit-of-the-office-of-the-srsg-svc-to-israel-and-the-occupied-west-bank-29-january-14-february-2024/20240304-Israel-oWB-CRSV-report.pdf, Page 4.

Introduction | Purpose of the Report and Methodology

The events of 7 October 2023 marked one of the largest terror attacks in history. A Hamas-led coordinated assault on Israel resulted in 1,182 fatalities and over 4,000 wounded. A further 210 hostages were taken alive into the Gaza Strip and 41 deceased bodies (the latter victims have been included in the total of 1182).[16] In the aftermath of this atrocity, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) UK-Israel established the 7 October Parliamentary Commission to ensure the events of that day were meticulously documented and permanently memorialised.

This report is driven by a single purpose: to chronicle the facts of 7 October with clarity and precision. By compiling survivor testimonies, eyewitness accounts, first responder narratives, and expert analyses, this project has sought to create an authoritative historical record. This report will serve as an enduring resource for governments, educators, and civil society, safeguarding the truth against denialism and distortion.

The parameters of the Commission's work are deliberately focused. It is not within the scope of this project to examine the causes or geopolitical contexts of the attack. Nor is it appropriate for this report to analyse intelligence failure or to critique decisions that were made or not made by the Government and the Defence Establishment of Israel, in the lead up to the attacks, or in their reactions on the day.[17] Instead, the Commission is dedicated solely to documenting what happened - detailing the scale and scope of the violence that was perpetrated. The purpose of the report is not to consider the regional wars and instability that followed the 7 October attacks in Gaza and elsewhere.

The events of 7 October 2023 represented not only an unprecedented violation of Israeli sovereignty, but a broader assault felt across the Jewish diaspora, including here in the United Kingdom. Even before 2023, there has been an upward trend in anti-Jewish hate. Previously record highs were caused by specific 'trigger events', particularly conflicts in the Middle East. However, over the last 10 years, annual reports have marked record-breaking levels of antisemitism. Antisemitism in the UK surged dramatically following the 7 October 2023 attacks on Israel, with 2,699 incidents recorded by the Community Security Trust (CST) between October and December accounting for 66% of all incidents in 2023. The worst single week of antisemitism was immediately after the Hamas attack, before any meaningful Israeli response had occurred. In total, 2023 saw 4,103 antisemitic incidents reported, an increase of 147% compared to 2022. A November poll revealed that 77% of British Jews felt less safe in the UK, while 89% believed antisemitism had risen in the last five years, underscoring a significant and growing climate of hostility.[18] This rise was also evident on university campuses, where antisemitic incidents more than doubled between 2022 and 2024, increasing by 117%.[19]

This report will be introduced into the Parliamentary record and distributed widely to educational, governmental, and civil institutions. By preserving these facts for posterity, the Commission seeks to honour the memory of those who died and ensure that the events of 7 October 2023 are never forgotten. It should also stand as a stark reminder of the cost of extremism.

16 Of the 1182 people that are known to have died on the 7 October, this includes 41 dead bodies who were initially classified as hostages as their status on 7 October was unknown but have since been confirmed as taken hostage after death. The government of Israel cites the number of 255 hostages, which does not distinguish between those taken alive and kidnapped bodies, 210 and 41 respectively. The figure of 255 also includes 4 individuals who have been held hostage in Gaza since 2014-2015, of which 2 are known to be kidnapped bodies. The hostage total relating to 7 October alone is 251 hostages. This number may rise if more information is made available about the hostages. This report has not changed the breakdown of the hostage number to reflect those who have since died in captivity but has noted their deaths when appropriate within the report body.

17 Following the 7 October 2023 attack, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) initiated internal investigations to evaluate their preparedness and response. The first findings, related to the attack on *Kibbutz* Be'eri, were partially released to the public on 11 July 2024. On 27 December 2024, Defence Minister Israel Katz received reports highlighting key events and shortcomings, emphasizing the need for lessons to be implemented swiftly. Katz directed the IDF to finalize all investigations by 31 January 2025, stressing the importance of thorough and transparent inquiries to address public concerns. However, the Israeli government has not established an independent commission of inquiry into the events.

18 Community Security Trust, "Antisemitic Discourse in Britain 2023," https://cst.org.uk/data/file/2/d/Discourse%20Report%202023.1729689553.pdf.

19 Community Security Trust, "CAMPUS ANTISEMITISM 2022-2024," 2022, https://cst.org.uk/data/file/f/d/Campus%20Antisemitism%20in%20Britain%202022-2024.1733481071.pdf.

Methodology

The report documents the Hamas-led attack on Israel that began on 7 October 2023, involving rocket fire and an invasion of the Gaza Envelope. A total of 55 distinct locations were attacked, including 32 civilian communities in the Gaza Envelope (comprising *Kibbutzim* and *Moshavim*), Zikim Beach, 3 cities, 2 Bedouin villages and camps, 15 military facilities such as bases, outposts, and border crossings, and the grounds of the Nova Music Festival. These 55 locations also encompass the events along Route 232, the major highway running through the Gaza Envelope, which is categorised as a single location for clarity.

In many attacked locations in the Gaza Envelope, fighting continued until 9 October. After this point civilian communities were declared free from infiltration. There were limited instances of the attack continuing in a few locations which caused further deaths, on 10 and 11 October. As such, 5 victims who were killed on these days have been included.

Qualitative research was conducted about the attack to build a comprehensive picture of the day's events, focusing on victim experiences and using testimony to corroborate open-source research. In addition to using publicly available and open-source information, such as photo and video evidence from social media, body cameras and CCTV footage, interviews were held with survivors, family members of victims and hostages, members of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), the Israeli Police, first responders, Israeli government ministries, medical and volunteer personnel responsible for preparing victims' bodies for burial, and civil society groups. Medical and military professionals in the UK and Israel were also consulted to provide insight and independent analysis of the attack.

The methodological approach outlined below was designed with the sensitive nature, and complexity of the attack in mind. The research was primarily conducted less than one year after the 7 October attacks; as such, the diversity and limitation of available evidence were considered. The research team used available testimony to avoid retraumatising survivors and witnesses through additional interviews. To respect the privacy of victims and active-duty military personnel, requests for privacy and anonymity were adhered to, even if it required excluding evidence.

This report aims qualitatively to build a comprehensive picture of the 7 October attacks. It primarily takes a narrative approach to understanding the experiences of witnesses and survivors during, and immediately after, the attack. This was achieved by using survivor and witness personal stories. Additionally, the report uses evidence-based analysis to corroborate information from narrative accounts by assessing geolocated data, field research, and other material. This approach enabled an in-depth examination of a specific event's impact across multiple locations, including a diverse range of data sources and accounting for the subject's sensitive and sociopolitical context-dependent nature. The design also ensured flexibility in integrating data sources to build an accurate picture of 7 October.

The research presented in this report was conducted between January 2024 and January 2025. The limited timeline presented challenges in analysing the breadth of available data, which are discussed further.

The research design incorporated ethical protocols to ensure participant safety and data integrity. Due to the traumatic nature of the events described, interviewees were treated with sensitivity.

Language and Terminology

To maintain neutrality, whilst ensuring the accuracy of memory and adhering to the proscription of certain groups as terrorist groups in UK domestic law, this report refers to members of the armed groups engaged in hostilities interchangeably as "terrorists" "attackers" "gunmen" or "militants." The term "soldiers" denotes members of formal national armies, such as those belonging to the Israel Defence Forces (IDF).

This report also uses the Hebrew terminology to describe people, places, and things unique to Israeli society. For example, a *ravshatz* is a Hebrew term for the security coordinator but popularly refers to the head of community security squads in *Kibbutz* and *Moshav* communities. Another example used in this report is *migunit*, a Hebrew term for a specific type of above ground, open door concrete bomb shelter found in Israel. For more information on the terminology used, see Glossary.

Research Setting

This report focuses on and around the locations targeted by Hamas on 7 October, including both civilian and military locations. Rather than concentrate on the focal points of the attack, it covers 55 independent locations impacted by the 7 October attack, aiming to record broader trends committed across multiple locations. The research setting contextualises the report's findings as communities are studied

independently, but atrocities are categorically assessed across locations.

The primary geographic focus of the report is the civilian areas located in the Gaza Envelope, including 24 *Kibbutzim*, 8 *Moshavim* and the cities of Sderot, Ofakim and Netivot. The report also discusses the events at two music festivals, Nova and Psyduck, that took place in the attacked areas. The events on the main highway, Route 232, are also considered. The report also documents the attacks on Israeli military bases and outposts in the area.

It must be noted that this research takes place within the broader context and history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has impacted the Middle East's sociopolitical landscape for decades. Hamas' 7 October attack was one of the most significant escalations in the recent history of the conflict. While these historical and political elements are critical in framing this report's research and analysis, the focus is on the 7 October attack. As such, this report does not cover events post 11 October 2023 or discuss events resulting from the attacks. Where appropriate the narrative has noted the fate of a hostage, if it is known, but the report does not discuss the treatment of hostages in Gaza beyond the details of their abduction.

The digital landscape was also a significant setting that shaped the report's research. Due to Hamas' prolific posting patterns on and immediately after 7 October, platforms like Telegram and X (formerly Twitter) serve as primary sources of information. Telegram provided critical photo and video evidence. However, the decentralised nature of the platform and the ease of posting and reposting content created challenges for ensuring verification, accuracy, and location where the content was produced.

Sources and Data Collection

The research team reviewed a wide range of evidence sources, including survivor testimony, interviews, media reports, photo and video evidence, military releases, legal documents, medical reports, census information, and academic articles. The team also consulted with think tanks and Israeli civil society groups and received briefings from Israel's Ministry of Health and the IDF's Spokesperson Department. The range of sources ensured that the research team could draw from individual experiences and recognise broader factors where necessary to record the attack comprehensively.

Testimonies were reviewed from survivors, first responders, and military personnel, providing firsthand insight into the immediate impact of 7 October. The report utilises testimony from every impacted community, including pre-existing testimony collection and new initiatives undertaken for the report. Interviews conducted for this report were done in person, via video conference, and via phone. As a London-based team, there were limitations on the number of interviews it could hold in person. Field research involved visits to affected locations to see the physical damage to communities, which was necessary to view to corroborate testimony. A panel of UK parliamentarians, led by the Chair, participated in a sample of the testimony interviews from a range of victims, attacked communities and experts.[20]

Lord Roberts of Belgravia conducted field research and met with experts and officials in Israel on 28 and 29 August 2024. Since 7 October, every member of the parliamentary advisory panel has visited Israel and some of the attacked sites. Members of the research team have also conducted field research, including in Sderot, *Kibbutz* Be'eri, Kfar Aza, the Nova Festival Site, and along Route 232.

Secondary data was drawn from reputable news outlets, official statements, reports from the Israeli government, and information from the Israeli Police and the Israel Defence Forces. The research team also utilised the United Nation's report, conducted by the Office of the Representative to the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten (the Patten Report), and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory report (the COI Report) titled "Detailed Findings on Attacks Carried out on and after 7 October 2023 in Israel" and the Human Rights Watch report titled "I Can't Erase All the Blood from My Mind" (HRW Report). Moreover, the report drew on the testimony collection projects and databases that were initiated after the attacks. These included the KAN 7:10 Memorial Project, which was created by the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation - the Israeli national broadcaster - using data collated by Dr Yuval Harpaz, Sagi Or, and Keren Yellin-Mor to chronicle the attacks on the civilian communities. Within the interactive archive, there is CCTV footage, recorded calls to the emergency services, text message and WhatsApp conversations from individuals during the

20 The panel included: Lord Roberts of Belgravia, Baroness Hodge of Barking, Lord Macdonald of River Glaven KC, Baroness Fox of Buckley, Lord Farmer, Baroness Smith of Newnham, Greg Smith MP and Sharon Hodgson MP.

events of the day and images. When bias from sources arose, the research team cross-verified information with primary evidence, and if issues with verification arose, testimony was not included.

Social media platforms were the primary medium for documenting and sharing information, photos, and videos during the attack. Social media content provided visual evidence of events and confirmed the participation of specific armed militant groups through coloured headbands, insignias and other clothing items. The report references geolocation confirmed by reliable external sources. Research team members also geolocated significant quantities of media from across the areas of conflict. Most of the armed groups that participated in the invasion uploaded and posted visual content to their Telegram channels shortly after the attack began. However, many Hamas-affiliated Telegram channels were shut down following the attack, limiting content availability. On 7 October, photos and videos of the attack were posted to other social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter). Those platforms have strict content moderation rules, and graphic content was later removed. Conscious of the prevalence of unverified content on social media platforms, video and photo material was triangulated against testimony and other evidence.

CCTV footage from attacked communities is referenced in this report. CCTV footage is also widely available on Telegram platforms such as South First Responders, an independent initiative to document Hamas' atrocities, and archived on civilian and media-led testimony initiatives in Israel. Some discrepancies across CCTV footage regarding timestamps were determined to be due to footage that was filmed before daylight savings 2023 ended, but were downloaded and shared on social media after it ended.

Internal peer review within the research team helped to highlight discrepancies in evidence, which were then resolved across team discussions. Inconsistencies across testimony were noted, such as when two testimonies gave slightly different times for an event. When possible, the time of specific events was confirmed by cross-checking against other sources. Translation of testimonies also presented challenges, which were mitigated by consulting subject-matter experts and fluent Hebrew speakers. The process of triangulation and cross-checking multiple sources was used to ensure that a high standard of evidence was enforced. Cross-referencing information came from interviews, evidence from social media, news reports, and field observations.

This report has employed a rigorous qualitative methodology, however certain limitations to research must be acknowledged. These limitations and constraints were due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter and practical and logistical barriers, including the lack of time that has elapsed since the attack.

Ongoing military operations also limited the availability of declassified information and operational data from the Israeli military, requiring the report to rely on indirect sources, public reports, news articles, and eyewitness testimony that has been released with consideration of military classification restrictions. Due to continued operational use by the military and legitimate interests of Israeli national security, the military locations that were attacked were not visited by the research team.

The time constraint of research and the relative recentness of the 7 October attack were considered in the writing of this report. As relevant authorities gain further clarity on the 7 October attacks in the coming years, further information may come to light that will require the report's amendment, clarification, or justify additional research. To mitigate these limitations, the validity of findings was ensured as much as possible through cross-verification and triangulation of data sources.

Victim Classification

For the purposes of the report, the victim total includes those who died between 7 October and 11 October, as this was when Israel was declared to be completely free of infiltration by the Hamas led-attacking groups. This total also includes 3 individuals who were severely wounded on 7 October and succumbed to their injuries at a later date.[21] This figure relating to victim deaths does not include the deaths of any hostages who have been killed in captivity since 7 October.[22] They are accounted for within the figure regarding the number of hostages that were taken.

Nearly all of the victims of the 7 October attack were located in the Gaza Envelope, however this report has also included individuals who died outside of the Gaza Envelope, as a result of rocket fire, and it has included

21 Staff Sgt. Shoham Moshe Ben Harush died 26 October 2023, Staff Sgt. Haim Meir Eden died 9 December 2023, Sgt Yona Betzakel Brief died 26 November 2024.

22 Individuals who have been killed in captivity are included within the list of hostages in the in-memoriam section at the end of the report

those who died on the northern border between 7-11 October after Hezbollah opened an additional front against the State of Israel. It has only included victims who died directly because of the attack; it has not included those who died because of other medical conditions aggravated by the assault, for example stress-related heart conditions, but it has included those who died as a result of friendly fire from IDF forces in the confusion. Another individual died in the West Bank. However, as this report could not determine whether this occurred in coordination with the 7 October attack, it has not been included in the figures. The report has also not included a soldier who died in a car accident on 7 October, as it did not occur as a result of the planned attack. It has also not included the deaths of anyone who have taken their own life, following the attack.

To tabulate the number of victims who were killed on 7 October, information has been taken from numerous sources to create a database. These include open-source information relating to the events of 7 October, obituaries in both English-speaking and Hebrew-speaking publications, names released by diplomatic missions, and the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs' published list of victims.

In the immediate aftermath of the 7 October attacks, the victim number was reported as approximately 1400. This was later reduced to around 1200 because the initial body count confused approximately 200 perpetrators with victims, as the identification process for the majority took several weeks. This was due to the volume of bodies that were required to be processed. For some victims this process took several months, the longest of which was 10 months, as bodies could not be found, and individuals were intially declared missing.

For the purposes of this report, victims have been separated into the following categories: civilians, first responders (includes police officers, fire brigade services, paramedics and Israeli Security Agency (ISA) officers), and active-duty military.

The IDF regards the death of any individual currently serving in the military as a military death regardless of whether they died in active combat. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) regards the death of any off-duty individual employed in the emergency services or ISA as a first responder death, regardless of whether they died in the line of duty. Importantly, both do not distinguish between those who were off-duty, and therefore in civilian clothing and without a weapon at the time of the 7 October attack, and those on-duty and wearing identifiable military or first responder fatigues. This entitles the families of the deceased to claim benefits and rehabilitation advantages according to the Fallen Soldiers Family Law.[23] However, the report has classified any off-duty individuals as civilians as all would have presented as civilians to attacking forces due to their clothing and lack of weapons.

Members of the *kitat konenut* (civilian security squads) have also been classified as civilians. The MFA also classifies these individuals as civilians but has included them on its published list of military deaths and labelled them as fallen soldiers. This comes from a decision made in the Knesset in 2017, following an investigation in the IDF that *kitat konenut* should be operated through the *Sherut Milu'im* (Reserves Service) to facilitate training and oversight. It is also part of Israeli culture, as a mark of honour for dying in defence of their communities. This honour was bestowed on 42 members of these civilian squad members. These squads were only ever intended to maintain a defensive position for 10-15 minutes before military reinforcements arrived, as opposed to the hours they spent defending their communities on 7 October. As such their supplies of defensive equipment like weaponry and body armour was limited and insufficient for the longer defensive stand that ended up occurring.

On 12 November 2023 The New York Times, using the IDF Swords of Iron Casualty list, placed the number of soldiers killed on 7 October as 278.[24] Due to using the IDF and MFA's casualty lists The New York Times did not make the distinction between active-duty and off-duty soldiers. This report has identified 253 active-duty soldiers and 27 off-duty soldiers (in a civilian capacity), bringing the total to 280. This report has included the deaths of 2 soldiers who would not have featured in The New York Times' calculation, as they succumbed to wounds sustained on 7 October after the date of the article's publication. Due to the inclusion of the off-duty soliders within the military victim total, The New York Times' civilian total is lower than that of this report. It is also lower because several bodies were not identified until after the article's publication date (such as those of Dolev Yehud and Bilha Yinon). Several of those who were initially thought to have been taken hostage alive have since been confirmed as dead at the time of their kidnapping.

23 "Remuneration and Benefits to Families of Those Killed in Hostilities - Hostile Action Casualties"(State of Israel National Insurance Institute, 2019), https://www.btl.gov.il/English%20Homepage/Benefits/Benefits%20for%20Victims%20of%20Hostilities/Families/Pages/default.aspx.

24 Aaron Boxerman, "What We Know about the Death Toll in Israel from the Hamas-Led Attacks," (The New York Times, November 12, 2023), https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/12/world/middleeast/israel-death-toll-hamas-attack.html.

Other estimates have slight variations in victims' totals. For example, the Human Rights Watch NGO cites figures from the Agence France Presse (AFP). However, neither the AFP nor the Human Rights Watch have publicly revealed their methodology or a list of names.[25] The KAN 7:10 Memorial Project have calculated the total number of victims as 1205 but have included in this total 25 individuals who have been killed in captivity since 7 October.[26] This database also includes at least 2 individuals who this report has been unable to cross-reference with secondary sources and have therefore not been included. Both these individuals are Chinese foreign workers who do not appear on the MFA's casualty list and the People's Republic of China has not confirmed their identity.[27]

Another reason that this report has created its own database, rather than relying on existing figures and lists of names, was because some lists contained duplicate names as a result of transliteration issues. As names were written in the Hebrew alphabet and then transliterated to English, this resulted in duplications due to minor spelling variations. Duplications resulting from transliteration issues and differences between Western and Eastern name order also arose for victims from Thailand, Nepal, China, countries which use the Cyrillic alphabet, and Arabic-speaking victims (Israeli-Bedouins, Israeli-Arabs and Palestinians from Gaza).[28]

For the purposes of this report, numbers have been tabulated based on the location of death. This has been the case for all locations apart from the Psyduck Music Festival, the Nova Music Festival and deaths that have occurred along the highways. For both Nova and Psyduck, not all deaths occurred at the festival sites but along the highways or even inside *Kibbutzim* as individuals attempted to get away from the focal point of the attack. For many victims who attended these two festivals it is not clear exactly where they died, especially as individuals who would be able to testify to a death were also killed. Therefore, this report has classified all those who originated at the Nova Festival or Psyduck Festival, as within each festival's victims' tally. Any individual who died on Route 232, Route 234, Route 241, Highway 34, or at an intersection or *migunit* (bomb shelter) along one of these routes, has been classified as a Highway death, unless they had also attended the Nova or Psyduck Music Festivals. If they had attended one of these festivals but died along the highway, they have been classified in these respective festival tallies, but their deaths will be discussed in both sections narratively.

The number of victims frequently cited in media reports as killed at the Nova Festival was initially placed at 260 on 8 October and then raised to 364 as more bodies were identified.[29] However, as more information has been released this report has identified the number of victims as 375, as well as a further 9 dead bodies which were kidnapped to Gaza.[30]

The IDF classified military victims of the 7 October attack based on where soldiers were originally stationed. By comparison this report has organised its victims based on location of death or kidnapping. Therefore, if a soldier stationed at one of the attacked military locations was killed or kidnapped in the *Kibbutzim*, *Moshav*im, cities, or along the highways, this report has tabulated them as a victim of the latter locations rather than of their stationed base. As such, the breakdown of the report's location figures will occasionally vary with that of the IDF.

25 Human Rights Watch Report, "'I Can't Erase All the Blood from My Mind' - Palestinian Armed Groups' October 7 Assault on Israel" (Human Rights Watch, July 17, 2024) https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/07/17/i-cant-erase-all-blood-my-mind/palestinian-armed-groups-october-7-assault-israel, Page 26.

26 Sagi Or, Keren Yellin-Mor, and Yuval Harpaz, "The Place of Death of the 1206 Murdered and Fallen in the Hamas Attack on Israel between 7-9.10.2023," Github.io, 2023, https://yuvAl-Harpaz.github.io/alarms/oct_7_9.html.

27 The names of these individuals on the Kan Database are Liu Jianhe and Liu Zhiguo.

28 The spelling of names in the report has been based on a combination of Hebrew and English obituaries, transliterated spellings on existing lists from the MFA and IDF, and information from diplomatic missions and respective national newspapers.

29 "Timeline: How a Night of Dancing Turned into the Worst Civilian Massacre in Israel's History," ABC News, October 12, 2023, https://abcnews.go.com/International/timeline-israel-supernova-music-festival-civilian-massacre/story?id=103892969 ; "Death Count from Re'im Music Festival Massacre Reportedly Updated to 364 — a Third of Oct. 7 Fatalities" (Times of Israel, 2023), https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/death-count-from-massacre-at-reim-music-festival-reportedly-updated-to-364-a-third-of-oct-7-deaths/.

30 One individual was killed in *Kibbutz* Alumim, 3 individuals were killed in *Kibbutz* Be'eri, 1 individual was killed in *Kibbutz* Re'im, and 1 individual was killed in Moshav Yakhini.

Glossary

Aliyah: The Hebrew word "*Aliyah*" literally means "to ascend or rise." In a modern context, *Aliyah* is the process of Jewish immigration to Israel from the diaspora.

Gaza Envelope: Known as "Azza Otef" in Hebrew, and often referred to simply as the Otef, the Gaza Envelope refers to areas in the western Negev and Southern District of Israel, located within 4.3 miles of the Gaza Strip.

IAF: is the initialisation for the Israeli Air Force, the aerial and space warfare branch of the Israeli Defence Forces that was founded in 1948.

IDF: is the acronym for the Israeli Defence Force, Israel's national military. The IDF has three branches of service: The Israeli Ground Forces, the Israeli Air Force (IAF), and the Israeli Navy.

Iron Dome: the system is a defensive missile shield designed to intercept short-range rockets, shells and mortars between 4 and 70km from the missile launcher and protect civilian communities in Israel. There are Iron Dome batteries located across Israel, each outfitted with 3 or 4 launchers, which holds 20 interceptor missiles each. When an enemy rocket is fired, the Iron Dome's radar system detects and tracks the incoming rocket, the control system then estimates a point of impact and launches an intercepting missile, which explodes near the oncoming rocket, destroying it.

Kibbutz (plural Kibbutzim): A *Kibbutz* is a type of agricultural collective community settlement unique to Israel. Historically, in *Kibbutz* communities all wealth is held communally by the members and profits are reinvested back into the agricultural or industrial initiatives of the respective community.

Kibbutznik: A *Kibbutznik* is someone who lives and works on a *Kibbutz*.

Kitat Konenut: Most Israeli towns and communities have a "*kitat konenut*," also known as a rapid response unit. These are units formed from community members who volunteer to mobilise to protect the community in an emergency, including in the *Kibbutzim* and *Moshav*im communities of the Negev. Volunteers are male and female, are armed, and are overseen by the IDF. Units range between 8 and 12 members and the level and frequency of training varies between communities. During the 7 October attacks, the civilian rapid response units were often the first line of defence against Hamas.

Magav: The combat arm of the Israeli Border Police, which is responsible for law enforcement and participates in counter-terrorism operations.

Mamad (plural mamadim): The word Mamad is an acronym for 'merhav mugan dirati,' which roughly translates to 'protected space apartment.' Mamads are reinforced saferooms in Israeli homes designed to protect residents from missiles and rocket attacks. Mamad rooms often are dual use and will also be used as playrooms, offices, and extra bedrooms. Mamad rooms do not typically lock from the inside. During the 7 October attack, many residents of the Gaza Envelope sheltered in their mamad for several hours.

MDA: Magen David Adom (MDA) is Israel's National Blood and Medical Emergency Service, serving as an ambulance and paramedic service. The name translates to 'Red Shield of David.' In Israel, MDA has a dedicated medical emergency phone number (dial 101).

Merkava: Main battle tanks used by the Israeli Defence Forces.

Migunit (plural Miguniot): are portable outdoor bomb shelters that can be found in public spaces across Israel and designed to protect people who are caught outside during rocket and missile attacks. They are often placed near bus stops, in parks and children's playgrounds. Some *migunit* are bell-shaped and others are large, square, concrete shelters.

Moshav (plural Moshavim): is a cooperative agricultural community in Israel formed of individual farms. While like a *Kibbutz*, *Moshav* members own their own land and are responsible for their own income. However, *Moshav* residents still share communal responsibilities, including for community infrastructure, cultural activities, and celebrating holidays.

Negev: The large desert region of southern Israel.

Nukhba: the special forces unit of the Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military wing.

Ravshatz: is a security coordinator of *Kibbutz*, *Moshav*, or other small community that has a *kitat konenut*.

RPG: Rocket-Propelled Grenade (RPG) are shoulder-fired, unguided rockets. There are various kinds of RPG warheads.

Shabbat: The Jewish Sabbath, a holy day, which begins at sundown on Friday evening and ends at sundown on Saturday evening. During the sabbath, observant Jewish people do not use machinery or technology.

Simchat Torah: A Jewish festival which commemorates the completion of the annual Torah reading cycle and beginning of a new cycle. The holiday is celebrated by dancing and singing and immediately follows the Sukkot festival.

Tseva Adom: Literally means "Colour Red" in Hebrew but is translated as "Red Alert" - this is the name of the automated rocket warning system installed in most Israeli communities. In the Negev, instead of sirens warning of incoming bombardment, a female voice repeats "*Tseva Adom*, *Tseva Adom*." The system sends direct alerts to mobile telephones and interrupts radio and television broadcasts.

YAMAM: An acronym for 'Yehida Merkazit Meyuhedet' which roughly translates to 'centralised special unit' which is National Counter-Terrorism Unit, one of four special units of the Israeli Border Police. They specialise in hostage-rescue operations and offensive take-over raids against terrorist targets in civilian areas.

YAMAS: An acronym for 'Yehidat HaMista'arvim' which is a tactical unit of the Israeli Border Police, that conducts covert and special operations, counter-terrorism and irregular warfare.

ZAKA: is a series of volunteer non-governmental post-disaster response teams in Israel. ZAKA Search and Rescue is an UN-recognised humanitarian volunteer organization that provides rapid response and recovery services during mass casualty events.

Chapter 1.1 | Timeline

Hamas' preparations officially begin from 2021. Planning continued throughout 2022 and 2023, including at a series of meetings that were held over the 2 years where a small group of Hamas political and military leaders, including Yahya Sinwar and Mohammed Deif, agreed to avoid smaller skirmishes with Israel to conceal their intentions, conserve resources, and execute a large-scale deception.

Saturday 7th October 2023

Terrorist Activity | Israel Activity | British Victims

06:15 Hamas squads assemble at roughly 24 points along the border fence.

06:29 *Tseva Adom* – 'Red alert' rocket sirens begin to sound across the Gaza Envelope (the area of Israel located within 4.3 miles of the Gaza Strip) and Negev region, giving warning to a barrage of rockets and mortars. 3873 fell throughout the day.

Radio transmission by Sgt. Roni Eshel at Nahal Oz Base stating Hamas attackers were approaching the fence marking the beginning of the land invasion.

06:30 Border breach begins, snipers from Gaza fire on several military posts along the 40-mile-long fence, and Hamas terrorists begin breaking through the fence during the first wave of assault. In total the border was breached 119 times over the course of the attack.

06:32 Hamas first infiltrate *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza on paragliders and shortly after 110 terrorists breach the main gate of the *Kibbutz* using explosives.

06:34 Terrorists infiltrate *Moshav* Netiv HaAsara using paragliders.

06:35-37 *Kibbutz* Kissufim is infiltrated, and the Kissufim Military Outpost is attacked.

06:40
- Terrorists are inside *Kibbutz* Holit
- Terrorists cut through the fence and infiltrated *Kibbutz* Nirim
- Observation post at Nahal Oz is hit and damaged with rocket fire

Music turned off at the Nova Music festival and festivalgoers are told to leave the premises.

06:41 The commander of the southern district of the police, Chief Amir Cohen, announces "code Parash Pleshet" - an IDF and police emergency command given in the event of a hostile incursion into Israel. About ten minutes later, the command is transmitted widely via the police radio.

06:43 Terrorists breach the border near the Kerem Shalom Border crossing. At 06:52 Kerem Shalom Base contact *Kibbutz* Kerem Shalom to inform that the crossing was attacked and there is an infiltration

Maj. Ido Israeli Shani informs his units over the unit "We are at war" in the Southern Gazan Envelope

06:45

- Breaching the sea barrier, a Hamas Zodiac fast boat makes landfall on Zikim Beach. Israeli Navy reports an active infiltration
- Terrorists blow up the protection wall and entered Erez Crossing on the Israel-Gaza border. In 5 minutes, they took total control by 06:50.
- Terrorists attack *Kibbutz* Be'eri, Nahal Oz and Ein HaShlosha

Civilian security squad at *Kibbutz* Sa'ad are assembled to confront the attackers outside the *Kibbutz*' perimeter.

06:47

Terrorists arrive in area near Paga Military Outpost and attack soldiers in a mortar compound

Col. Asaf Hamami, Commander of the IDF Gaza Division Southern Brigade arrives at *Kibbutz* Nirim. He is killed by the attacking force, with the last sign of life at 07:05. His body and armored personnel carrier is taken to Gaza, with footage online by 10:00.

06:49

Terrorists arrive at *Kibbutz* Nir Oz

06:50

Approximate time that the civilian security squad at *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza are ambushed at the armory. The neutralisation of this squad leaves the *Kibbutz* largely undefended.
Terrorists arrive at the main gate and infiltrate *Kibbutz* Sufa

20 civilians who fled the initial attack on Zikim beach arrive at Zikim training base seeking shelter

06:55

Terrorists infiltrate Nahal Oz Base

06:55

Main gate of *Moshav* Pri Gan is blown up by terrorists

06:56

Terrorists attack *Kibbutz* Mefalsim

06:57

Hamas gunmen upload the death of Bracha Levinson to her own Facebook page

06:58

- First larger unit of terrorists enter the city of Sderot
- Terrorists infiltrate *Kibbutz* Be'eri

07:00

- Just before 07:00, Re'im Base (Gaza Division Command) is attacked
- Terrorists attack *Kibbutz* Nir Am
- Terrorists infiltrate *Kibbutz* Alumim, and 5 minutes later attack the foreign guest workers housing killing Nepalese workers
- Terrorist set up an ambush at Mefalsim junction on Route 232
- Terrorists enter the COGAT DCO base near Erez Crossing

- Three-quarters of attendees from the Psyduck music festival leave the grounds, 16 of whom are killed along the highways. One of whom was Dor Hannan Shafir, a British-Israeli-Irish civilian.
- Terrorists reach the Yiftach Outpost in the northern Gazan Envelope. British Israeli soldier Nathanel Young was killed.

07:02

Terrorists enter the city of Ofakim

07:03

Hamas forces attack the Sderot Police Station. At the same time a second smaller group of terrorists arrive to the city of Sderot from other entrance point and immediately kill 13 pensioners at a bus stop.

07:10

- *Kibbutz* Magen is breached
- Terrorist incursion confirmed in the city of Netivot
- The Alumim bomb shelter on Route 232 is attacked – containing escapees from the Nova Music festival
- Rockets reach the city of Ashkelon

07:15 Ambush is set up by the terrorists at Mivtahim Junction on Route 232

Thirty escapees from the Nova festival arrive at *Kibbutz* Re'im

07:18
- Hamas published on its Al-Qassam website, a pre-recorded speech by Commander-in-Chief of Al-Qassam Brigades, Mohammad Deif, announcing the beginning of Hamas's Tufan Al-Aqsa (Al-Aqsa Flood) and claimed to be firing of over 5,000 rockets aimed at Israel.
- *Kibbutz* Kerem Shalom is breached

07:19 Terrorists attack Zikim Military Training Base

07:20
- Terrorists reach the gates of *Kibbutz* Erez
- Hostages are taken at Erez Crossing. This is the first abduction the IDF knew of in real-time.
- Terrorists reach Re'im military base.

Escapees from the Nova music festival arrive at *Kibbutz* Sa'ad

British Israeli Bernard Cowan is shot dead in his home by terrorists in *Kibbutz* Sufa.

07:25
- Terrorists begin to attack *Kibbutz* Gevim
- Second wave of attack begins at Kissufim Military Outpost

07:26 Hamas operatives breach Urim Military Observation Outpost

07:30
- Shahar HaNegev junction (the intersection between Route 232 and Highway 34), a strategically important location, is under full terrorist control
- Terrorists attack soldiers stationed at firing range at Zikim Training Base

Car jam leaving the Nova Music festival forces festivalgoers to abandon their vehicles as gunfire draws closer. Many flee east over farmland, those who flee west, back to the festival site were largely killed. British Israeli Jake Marlowe who was working as a security guard at the festival is killed when Hamas terrorists enter the site.

07:34 Terrorists enter *Kibbutz* Nir Yitzhak

07:36 Terrorists drag Shlomo Manzour out of his home in *Kibbutz* Kissufim. At 85 years old he would be the oldest hostage taken to Gaza

07:37 The first reported casualty of the Oct 7 attack arrive at Soroka Medical Center's Emergency Department (ED). Soroka is the only Level One Trauma Center in Southern Israel

07:38 Terrorists arrive at *Moshav* Yakini moments after escapees from the Nova music festival sought shelter in the community. A second group of attackers entered the *Moshav* at 07:45

07:39 Terrorists have set up an ambush at Gamma Junction and Re'im intersection

07:40 Terrorists break into the Sufa Military Outpost

07:45 Terrorists infiltrate *Moshav* Mivtachim and *Moshav* Yesha

07:50 Terrorists attack and loot the Magen Junction Petrol Station

07:54 Terrorist attack main gate of *Moshav* Ein HaBesor

07:55 Hamas breach the front and back gate of *Kibbutz* Re'im

On Route 232, the Re'im bomb shelters are attacked. British Israeli Aner Shapira is in Re'im West Bomb shelter and is killed by a grenade thrown into the shelter.

07:56 The Bedouin village of Albah-at is struck by rockets killing 6

08:00 Looting, setting houses on fire, and hostage taking begins at *Kibbutz* Nirim

- Soroka Medical Center declare a Mass Casualty Event for all area hospitals and call in all critical clinical and ancillary staff
- IDF declares 'Readiness for War'

08:09 Abu Hamza, the Al-Quds Brigades spokesman make a statement confirming that Palestinian Islamic Jihad was participating in the attack on Israel. He said, "We are part of this battle, and our men are fighting shoulder to shoulder alongside with their brothers in Al-Qassam Brigades until victory, God willing"

08:10 Hamas forces reach the police blockade at the exit to the Nova music festival.

British Israeli Police officer, MST Sgt Devorah Abraham was positioned at the foreword command post at the Nova Festival to expediate departure of attendees. She is killed when Hamas entered the festival grounds

08:15 Thai hostages taken from *Kibbutz* Re'im

08:17 Terrorists breach the observation room at Urim Outpost killing the predominantly unarmed and female 'field officers'

08:20 Hamas squad is intercepted on the Fork junction (Highway 34 and Route 25) which stops the attacking forces reaching the city

08:26 Fighting concluded in *Moshav* Ein HaBesor

08:30

- 6 workers are taken hostage from *Kibbutz* Holit
- Terrorists approached the back of *Kibbutz* Yad Mordechai
- The main festival site at Nova is under Hamas control
- Second wave of terrorists break into the Paga Military Outpost
- Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades announces they are joining the attack on Israel

First IDF unit to respond to the attack on *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza arrives at the main gate

- At approximately this time, British-Israeli Nadav Poppelwell is taken hostage, and his brother Roi, also a British citizen, was killed. Nadav was killed in captivity in Gaza.
- Terrorists are going house to house in Kibbuzt Be'eri, two of their victims are British Israeli citzens, Rotem Kaderon, and Yonatan Rapoport.

09:00 The west to the centre of *Kibbutz* Be'eri is under full terrorist control

- Small number of police arrive at *Kibbutz* Re'im
- IDF reinforcements arrive at Zikim Training Base

British citizen Danny Darlington is killed in *Kibbutz* Nir Oz, where he was visiting a friend.

09:00 - 12:00 The third wave of attackers who crossed the border, including Palestinian civilians was underway across the Gaza Envelope, adding second and third wave strikes to targeted communities, and military base

09:15
- Second wave of attack on *Kibbutz* Kerem Shalom
- Terrorists are reported in *Moshav* Yated

09:25
Second wave of attackers reach *Kibbutz* Mefalsim

09:30
- The second wave of attackers arrive at *Kibbutz* Alumim and *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza. In Kfar Aza the group enter at the back gate, adjacent to the 'Young Neighborhood'
- The second wave of attackers arrive at *Kibbutz* Nir Am
- The communication system at Erez Crossing is destroyed

09:45
- Yarden Bibas, the father of Kfir Bibas (the youngest hostage taken at 9 months old) texts his sister that terrorists are inside his house. The Bibas family were all taken hostage by the Palestinian Mujahideen Brigades
- Civilian looters from Gaza arrived at *Kibbutz* Nir Yitzhak

09:50
First IDF troops arrive at *Moshav* Pri Gan

10:00
Gazan civilians enter the Nova Music festival site

10:20
Hostages taken from *Kibbutz* Alumim

10:24
British Israeli, Emily Damari, sends her last WhatsApp message to her brothers before being taken hostage. (Kfar Aza). At approximately 10:45-11:00 her car was seen driving out the back gate of the *Kibbutz* taking hostages to the Gaza Strip (Kfar Aza)

10:30
- IDF Sayeret Metkal and Duvdevan units enter *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza via the front gate and engage the second wave of terrorists. They are unable to reach the Young Generation's neighbourhood at the back of the *Kibbutz* which is under full terrorist control.
- Sayeret Metkal and Duvdevan units enter *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza and engage the second wave of terrorists
- Attackers at *Kibbutz* Mefalsim are largely neutralized

11:00
- Hostages taken from *Kibbutz* Nir Yitzhak
- Cables are sliced at Nahal Oz base cutting electricity and communications

- IDF attempted to reach *Kibbutz* Nir Oz but were attacked en route on Highway 232
- IDF troops arrive at *Moshav* Mivtachim and Yesha

11:15
Hezbollah releases its first official statement on its Telegram channel voicing their support of the Palestinian operation against Israel.

11:35
Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu declares the State of Israel is at war

12:30
The last time family and friends heard from British Israeli Lianne Sharabi who was then killed in *Kibbutz* Be'eri, alongside her two British Israeli daughters, Yahel and Noya. Their father Eli was taken hostage to Gaza.

12:40
First IDF troops arrive at *Kibbutz* Re'im

12:54
Pessi Cohen's house in *Kibbutz* Be'eri is infiltrated. The home would be used as location to bring hostages which resulted in a stand-off with the IDF. It would end in a battle where all but 2 of the hostages were killed, including British-Israeli twins Liel and Yannai Hetzroni.

13:00
- In *Kibbutz* Nir Oz, hostages are taken immediately and continue until 13:00. This *Kibbutz* had the most hostages – 75 taken alive.
- In *Kibbutz* Be'eri all the hostages taken to Gaza by this point (the hostage stand off at the Cohen household is ongoing)

13:00

- IDF arrive at *Kibbutz* Kissufim
- IDF forces enter *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz
- Lone IDF tank arrives at *Kibbutz* Sa'ad
- Six soldiers from the LOTAR counterterrorism unit arrive at *Kibbutz* Sufa
- Urim observation post declared free from infiltration

13:08

IDF troops arrive en mass to the Nova Music festival site.

13:10

More IDF forces arrive at Kfar Aza

13:20

Israeli troops including counterterrorism forces arrive at *Kibbutz* Nir Yitzhak

13:30

- Hostages taken from *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz
- The last terrorists and Gazan civilians left *Kibbutz* Nir Oz. The IDF arrived an hour later.

- IDF forces reach Be'eri bomb shelter on Route 232 and discover it has been attacked with grenades
- IDF attack helicopter fires on terrorists at Sufa Outpost
- IDF troops accumulate at *Kibbutz* Be'eri, and try to regain control

13:35

A relief IDF force arrive at *Kibbutz* Nirim

14:00

- More IDF arrive at Kfar Aza
- IDF forces arrive at *Kibbutz* Kerem Shalom
- IDF forces arrive at *Kibbutz* Magen
- IAF attack helicopter arrives at *Kibbutz* Sufa
- More troops arrive at *Moshav* Mivtachim and Yesha
- IDF troops arrive in the city of Ofakim

14:15

IDF Naval Commandos arrive at *Kibbutz* Nir Oz

14:30

- 'Shayetet 13' Naval Commandos arrive at Sufa Military Outpost and by 17:30 have restored complete control to the outpost, recusing 250 besieged soldiers who were trapped in the cafeteria
- IDF arrive at *Kibbutz* Alumim

15:30

Shaldag unit from the IDF arrived at *Kibbutz* Holit

16:00

Approximate time of death of British Israeli solider Yosef Guedalia who was rescuing civilians from *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza

16:50

Caracal brigade tank crew arrive at *Kibbutz* Sufa

17:00

Hamas operatives who had besieged the Sderot Police Station try to escape

- Tanks from the Caracal battalion arrive at *Kibbutz* Holit
- IDF forces arrive at *Kibbutz* Netiv HaAsara
- IDF forces arrive at Pysduck grounds
- IDF Rescue company arrive at Paga Military Outpost

17:30

IDF forces arrive at the Erez Crossing

19:00

IDF arrive at *Moshav* Yated

19:45 The IDF reported that it had regained control of the Re'im Military Base.

20:00 Large IDF force arrive at *Kibbutz* Erez

23:00 Kissufim Military Outpost is cleared

Sunday 8th October 2023

00:00 *Kibbutz* Holit declared free from infiltration

01:30 The first truck carrying bodies arrives at the Shura Military Rabbinate base where they would be identified and processed for burial.

02:00
- Bulldozers begin demolishing the Sderot Police Station, with a tank providing suppressing fire. By 05:00 it is completed.
- IDF relieve the civilian security squad at *Kibbutz* Yad Mordechai

02:30 Zikim security squad stood down

03:30 IDF declared sufficient control over *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza and ordered the start of the evacuation. It was not declared infiltration free, until 11 October

04:00 Another infiltration is reported in *Moshav* Yated

05:00 IDF confirmed total operational control of *Kibbutz* Be'eri. Throughout the day individual volunteers and ad hoc groups from elsewhere in Israel came to the *Kibbutz* to rescue or defend its residents, alongside the official IDF response. They included British Israeli Benjamin Trakeniski, an off-duty major in the IDF armoured corps who was killed rescuing wounded residents.

09:00 The City of Sderot is declared free from infiltration

PM Terrorists try to breach *Kibbutz* Urim

Monday 16th October 2023

Abu Ubaida, spokesman of the Qassam Brigades confirmed that Hamas was holding 200 Israeli hostages and over 50 hostages were being held by associated groups in Gaza

Chapter 1.2 | The Perpetrators

The events of 7 October 2023 involved a large-scale, coordinated assault executed by approximately 7,000 individuals. It was meticulously planned and led by Hamas through the Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades and elite *Nukhba* forces. Of the total participants, 3,800 were from Hamas' Qassam brigades, including *Nukhba* forces. They were supported by an additional 2,200 from other groups, such as hundreds from Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and civilians who crossed the border, exploiting the chaos to steal and destroy property. The perpetrators engaged in acts of violence and the taking of hostages. An additional 1,000 rocket launchers remained within Gaza, providing tactical support through missile strikes targeting Israeli positions and infrastructure.

The Terrorist Groups in the Gaza Strip

The largest terror group in the Gaza Strip is Hamas, an acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya ("Islamic Resistance Movement") who were also democratically elected in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections. There are at least another 16 Palestinian militant and terrorist factions and groups operational in the Gaza Strip.[1]

Hamas

Hamas emerged as a splinter faction of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1987 with an ideological blend of Palestinian nationalism and Islamism.[2] Its 1988 charter called for the murder of Jews, the destruction of Israel, and in her place, the establishment of an Islamic state in 'historic Palestine.'[3]

In the original charter, antisemitism is a frequent theme, notably beginning in Article 20 which begins describing the Jews' "Nazi treatment [of other peoples]" and continues in Articles 22-32 using arguments from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion,* Hitler's *Mein Kampf,* and the American Ku Klux Klan. The charter continues, stating that the Jewish people are attempting to enact a policy of global domination and alcoholism, and drug addiction is a tactic used to do so.[4] This ideology has also been spread through propaganda for Gazan children through Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV channel. Such programmes, such as "Pioneers of Tomorrow" which feature Mickey Mouse-like characters teaching children to hate Americans and Jews and kill them through acts of martyrdom.[5] Between the antisemitism within Hamas' charter, and the spread of propaganda in Gazan society, especially through the younger generations, antisemitism is a key facet of the Hamas ideology.

Hamas was involved in the First and Second Intifadas, 1987-1993 and 2000-2005 respectively, including perpetrating suicide bombings and other terror attacks against Israeli civilians. In the years in between (1993-2000), they were a leading force opposing the Israeli-Palestinian Oslo Peace Process and claimed responsibility for 20 suicide bombings, which killed 187 people and injured 1,150.[6] Following Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005, and the Palestinian Legislative elections in 2006 which Hamas won, the group violently seized power in the Strip in 2007. Since then, the terror group Hamas has created a quasi-state with a political and military infrastructure, through a mix of political control, public service provision, and coercive enforcement. Its governance often exploited the humanitarian crisis in Gaza to consolidate control, channelling international aid and Qatari funds into both public works and military projects. Simultaneously, Hamas maintained a militant focus, using its governance as a platform to support its resistance narrative. In 2017, in a guise to moderate its image, Hamas released a new document, which removed explicit references to killing Jews. However, ahead of its release Hamas leaders said that it did not replace the original 1988 charter, and it still did not recognise Israel's right to exist in the land and remained committed to a policy of violence.[7]

Soon after its formation, Hamas began military operations against Israel and formed a network of underground militarized cells known as Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, (Al-Qassam) in 1991-92. Al-Qassam brigades perpetrated bombings and shootings at bus stops, restaurants and nightclubs in Israel throughout the intifadas of the 1990s and 2000s.[8] The group gained capacity for domestic weapons production, and added to those smuggled from Iran, amassed thousands of rockets. Its defensive military infrastructure included an extensive tunnel network used for smuggling, storing weaponry, and launching cross-border attacks.

Hamas, Izz Al Din Al Qassam Brigades

Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Al Quds Brigades

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command, Jihad Jibril Brigades

Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Omar Al-Qasim Forces

Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade

Palestinian Mujahedeen Movement

Popular Resistance Committees, Al-Nasser Salah Al-Din Brigades

Al Ahrar & Al-Ansar Brigades

This network, often referred to as the 'Gaza Metro,' allowed Hamas to bypass Israeli surveillance and retain operational flexibility.[9]

Prior to 7 October, Hamas had turned Gaza into a militarised state. The group's fighting power was an estimated 25-30,000 fighters organised into four brigades and an estimated 12-24 battalions,[10] largely trained at military camps located across the Gaza Strip.[11] In addition to the official military camps, Hamas has historically also trained the children of the Gaza Strip for the next generations of conflict against Israel within military summer camps, offering military training and instruction on weapons handling, to "train the generation of liberation and victory."[12] The brigades themselves are largely sectioned by their location within the Gaza Strip, consisting of the North Brigade, Gaza Brigade, Central Brigade, and Rafah Brigade, each with their own set of battalions and commanders.[13] Reports quoting senior IDF commanders also assessed that Hamas would draw on several thousand fighters from other resistance groups in Gaza.[14]

Hamas is a designated terrorist organisation in a number of countries, including in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Japan and the European Union.

On the eve of 7 October 2023, Hamas leadership was comprised of figures operating both inside Gaza and in exile in Qatar. Yahya Sinwar, a former leader of Hamas' military wing and a central figure in planning its operations, acted as the de facto leader in Gaza. Ismail Haniyeh, the leader of Hamas' political bureau, was based in Qatar and coordinated international relations, notably with backers such as Iran. The overall leader of the Izz Ad-Din Al-Qassam Brigades was Mohammed Deif, and his deputy was Marwan Issa.[15]

Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)

Palestinian Islamic Jihad began as a small group of underground cells,[16] but has grown into the second-largest movement in Gaza.[17] Compared to Hamas, the group is more extremist both ideologically and tactically.[18] PIJ believes that Palestinian land is consecrated for Islam and as such refuses to negotiate with the Israeli government.[19] However, unlike Hamas, PIJ does not engage in any political activities, govern, or provide social services.[20] The PIJ was founded in 1981 and launched an official armed resistance in 1984. The group has little interest in growing into a political movement and primarily views itself as a military organisation countering in their words, "Israeli settler colonialism." When Hamas cut ties with Syria in 2012, it prompted Iran to redirect funding to the PIJ. As a result,

between 2011 and 2014, the PIJ grew into a more professional force with access to advanced weaponry.[21]

In 2011, PIJ claimed to have 8,000 battle ready soldiers. But in 2018, the US State Department estimated their membership numbers were closer to 1,000.[22] By 2022, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad had reportedly reached a point where it had the capacity to independently wage war against Israel.[23] It increasingly engaged in hostilities against Israel, independently from Hamas and other groups in the Strip (SEE Chapter 2). PIJ is a designated terrorist organisation in a number of countries, including in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and the European Union.

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) combines Arab nationalism and Marxist-Leninist thinking. It was founded in 1967, active first in the Gaza Strip and then expanded to Lebanon and Syria.[24] The PFLP thinks that annihilating Israel will further the struggle to remove Western capitalism from the region and seeks to create a single communist Palestinian state in the Middle East.[25] The PFLP's first secretary general, George Habash, thought that liberating Palestine was a critical step in the world Communist revolution.[26] The military wing, the Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades (AAMB) were founded in 2000 under the name of the Popular Resistance Forces as part of efforts of the Second Intifada to bring militant forces together. They function as a faction of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO).[27] The PFLP and Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades have a strong relationship with and receive support from Iran.[28] The group self-reports hundreds of members across Gaza and the West Bank, but total numbers are unconfirmed.

Iran has sought to incorporate secular Palestinian terrorist organisations, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), into the "resistance axis." Iran recognized that Hamas maintained close ties with the PFLP and that the PFLP had an interest in improving its relations with international actors to be able to increase its activities. A document dated July 4, 2023, summarized the key points of a meeting which took place days earlier between PFLP representatives and Hossein Akbari, the Iranian ambassador to Syria, during which both sides discussed strengthening their relations.[29]

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC)

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC), founded in 1968 is a splinter group from the PFLP, based in Lebanon and Syria. The group itself has had historical ties and links to the Assad Syrian regime and had participated in the Syrian Civil War against rebel forces. The PFLP-GC is distinct from the PFLP, in its founding it adopted a strong pro-Syrian and anti-PLO ideology, going so far as to fight against PLO forces during the Syrian invasion into Lebanon in 1976.[30] The original split between the PFLP and the PFLP-GC was due to differences between founder Ahmad Jibril and the PFLP head George Habash, as Habash was committed to an armed struggle only rather than political engagement with other Palestinian factions. Jibril's ideology was also more radical than Habash's and alighned more with the Assad regime in Syria and against the PLO.[31] The PFLP-GC also has links with Iranian proxy terrorist organisation based in Lebanon, Hezbollah.[32] Today, the assumed leader of the PFLP-GC is Talal Naji.[33]

The military wing of the PFLP-GC was proscribed as a terrorist organisation by the UK government in June 2014 and has also been proscribed by the US since 1997.[34]

The militant Jihad Jibril Brigades are named for the late founder Ahmad Jibril's son, Jihad Ahmed Jibril, who was killed in a 2002 car bombing. Following his death, the new Jihad Jibril Brigades were established in the West Bank and Gaza within the PLFP-GC.[35]

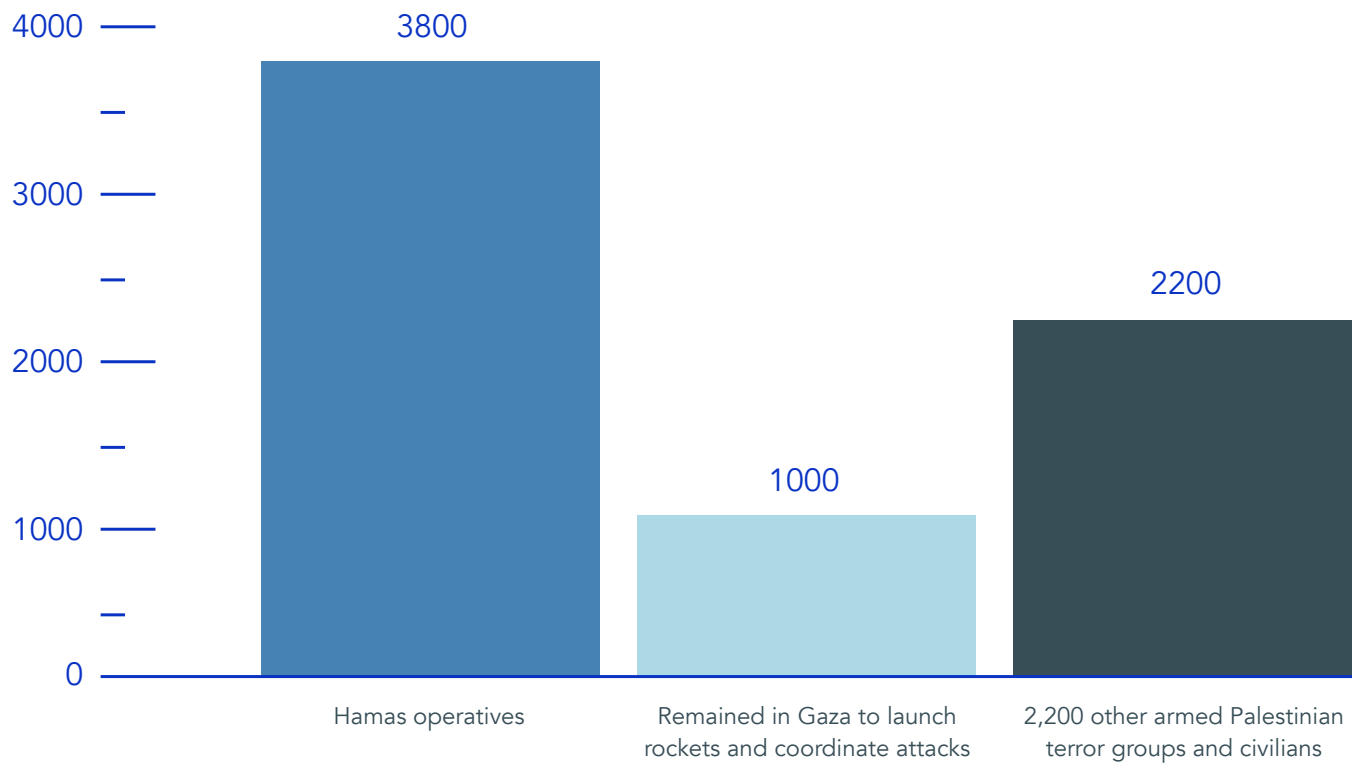
Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)

The DFLP split off from the PFLP in 1969. The group maintained its Marxist-Leninist ideology but also draws inspiration from Maoism. The DFLP wants to establish an independent Palestinian state through both political and military methods, within the borders of the current Jewish state.[36] The armed wing of the DFLP was formed in 2000 as the Second Intifada began. The force numbers are unknown, but the group reportedly operates as a series of small cells in Gaza and the West Bank.[37]

Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (AAMB)

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (AAMB) was founded in 2000 in the West Bank during the Second Intifada and formerly functioned as the armed wing of Fatah and was affiliated with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation

NUMERICAL BREAKDOWN OF THE ATTACKING FORCES



(PLO). Their first major attack was a shooting attack in Hadera in 2002, and a double bombing outside a Tel Aviv bus station killing 23 in 2003 which also marked the group's first decision to join Hamas and the PIJ in attacks against Israel.[38] Following Hamas' 2007 takeover of the Gaza Strip, AAMB was forced to dismantle under a decree from Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority,[39] which banned all armed militias.[40] Following 2007, the connection between Fatah and the AAMB also continued to diverge as Fatah choose to promote "resistance" activities without violating ground rules agreed on with Israel in the West Bank.[41] However, in recent years AAMB activity has increased in Palestinian Authority territories due to a weakening of PA security forces, especially in Jenin and Nablus. This has resulted in an increase in status of AAMB among young Palestinians.[42] AAMB has no known command structure, instead operating in splinter groups organised geographically, with the activities of those in Gaza largely independent to those in the West Bank. In the Strip the splinter groups include the Nidal Al-Amoudi Battalion, Jaish al- Asifa Squad, Abd Al-Qadir Al-Husseini Squad and Ayman Jawda squads.[43] Each one of these battalions and local groups has its own local leader and operational agenda, functioning independently of centralised hierarchal leadership.[44] AAMB was responsible for many rocket attacks between 2003 and 2012, including launching over 500 rockets during the limited military conflict between Israel and Gaza in 2012, Operation Pillar of Defence.[45]

In September 2021, several AAMB groups in the Gaza Strip announced their unification, which was considered a result of Hamas' military wing investing in the group's development.[46] Senior Fatah leadership have distanced themselves from AAMB – in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank – and insist that it is formed mainly of disorganised gangs of young Palestinians,[47] although some of the members are former security personnel for the Palestinian Authority.[48]

Palestinian Mujahideen Movement

The Palestinian Mujahideen Movement emerged in the early 1970s but formalised as a relatively small Palestinian militant organization in 2001, during the Second Intifada.[49] Over the years in Gaza, it has worked with Hamas and cooperated with it in operations, supplying weapons and training.[50] For a period, the group also operated as a unit within the AAMB. The group's leader is Asad Abu Sharia, but the total number of members is not known.[51]

Popular Resistance Committees (PRC)

The Popular Resistance Committees (PRC) are a coalition of militant groups active in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.[52] PRC is inspired by a radical Islamist ideology, aims to implement Sharia Law and believes that a holy war between Israel and the various

Palestinian militant groups is the only path forward.[53] While the PRC holds its Islamist ideology it does not participate in Palestinian Authority or PLO politics and advocates for armed resistance to create a Palestinian state with the pre-1967 borders. The armed wing of the PRC, the Al-Nasser Salah Al-Din Brigades was founded in 2000 and active during the Second Intifada as a more radical splinter group of Fatah. However, in practice there is no real distinction between the PRC and the Al-Din Brigades.[54] As of 2018, it was estimated to have several hundred members, with top PRC officials claiming up to 3,000 members, forming the third-largest armed group in Gaza as of 2024 reports.[55] The Al-Nasser Salah Al-Deen Brigades was reportedly formed by Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade members in Gaza and has collaborated with Hamas' Al-Qassam Brigades and the PIJ's Al-Quds Brigades. The two groups were responsible for the 2006 kidnapping of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.[56] Under the Tawheed Brigade, the PRC has a rocket and engineering unit and a propaganda unit, called Jihadist Information. The Al-Nasser Salah Al-Din Brigades are also active and recruit within universities in the Gaza Strip.[57]

Al-Ahrar

Al-Ahrar, or the Palestinian Freedom Movement, is a militant political party in Gaza that founded in 2007 following the Hamas takeover of Gaza. Originally named Fatah al-Yasir, the party was created by former Fatah members, and was named after former Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Despite their former alignment with Fatah, Al-Ansar Brigades do not recognise the authority of Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas. The military wing, Al-Ansar Brigades has an unconfirmed number of fighters.[58]

The 7 October Attack Groups

In 2018, Palestinian armed groups in the Gaza Strip established the "Joint Room for Palestinian Resistance Factions" to coordinate their activities against Israel. It was first suggested in 2016 but implemented to organise the 'March of Return' in 2018 (SEE Chapter 2 for more information). Ayman Nofal, a member of the General Military Council of the Izz Al-Din Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military-terrorist wing, and responsible for military communications, gave a rare interview to the al-Jazeera network in June 2023, where he described the goals and structure of the joint operations room. He emphasised its purpose of fostering an inter-organizational alliance to coordinate operations, enhance the capabilities of the "Palestinian Resistance," and serve as an inclusive framework encompassing all organizations, networks, and fighters without exception.[59] The Joint Room was responsible for organising joint training exercises which have occurred annually since 2020. Some of these were publicised

The "Joint Room for Palestinian Resistance Factions" announced it would be conducting its first training exercise in 2020 and uploaded this picture to Telegram and other sites. Source: Hamas Telegram

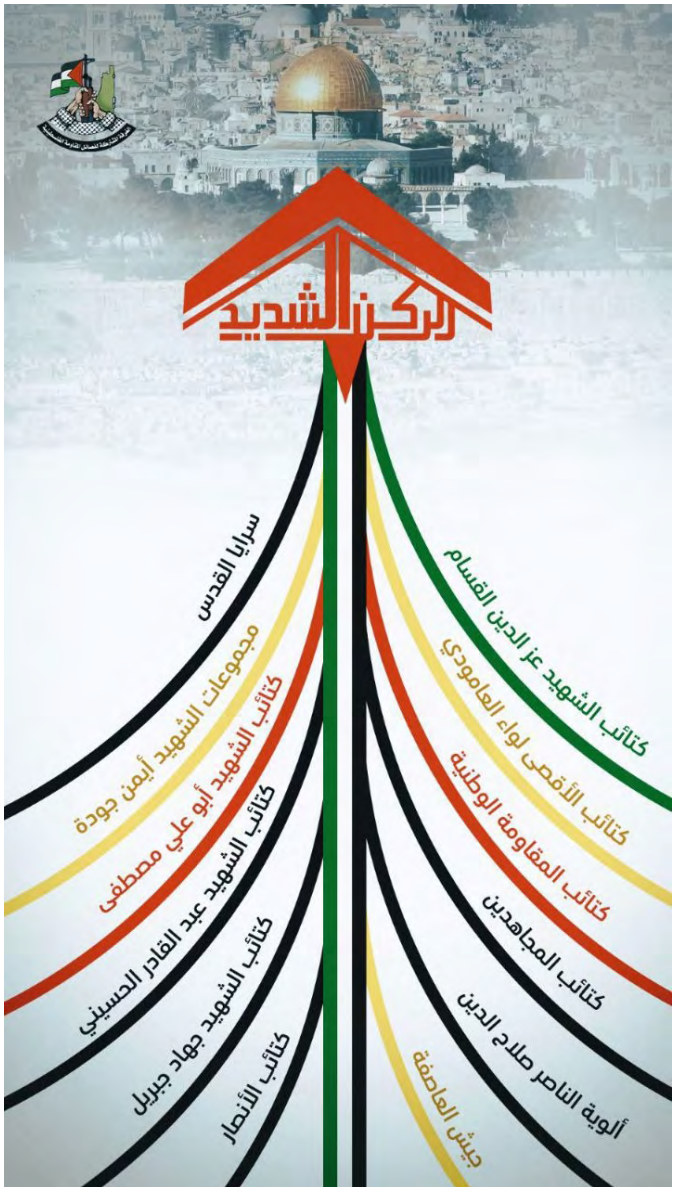
via Telegram on the official channel of the Joint Room of Palestinian Resistance Factions, others were only released following 7 October (SEE Chapter on Hamas Aims and Plans). Nofal noted the involvement of 9 groups: Izz Al-Din Qassam Brigades (Hamas), The Al-Quds Brigades (Palestinian Islamic Jihad), The Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), The Jihad Jibril Brigades (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command), The National Resistance Brigades (Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine), The Nasser Saleh Al-Din Battalions (Popular Resistance Committees), The Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades (ex-Fatah), The Holy Warriors' Battalions (Mujahedeen) and The Al-Ansar Brigades (Al-Ansar Movement).

In 2 images uploaded to Telegram in 2020 – to announce the first joint training manoeuvre - and in 2023 – to announce the fourth on 12 September that year – an additional 3 groups can be identified the Ayman Jawda Squads, the Abd al Qadr Al-Husseini Brigades and the Al-Assefa Army.[60] A report in the Lebanese Al-Akhbar noted the involvement of four Fatah military wings in a joint exercise which are no longer recognised by the Palestinian Authority (PA) chairman Mahmoud Abbas after ordering their dismantlement in 2007. They continue to operate in the Gaza Strip under Hamas's authority, aligning with its policies. The 9 groups – named by Nofal – can be identified as taking part in the attacks on 7 October 2023. The exact breakdown of both figures, groups and waves has not been publicly confirmed, and is a central focus of the IDF's investigations.

The attack was planned, organised and led by Hamas and they comprised the majority of the forces – 3,800 of the individuals who crossed the border.

1. The Izz ad-Din Al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas)

The exact date of when Hamas began to plan the 7 October attack is unknown. However, it is officially referred to, as the "big project" in minutes from Hamas-held meetings from January 2022. In a sign of how covertly the attack was prepared, Sinwar and his subordinates decided the plans should be kept secret from many lower-ranking Hamas fighters until only hours before the assault.[61] Preparations for the operation involved notifying Qassam Brigades leaders of the attack plan but not its timing. They were informed 3 days before the final preparations and assigned specific tasks without revealing a precise start time ("zero point"). Regional brigade leaders



On 12 September 2023 the "Joint Room for Palestinian Resistance Factions" conducted their fourth annual training exercise and uploaded this picture, along with photos from within the operation room.
Source: Hamas Telegram

then prepared their forces, and Ayman Siam, the Gaza rocket unit commander, was instructed to ready hundreds of rockets for launch at the operation's onset. Most battalion leaders in Gaza were unaware of the operation's details or timing, with some receiving only limited mission-related information. This strict security plan aimed to prevent leaks to Israeli intelligence.[62]

Individuals from across the Gaza Strip were selected from the *Nukhba* "Elite Unit" for their exceptional capabilities. They underwent intensive training over several years, with periodic tests to assess and enhance their combat skills. Early in the training, participants, unaware of its purpose, took a special oath of secrecy before their commanders, pledging not to disclose any details about their training or related plans. While the participants were not informed of any imminent attack, their training focused specifically on storming

communities[63] (SEE Chapter 4: Hamas Aims and Plans for more detail).

On 7 October, at in a statement released on Hamas' website at 07:18, Mohammed Deif announced the beginning of Hamas' Tufan Al-Aqsa (Al-Aqsa Flood) and in a pre-recorded message on Al-Aqsa TV, said that in the first strike more than 5,000 rockets and mortar shells had been fired at Israel. Abu Obeida, Hamas spokesman, also in a pre-recorded voice message broadcast on Al-Aqsa TV, said the operations "in the field" were proceeding as planned, and that the results were as yet unknown in Israel, but that when they awoke Israel would be stunned. He called on the Palestinians in the West Bank and Jerusalem and on Israeli Arabs to participate in the attack. Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau based in Qatar issued a press release later in the day claiming that "Palestinian resistance" was conducting a campaign for Al-Aqsa Mosque, the holy places and the prisoners.[64]

The Qassam Brigades led the attack on Israel and had the highest number of forces. Video evidence of Al-Qassam terrorists, distinctive due to their uniform's green headbands (sometimes this is inverted to be a white headband with green text), labelled with Kataib Al-Shahid Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam, shows the group present.[65] On 16 October, Abu Ubaida, spokesman of the Qassam Brigades confirmed that Hamas was holding 200 Israeli hostages and over 50 hostages were being held by associated groups in Gaza.[66]

On 7 October, 2,200 additional individuals joined Hamas forces throughout the attack comprising of other armed groups and civilians from Gaza.[67]

2. The Al-Quds Brigades, (PIJ)

On 7 October, PIJ spokesman Abu Hamza made a statement confirming that PIJ were responsible for some of the missile attacks on Israeli communities near the Gaza border.[68] At 08:09 on 7 October, Abu Hamza, the Al-Quds Brigades spokesman, made a statement confirming that PIJ was participating in the attack on Israel. He said, "We are part of this battle, and our men are fighting shoulder to shoulder alongside with their brothers in Al-Qassam Brigades until victory, God willing." The day of attack, PIJ also posted a video to the Al-Quds Brigade official Telegram channel showing a compilation of scenes of PIJ storming military and civilian sites across the envelope.[69] The group can also be identified by their black headbands, often with the PIJ logo and labelled Sayyara Al-Quds.[70] On 8 October, PIJ political leader Ziad al-Nakhala confirmed that the group was holding over 30 hostages.[71] The Quds Brigades are identified by wearing black headbands with yellow writing.[72]

3. Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades (PFLP)

On 7 October, the Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades participated in the attack on Israel. In digital materials documenting the attacks, Brigade fighters are identified by wearing red headbands labelled Kataib al-Shahid Abu Ali Mustafa in white letters.[73] The PFLP also shared videos, images, and messages on its website and Telegram channels celebrating the attack. On the official Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades Telegram, PFLP posted several photos showing terrorists in action, with accompanying text that said "Cells of the martyr Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades stormed several [military] points in the Gaza envelope and have inflicted verified losses in the Zionist ranks. The cells have returned safely to their bases, and other cells are operating in the field now to inflict more losses in the ranks of the occupation army troops and the herds of their settlers."[74] The group also issued a statement on their website calling for a mass mobilisation within their ranks. The statement said the brigades were standing with the Al-Qassam Brigades and all resistance forces and called for all available soldiers to join the resistance.[75]

On 9 October, PFLP posted a photo and accompanying statement confirming that since launching the Al Aqsa Flood campaign, the PFLP's cyber force had conducted online attacks targeting Israel's water, electricity, road and UAV developing and manufacturing control systems.[76]

4. Jihad Jibril Brigades (PFLP-GC)

The Jihad Jibril Brigades announced their involvement in an Arabic-language post on their official Telegram channel, writing that they were "side by side with the other resistance factions in the Zionist settlements."[77] The Jihad Jibril Brigades claimed to have lost two members within the group's participation in the 7 October attack.[78] They can be recognised by a camouflage or black print headband with Kataib al-Shahid Jihad Jibril written in white lettering.[79]

5. Omar Al-Qasim Forces (DFLP)

Pictures posted to the official DFLP Telegram channel show armed militants, identifiable by red headbands with Kataib al-Moqowma Al-Wataniya in white writing inside Israeli territory on 7 October.[80] The National Resistance Brigades posted on their Telegram channel

that their fighters were part of clashes in *Kibbutz* Be'eri, Kerem Shalom, *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza and Kissufim.[81]

6. Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (AAMB)

On 7 October at 08:30, Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades announced they were joining the attack on Israel.[82] The group often wear yellow or white headbands with Kataib Al-Aqsa, Lwa' Al-Amoudi written in black to identify themselves.[83] The group shared footage of their involvement of the attacks, including at *Kibbutz* Kissufim, and the transferal of hostages between groups.[84]

7. Mujahideen Brigades

On 7 October at 08:19, the Mujahideen Brigades announced that its members were fighting with the Al-Qassam Brigades and other resistance groups in "Zionist territory."[85] The Secretary-General of the Palestinian Mujahideen Movement also made a statement urging Arab governments to revisit their stance on normalisation with Israel and reject it.[86] released footage on Telegram showing its members at Nir Oz, Sderot, the Erez Crossing and the Paga military outpost. The Mujahideen Movement can be identified by black headbands labelled with Kataib al-Mujahideen in white letters.[87] Following the 7 October attack on Israel, the Palestinian Mujahideen Movement claimed to be holding hostages taken from Israel.[88] It is understood that the Mujahideen Brigades are responsible for taking hostage Shiri Bibas, and her two sons, then-4-year-old, Ariel and 9-month, Kfir.[89] On 30 November 2023, the Brigades claimed to announce their deaths.[90]

8. Al-Nasser Salah Al-Deen Brigades, (PRC)

The group claimed it worked with Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups to perpetrate the 7 October attacks and posted on their Telegram channel that they both killed and captured 'Zionist soldiers and settlers.' On 7 October, posts on the group's official Telegram channel featured photos of stolen Israeli equipment and IDs and credit cards belonging to Israeli soldiers.[91] The group also posted to social media that the PRC launched kamikaze drones as part of the assault.[92]

Following the 7 October, PRC claimed to be holding hostages taken from Israel.[93] Street camera footage recovered by Israeli Security Forces in Khan Yunis indicate that the hostages were an Argentinian-Israeli mother and her two children.[94] The PRC can be identified mainly via the Al-Nasser Brigades wearing green or black headbands with Alwiyeh Al-Nasser Saleh Al-Din written in white.[95]

9. Al-Ansar Brigades (Al-Ahrar)

Video footage and other evidence suggests the Ansar Brigades participated in hostage taking on 7 October, however other involvement on 7 October is not likely due to their small size and overall dependence on Hamas. The group was only evidenced to have entered full operations against Israel in February 2024.[96] In other operations, the Ansar Brigades can be identified by their black headbands labelled with Kataib Al-Ansar.[97]

10. Civilians

On 7 October the 2,200 additional individuals who joined Hamas forces throughout the attack were comprised of other armed groups and civilians.[98] Many of those who participated in the attack – despite potentially being members of terrorist groups dressed in civilian clothing. The majority took advantage of the border breach to loot and destroy property, but in some cases, civilians also inflicted harm and actively participated in the taking and abuse of hostages both alive and dead.

In many of the attacked locations, civilians can be seen on CCTV cameras and self-recorded footage later uploaded to various social media channels looting from homes and stealing communal agricultural equipment, for example in *Kibbutz* Be'eri where a civilian was seen on CCTV stealing a large flat-screen television.[99] Many residents who were hiding in their saferooms reported that their personal property including clothing, food, jewellery and valuables, passports, children's toys, and vehicles were stolen.[100] In *Kibbutz* Holit, civilian looters were captured on CCTV taking the wallet and car keys of Salem Alziadana, a Bedouin worker who had been hiding in the dairy farm with his children after his brother and brother's children had been kidnapped earlier that morning.[101] In several cases, arrested Palestinian civilian infiltrators admitted that they had been paid to transport *Nukhba* troops into Israel and encouraged to loot.[102]

Beyond looting, on several occasions civilians filmed themselves inflicting harm and abuse on residents, including partaking in the desecration of corpses. In Nahal Oz, one civilian filmed himself attempting to behead a Thai worker with a garden hoe.[103] Video

footage from the abduction of Yarden Bibas from *Kibbutz* Nir Oz shows him surrounded by a mob of mostly unarmed individuals in civilian clothing beating and filming him, and he is seen covered in blood whilst seated on a motorbike between two civilians.[104] In other instances of hostage-taking, unarmed civilians can be seen participating along with militants, such as in the kidnapping of Noa Argamami and her boyfriend Avinatan Or from the Nova Festival.[105]

Based on CCTV footage and testimony both women and children were amongst the civilians from Gaza to take part, with footage from Nir Oz capturing children stealing bicycles.[106]

During the attack on Nir Oz, a civilian journalist affiliated with the Saudi Al-Hadath news channel, filmed the attack and abductions taking place, and appeared to provide encouragement to militants and instructions regarding hostage-taking.[107] Other journalists were present during and took part in the attack, including freelance photographers who later sold images of the attack to the Associated Press and Reuters news agencies, including images of kidnapped corpses in degrading and humiliating conditions such as partial stages of undress and disfigurement, for example the body of Nova Festival attendee Shani Louk.[108] In some cases, photographers were invited by Hamas to document the attack.[109]

The perpetrators and UNRWA

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), was founded in 1949 following the passing of UN General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV). Resolution 302 (IV) stipulated that UNRWA's mandate was to "provide direct relief and works programmes to Palestinian refugees, in order to prevent conditions of starvation and destress...and to further conditions of peace and stability."[110] UNRWA was established to take over from the United Nations Relief for Palestinian Refugees (UNRPR) from 1948. Historically, UNRWA provides support for over 6 million refugees in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and East Jerusalem.

Unlike the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that protects all refugees globally, UNRWA is solely focused on Palestinian refugees. Notably, UNRWA defines Palestinian refugees as "persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict". UNRWA also stipulates that "the descendants of Palestine refugee males, including adopted children, are also eligible for registration." This has caused the number of Palestinian refugees to increase from 750,000 refugees in 1950 to 5.9 million eligible today.[111] In comparison with the definition of refugees for every other population from the UNHCR, a refugee globally is "a person who is outside their country of nationality due to a well-founded fear of persecution, for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group".[112]

The aid agency has had a history of cases which demonstrate its difficulty in maintaining neutrality, and the significant risks involved in addressing Hamas infiltration in Gaza. In 2014 during a United Nations investigation into whether some UNRWA employees in Gaza were members of Hamas, a senior U.N. legal officer faced escalating threats, including anonymous emails, a funeral bouquet labelled with the officer's name, and a live grenade sent to the main UN compound. The legal officer was evacuated for his safety.[113] Matthias Schmale, who directed UNRWA's operations in Gaza from 2017 to 2021, fired an employee who was a member of Hamas' military wing. He also persuaded Hamas to allow UNRWA to block off another tunnel discovered near one of its schools, after a heated confrontation. Schmale, however, was forced to leave Gaza in 2021 following backlash over comments where he was perceived to praise the precision of Israeli strikes on Gaza.[114]

7 October 2023 Attacks

In January 2024 Israeli intelligence dossiers provided evidence that two UNRWA employees kidnapped Israelis, two were tracked to the locations of mass shootings[115] and others helped arm Hamas for the 7 October invasion. The dossier also specified that 10 of the UNRWA employees are affiliated with Hamas, and one affiliated with Palestinian Islamic Jihad.[116] On 26 January 2024 the UNRWA Commissioner-General published a statement on the agency's website,

"The Israeli Authorities have provided UNRWA with information about the alleged involvement of several UNRWA employees in the horrific attacks on Israel on 7 October. To protect the Agency's ability to deliver humanitarian assistance I have taken the decision to immediately terminate the contracts of these staff members and launch an investigation to establish the truth without delay. Any UNRWA employee who was

involved in acts of terror will be held accountable, including through criminal prosecution."[117]

On 26 April, 3 months after the start of the investigation, the UN announced investigations had been opened into a total of 19 UNRWA staff members. These were the original 12, plus 2 more named on 4 March by Israel,[118] and an additional 5, making an additional 7 in total.[119] On 5 August 2024 the UN Office of Internal Oversight announced that 9 UNRWA employees 'may have' participated in the 7 October attacks and as such were fired from their positions.[120] Some of these 19 investigated individuals (the UN will not specify how many) had already been terminated "in the interests of the Agency" more than 6 months earlier.

Since 7 October, several UNRWA employees have been identified by name as participating in the attack:

Mohammad Abu Itiwi, a *Nukhba* Commander in the Bureij Battalion has been employed by UNRWA since July 2022.[121] Itiwi is seen on dashboard camera footage[122] directing a group of *Nukhba* terrorists to attack the roadside bomb shelter near Re'im where British-Israeli Aner Shapira was sheltering with 26 other Nova festival goers. Itiwi directed his men to throw grenades into the shelter, 7 of which Shapira caught and threw back towards Hamas. The eighth grenade killed Shapira.[123]

Yusef Zidan Suleiman Al-Hawajara (a UNWRA Arabic teacher) Mousa Subhi Musa El Qidra (a UNWRA school counsellor), Rami Mohammad Ramadan Sabbah (a UNWRA math teacher) and Faisal Ali Mussalem al-Naami (a UNWRA social worker) were involved in capturing and holding hostages. Al-Hawajara referred to his female captives as "sabaya," in Nahal Oz base (see section on sexual violence), El Qidra abducted an Israeli woman with his son, Sabbah detained hostages himself and photographed an elderly hostage being taken to Gaza on a motorcycle, and al-Naami was filmed on CCTV abducting the corpse of 21-year-old, Yonatan Samerano from *Kibbutz* Be'eri.[124]

Ala Abd Al-Hamid Qassam Jouda (a UNWRA Arabic elementary school teacher), Ibrahim Atiya Mohammad Abu Ghafra (UNRWA elementary school teacher) and Mamdouh Hussein Ahmad Al-Qak (UNWRA elementary school teacher) can be directly participated in attacks on Israeli territories, with Jouda and Ghafra linked to assaults on *Kibbutzim*, Be'eri and Re'im, respectively. Ghafra was also geo-located to the Nova Music Festival site.[125] Al-Qak (a PIJ operative) rang his family after entering Israel, saying he would return to Gaza when he died.[126]

Ghassan Nabil Mohammad Sh'hadda El Jabari, 41, an Al-Qassam Brigades operative in the al-Furkan Battalion and UNRWA Health Centre Clerk, who also works in the Hamas-run Ministry of Health arrived in a hospital with a gunshot wound on 7 October and turned off his cell phone.[127]

Seven other individuals with ties to both UNRWA and Hamas played various roles in the attacks. Several were involved in logistical preparations, including Ali Isa Hamuda Matar, Shadi Mohammad Jamal Razak Darabiah, and Mohammad Tawfiq Ibrahim El Ghafari, who received texts directing them to report to meeting points and organize logistics prior to the infiltration. Abd Al-Rahman Atiya Salem Abu Awad monitored the unfolding events via radio to coordinate operatives. Others, such as Amer Yaser Nazmi Sada, Mahmoud Abdallah Darwish, and Mohammad Nasser Al-Din Mohammad Abu Naama, were identified in Israeli territory during or after the attacks, with Sada's UNRWA diploma found in an abandoned terrorist vehicle.[128]

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Chapter 1.3 | The Victims

FIGURE 1 | NUMBER OF VICTIMS DURING THE ATTACKS ON 7 OCTOBER

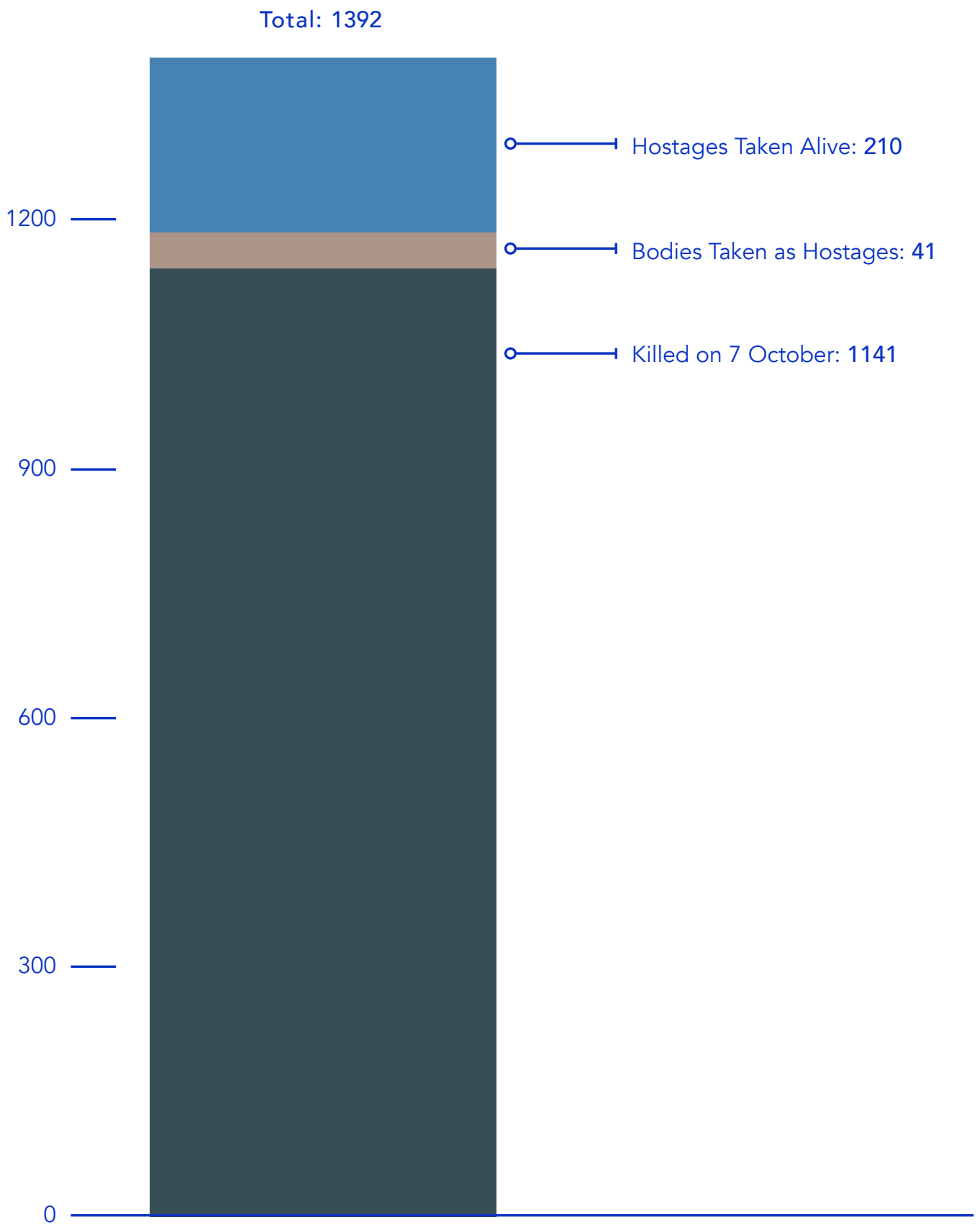

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FIGURE 2 | NATIONALITY OF VICTIMS DURING THE 7 OCTOBER ATTACK

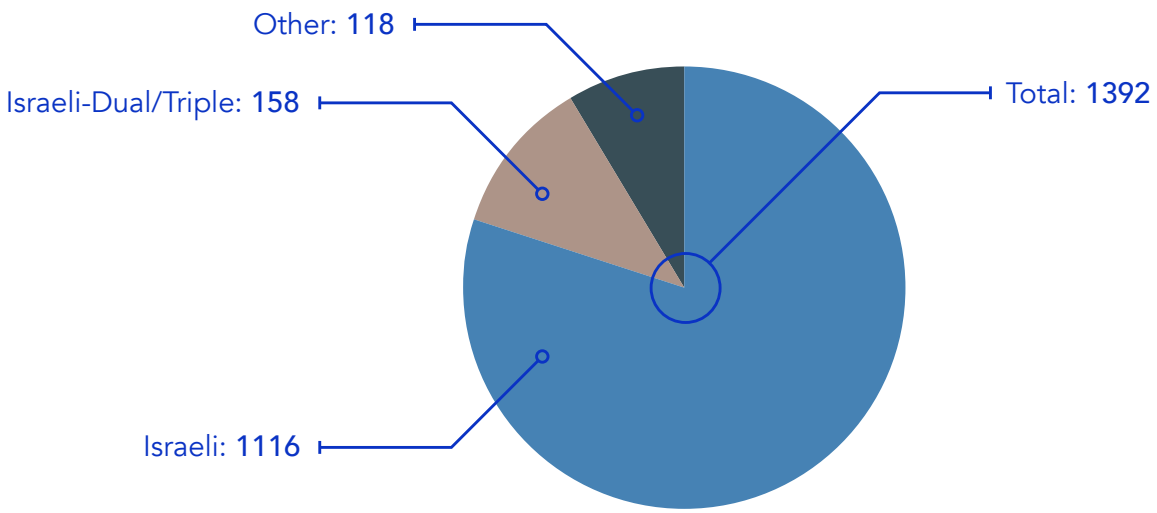
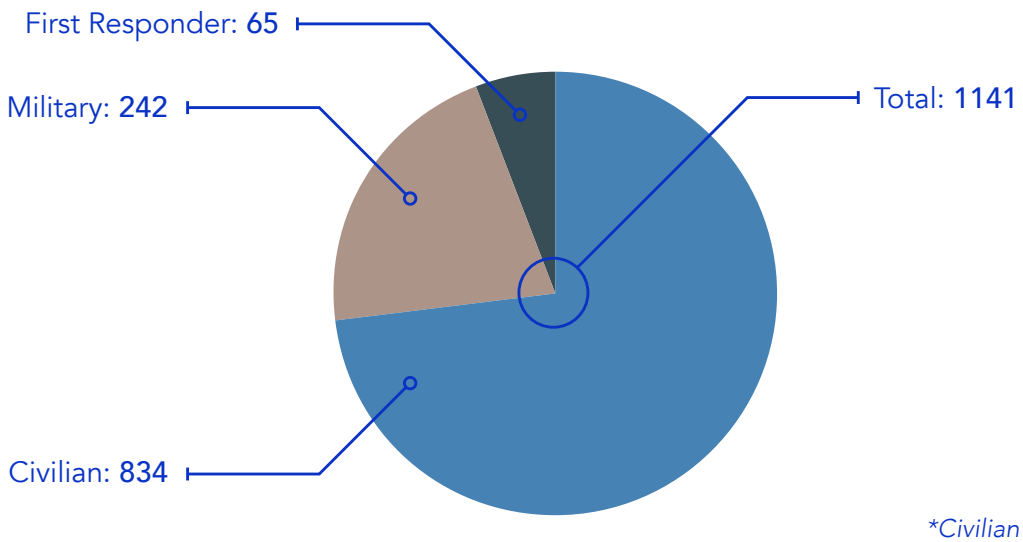
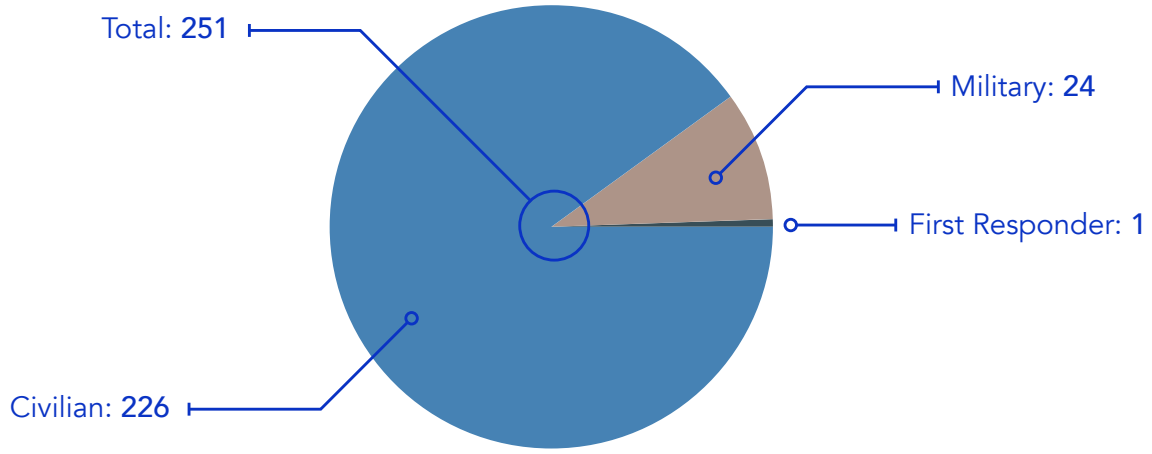


FIGURE 3[A] | VICTIMS BY CLASSIFICATION (KILLED)



**Civilian includes civil guards*

FIGURE 3[B] | VICTIMS BY CLASSIFICATION (HOSTAGES)



**Civilian includes civil guards*

Figure 4 | The Global Reach of 7 October attacks

THERE WERE 1,116 ISRAELIS WHO DIED ON 7 OCTOBER WHO HELD ONLY ISRAELI NATIONALITY. 276 INDIVIDUALS WERE DUAL AND TRIPLE ISRAELI NATIONALS, AND SINGLE NATIONALS FROM AROUND THE WORLD.

Citizenship of victims (A-L)

American	British	Czech	German
Argentinian	Cambodian	Danish	Greek
Australian	Canadian	Dutch	Hungary
Azerbaijani	Chilean	Eritrean	Irish
Belarussian	Chinese	Filipino	Israeli
Brazilian	Colombian	French	Italian

Citizenship of victims (M-Z)

Mexican	Peruvian	South African	Tanzanian
Moldovan	Polish	Spanish	Thai
Nepalese	Portuguese	Sri Lankan	Ukrainian
New Zealand	Russian	Sudanese	Uruguayan
Palestinian	Serbian	Tajik	Uzbek

Figure 5 | Nationality of Hostages taken on 7 October

ISRAELI HOSTAGES INCLUDE DUAL NATIONALS

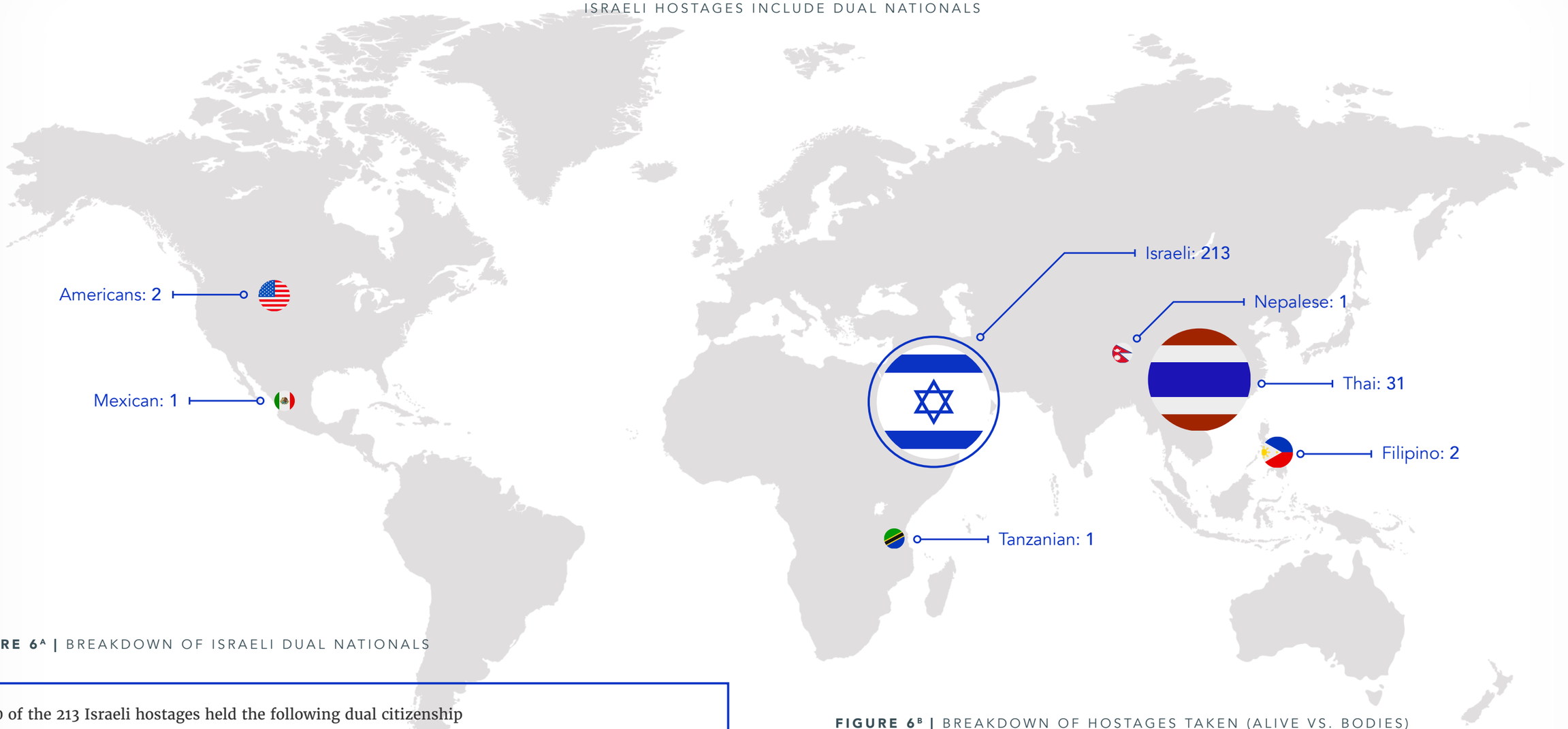


FIGURE 6A | BREAKDOWN OF ISRAELI DUAL NATIONALS

60 of the 213 Israeli hostages held the following dual citizenship

American	11	Dutch	1	Polish	5
Argentinian	18	French	2	Russian	4
Brazilian	1	German	8	Serbian	1
British	2	Hungary	1	South African	1
Colombian	1	Irish	1	Uruguayan	1
Danish	1	Mexican	1	Total	60

*ONE ISRAELI-AMERICAN ALSO HAS CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP
*ONE MEXICAN ALSO HAS FRENCH CITIZENSHIP

FIGURE 6B | BREAKDOWN OF HOSTAGES TAKEN (ALIVE VS. BODIES)

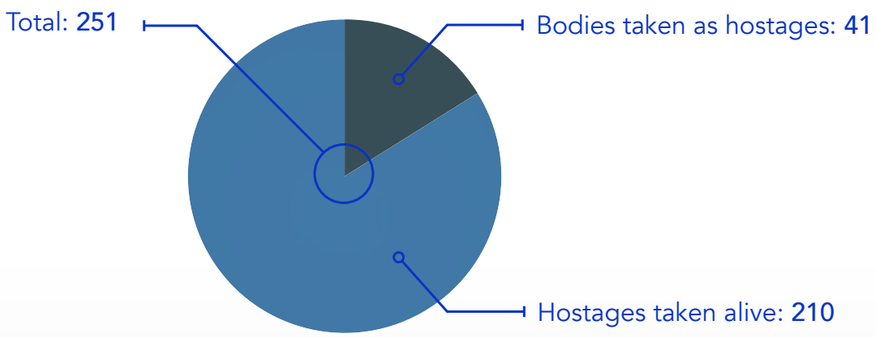
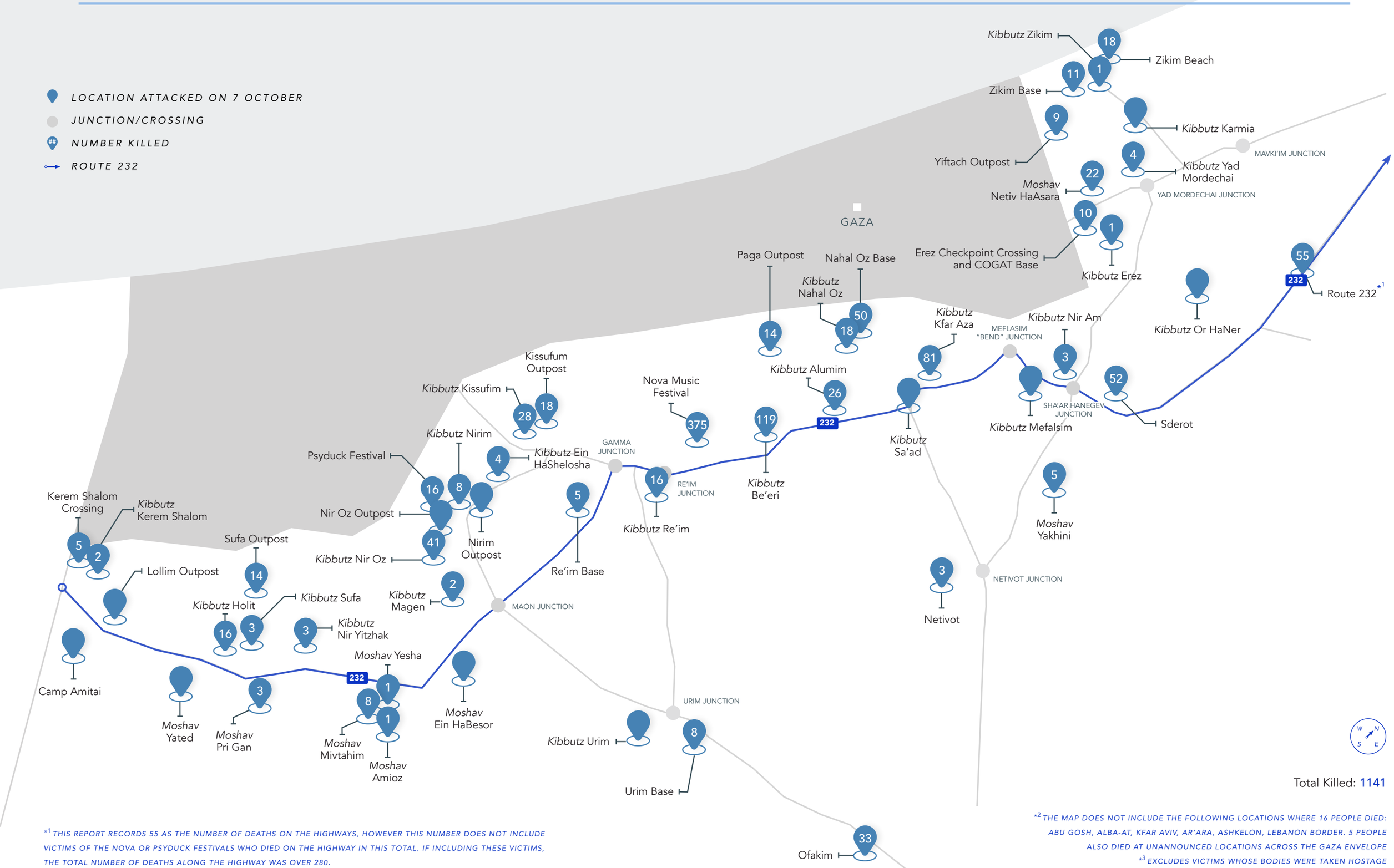


Figure 7 | Gaza envelope with the location of those killed on 7 October



Total Killed: 1141

*1 THIS REPORT RECORDS 55 AS THE NUMBER OF DEATHS ON THE HIGHWAYS, HOWEVER THIS NUMBER DOES NOT INCLUDE VICTIMS OF THE NOVA OR PSYDUCK FESTIVALS WHO DIED ON THE HIGHWAY IN THIS TOTAL. IF INCLUDING THESE VICTIMS, THE TOTAL NUMBER OF DEATHS ALONG THE HIGHWAY WAS OVER 280.

*2 THE MAP DOES NOT INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS WHERE 16 PEOPLE DIED: ABU GOSH, ALBA-AT, KFAR AVIV, AR'ARA, ASHKELON, LEBANON BORDER. 5 PEOPLE ALSO DIED AT UNANNOUNCED LOCATIONS ACROSS THE GAZA ENVELOPE

*3 EXCLUDES VICTIMS WHOSE BODIES WERE TAKEN HOSTAGE

FIGURE 8[A] | PEOPLE KILLED ON 7 OCTOBER BY GENDER AND AGE

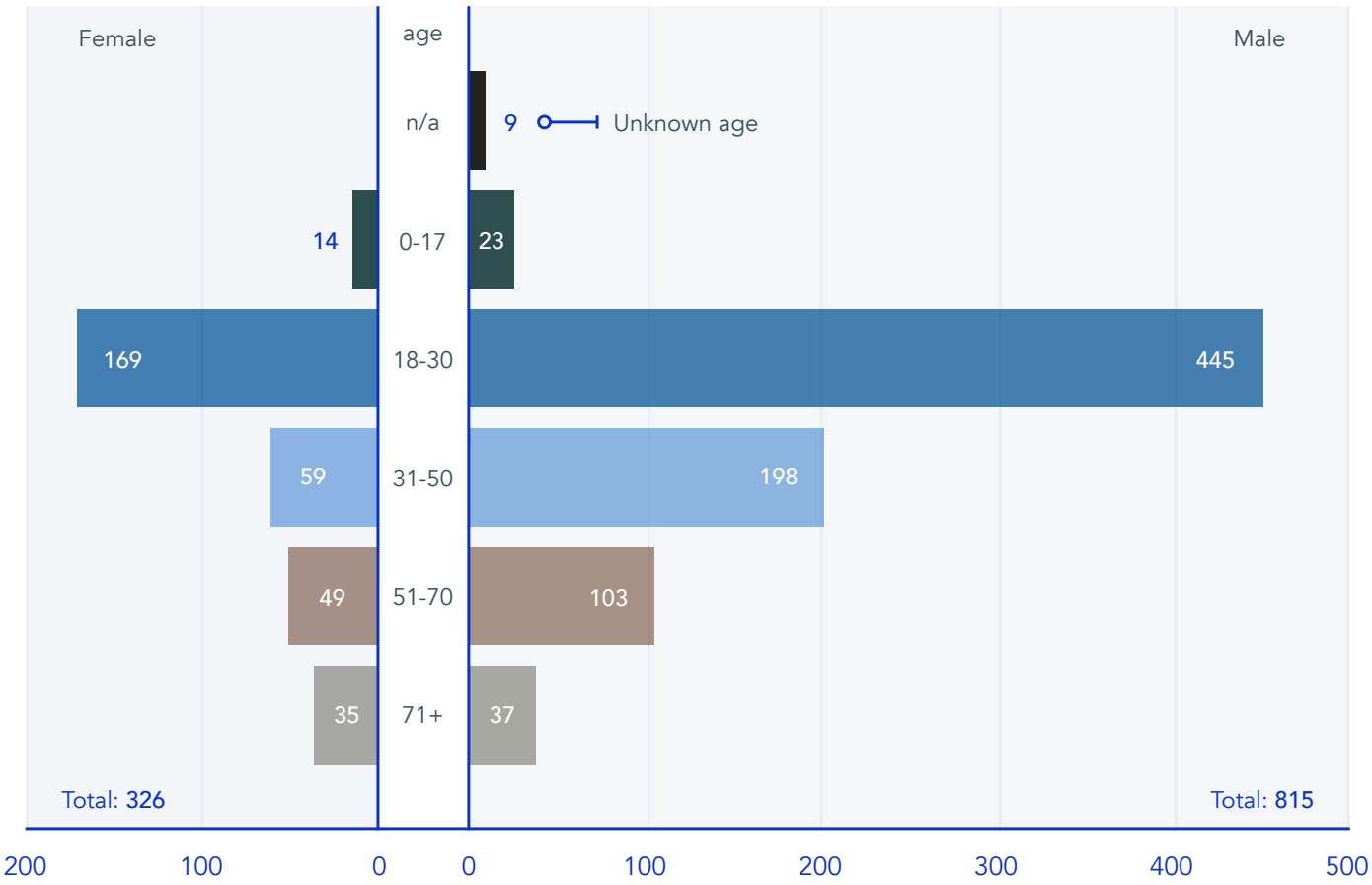


FIGURE 8[B] | HOSTAGES TAKEN BY GENDER AND AGE (DEAD AND ALIVE)

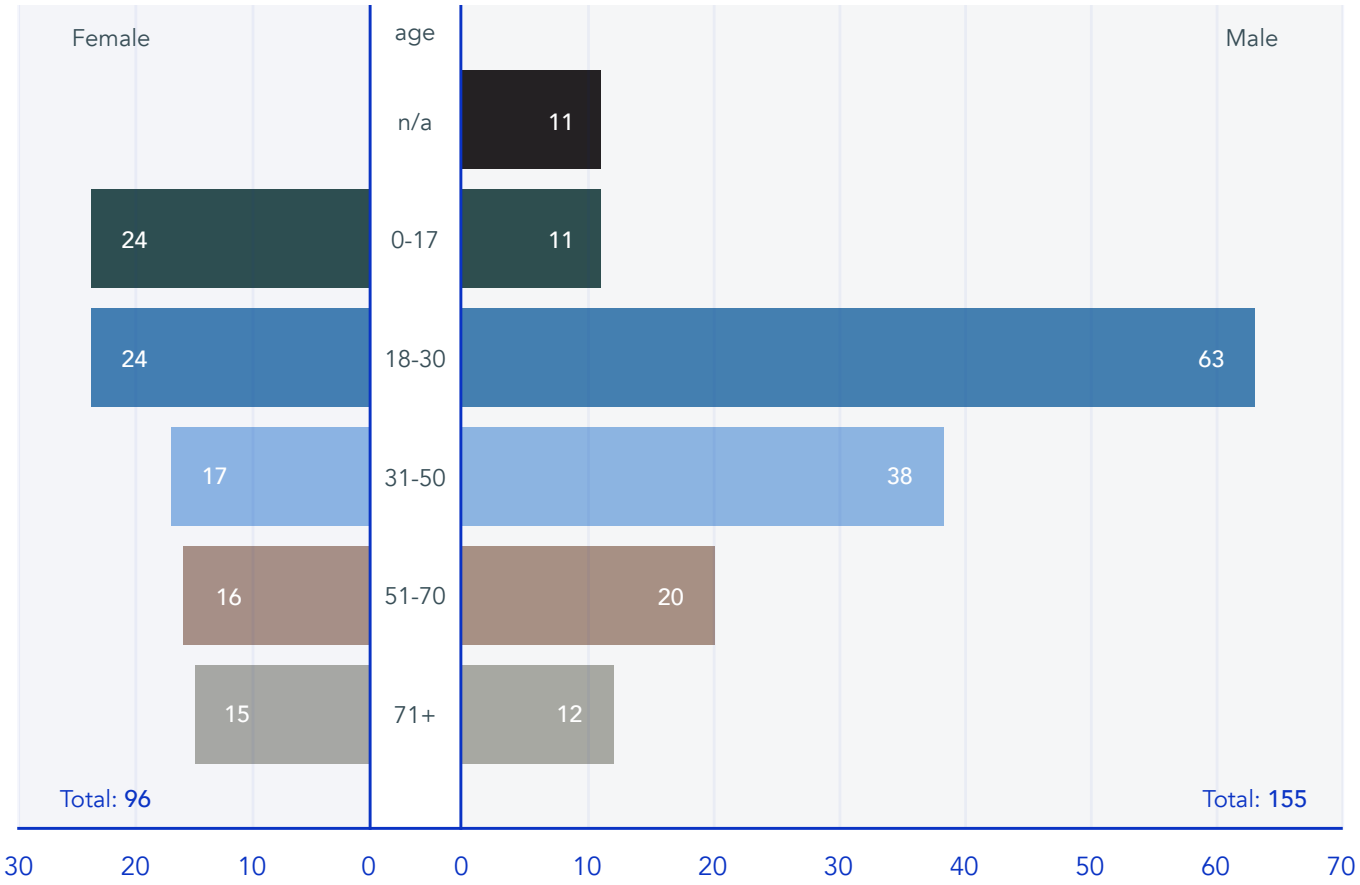
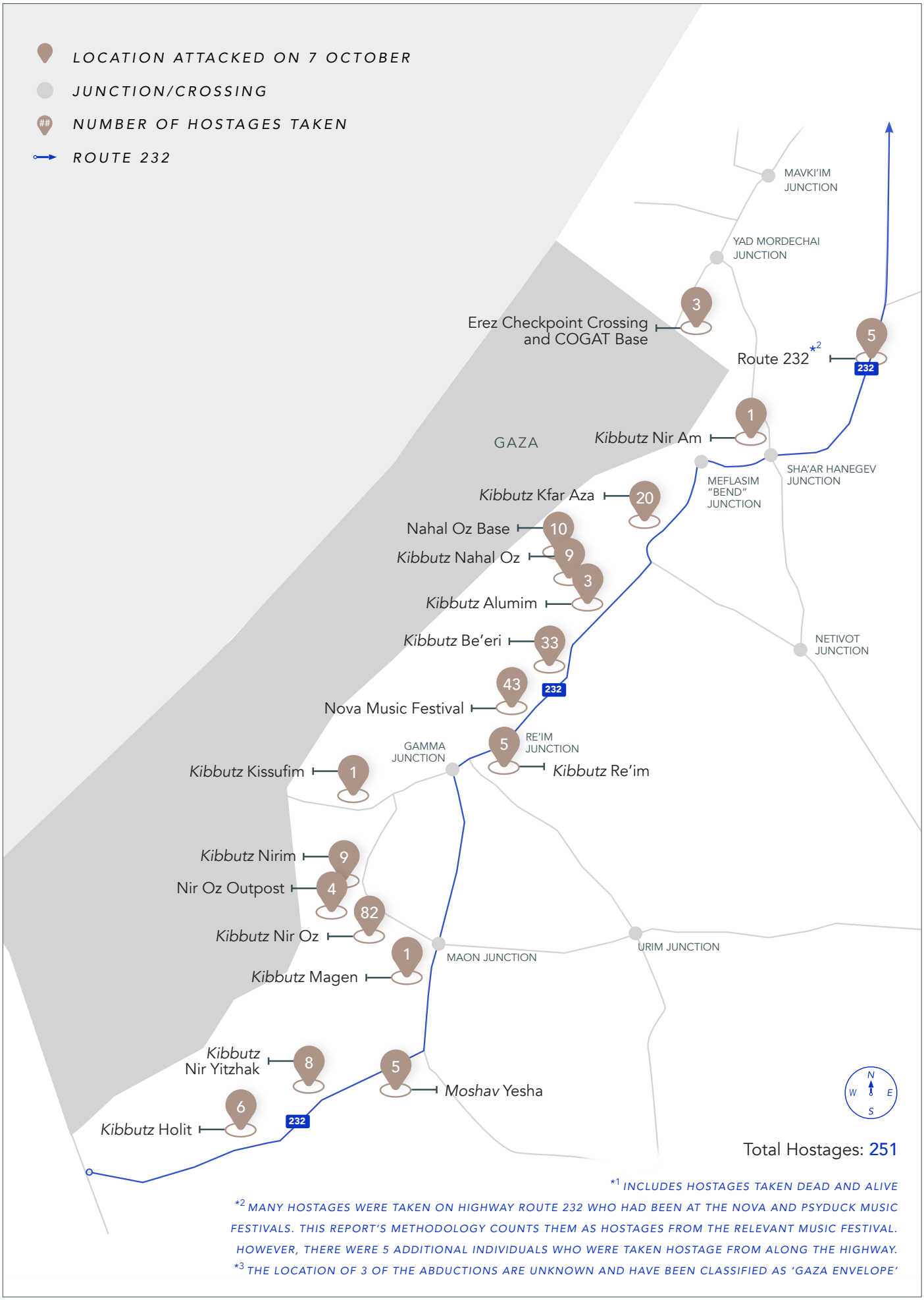


FIGURE 9 | GAZA ENVELOPE WITH THE LOCATION OF HOSTAGES TAKEN ON 7 OCTOBER

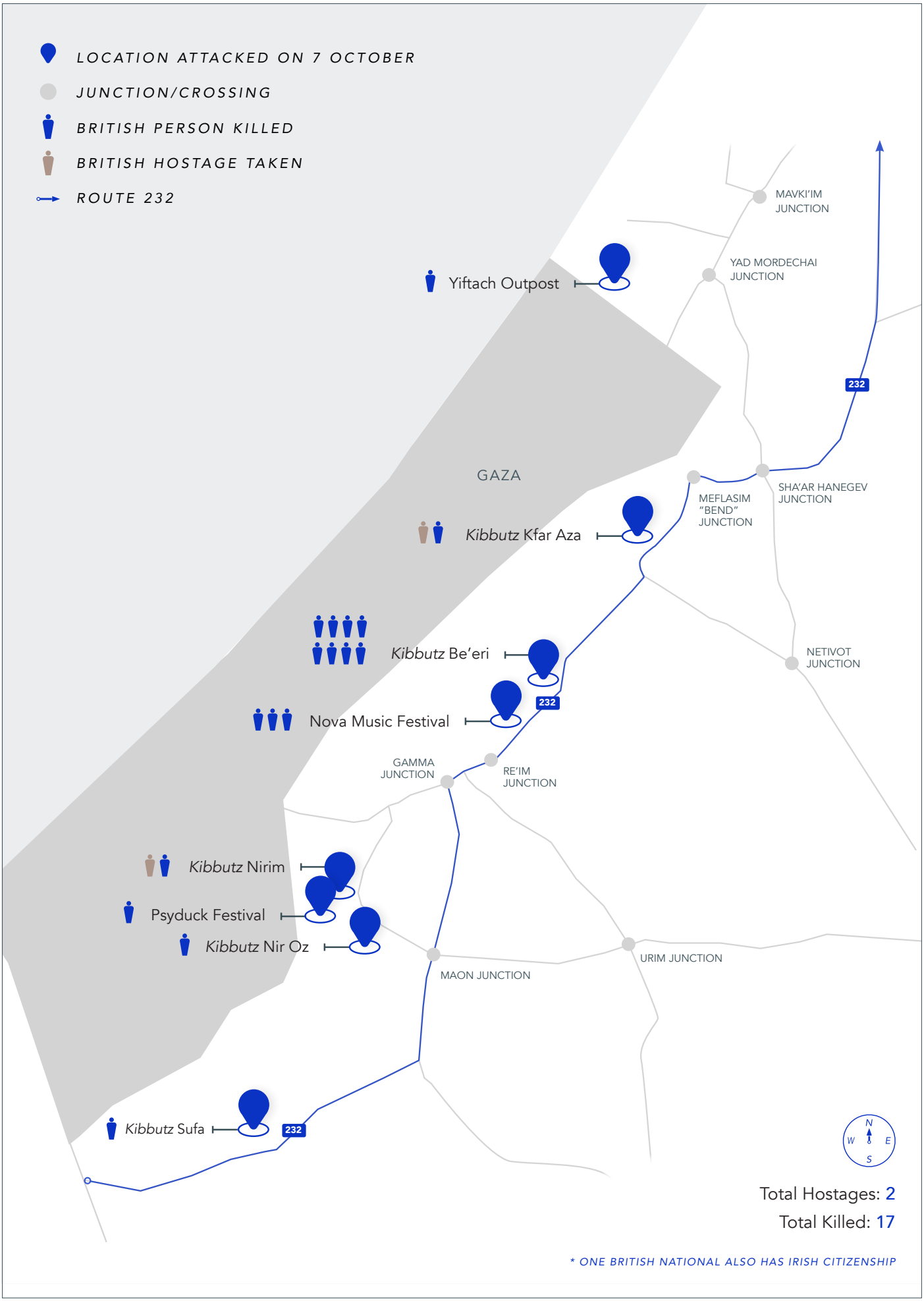


*1 INCLUDES HOSTAGES TAKEN DEAD AND ALIVE

*2 MANY HOSTAGES WERE TAKEN ON HIGHWAY ROUTE 232 WHO HAD BEEN AT THE NOVA AND PSYDUCK MUSIC FESTIVALS. THIS REPORT'S METHODOLOGY COUNTS THEM AS HOSTAGES FROM THE RELEVANT MUSIC FESTIVAL. HOWEVER, THERE WERE 5 ADDITIONAL INDIVIDUALS WHO WERE TAKEN HOSTAGE FROM ALONG THE HIGHWAY.

*3 THE LOCATION OF 3 OF THE ABDUCTIONS ARE UNKNOWN AND HAVE BEEN CLASSIFIED AS 'GAZA ENVELOPE'

FIGURE 10 | GAZA ENVELOPE WITH THE LOCATION OF BRITISH VICTIMS ON 7 OCTOBER



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Location	Killed	Hostages
Abu Gosh	1	
Alba-at (Bedouin Village)	6	
Amioz	1	
Ar'ara (Bedouin Village)	1	
Ashkelon	4	
COGAT Base/Erez Checkpoint	10	3
Gaza Envelope	8	3
Highway	55	5
Kerem Shalom Crossing	5	
Kfar Aviv	1	
Kibbutz Alumim	26	3
Kibbutz Be'eri	119	33
Kibbutz Ein HaShlosha	4	
Kibbutz Erez	1	
Kibbutz Holit	16	6
Kibbutz Kerem Shalom	2	
Kibbutz Kfar Aza	81	20
Kibbutz Kissufim	28	1
Kibbutz Nahal Oz	18	9
Kibbutz Nir Oz	41	82
Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak	3	8
Kibbutz Nirim	8	9
Kibbutz Re'im	16	5
Kibbutz Sufa	3	
Kibbutz Zikim	1	
Kissufim Outpost	18	

Location	Killed	Hostages
Lebanon Border	4	
Magen	2	1
Moshav Mivtahim	8	
Moshav Pri Gan	3	
Moshav Yakhini	5	
Moshav Yesha	1	5
Nahal Oz Base	50	10
Netiv HaAsara	22	
Netivot	3	
Kibbutz Nir Am	3	1
Nir Oz Outpost		4
Nova	375	43
Ofakim	33	
Paga Outpost	14	
Psyduck	16	
Re'im Base	5	
Sderot	52	
Sufa Outpost	14	
Urim Base	8	
Yad Mordechai		
Yesha Outpost	4	
Yiftach outpost	9	
Yad Mordechai	4	
Zikim Base	11	
Zikim Beach	18	
Total	**1141**	**251**

Chapter 2 | The Previous Cycles of Conflict and Ceasefire

Since Hamas assumed complete political and military control over the Gaza Strip in 2007, its relationship with the State of Israel has been a cycle of conflict and carefully negotiated ceasefires, through third party mediators. On 7 October 2023, a ceasefire was in effect.

The first years of the new millennium were marked by substantial violence as the failure of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process at the Camp David final status negotiations in July 2000, prompted the Second Palestinian Intifada 2000-05. With the aim of 'reducing the day-to-day friction' between Israelis and Palestinians in the territory, and further increasing the security of Israel-proper, Israel unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip in August 2005.[1]

Hamas violently took over the Gaza Strip in 2007 (after its victory in the 2006 Palestinian elections) and began launching rockets at Southern Israel, which increased steadily in rate, range and lethality.[2] Hamas' history and actions prompted Israel and Egypt to jointly seal their respective border crossings, in Rafah (Egypt) and Kerem Shalom and Erez (Israel), restricting goods from entering the Gaza Strip that could be used by Hamas to build its forces, launch rockets and attacks. Unintendedly, this prompted Hamas to increase its arms smuggling through tunnels under the Egyptian-Gazan border.[3]

The Gaza Wars

The First Gaza War (Operation Cast Lead for the Israelis and the Battle of al-Furqan for Hamas) began on 27 December 2008, and ended on 18 January 2009, with an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire that included calls for opening border crossings and restricting arms smuggling.

Militant activity in Gaza increased after the Arab Spring (Arab Uprisings), which began in 2011, due to the influx of advanced weapons and the rise of jihadist groups unaffiliated with Hamas, exploiting gaps in its control and escalating attacks on Israel. The reality of a tit-for-tat escalation developed as Israel increasingly employed preventive airstrikes against rocket-launching positions and assassinated Jihadist leaders in the Strip. Since March 2011, the Iron Dome aerial defence system had been deployed to the Israeli South and began intercepting rockets mainly around the cities of Be'er Sheba, Ashdod, and Ashkelon.[4] Hamas' capabilities had expanded; its smuggled-arsenal now included Iranian made Fajr-3 and Fajr-5 rockets, with a range of 75km, reaching Tel Aviv. Their homemade capabilities had equally improved, as they boasted a M-75 rocket, with a range of 75-80km.[5]

The 2012 Gaza War (named Operation Pillar of Defence by Israel) began on 14 November, following intensified rocket fire and the targeted killing of the second in command of Hamas' Al-Qassam Brigades. On 21 November, a ceasefire mediated by Egypt began, which expanded fishing zones, improved border crossings, and committed both sides to de-escalation.

Following the 2013 military coup in Egypt, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's regime destroyed smuggling tunnels that were a major revenue source for Hamas. This compounded the financial hardship in Gaza, exacerbated by the temporary lessening of Iranian funding (due to Hamas' lack of support for Assad in the 2012 Syrian Civil War) and inadequate support from Turkey and Qatar as the region's focus moved to the chaos and threat posed by the Islamic state in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).[6] Economic pressures in Gaza surged, with soaring unemployment and unpaid salaries for thousands of Hamas personnel. Hamas sought a unity government with the Palestinian Authority to alleviate its financial crisis.[7] However, the Hamas kidnapping and murder of 3 Israeli teenagers in June 2014, collapsed the government. The situation quickly deteriorated with increased rocket fire reaching as far as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and IAF retaliatory strikes, as well as riots in Jerusalem's Arab neighbourhoods following a retaliatory murder of an Arab teenager by Jewish extremists. A Hamas commando raid attempted to infiltrate Israel from the sea on 8 July and war was declared.

The Third Gaza War (Operation Protective Edge for the Israelis and the Battle of the Withered Grain for Hamas)

was a seven-week conflict, that ended on 26 August 2014, with another Egyptian-mediated ceasefire. In it, Israel agreed to ease the blockade on Gaza by opening border crossings for goods and humanitarian aid, extend the fishing limit to 6 nautical miles, and reduce the Gaza-Israel buffer zone. Qatar began to deliver millions of dollars in cash to Hamas in Gaza as part of a policy of an economic "carrot" in exchange for quiet. Both sides agreed to participate in indirect talks to address broader issues, such as the potential reconstruction of Gaza's airport and seaport, and an exchange of Palestinian prisoners for Israeli soldiers' remains being held hostage by Hamas.[8]

The March of Return and Further Limited Conflicts

Relative quiet after 2014 was broken in 2018, when the 'Great March of Return' protests at the border fence with Israel involved crowds of up to 50,000 Palestinians each Friday.[9] The campaign launched on 30 March 2018, originated from the grassroots as an independent peaceful initiative but as it gained momentum Hamas endorsed them (as did PIJ and other militant groups) and assumed control of their organisation.[10] Some participants peacefully protested, but with Hamas involvement and directives many engaged in violent activities including launching incendiary devices and grenades, as well as attempts to breach the border fence. Hamas leader, Yahya Sinwar, urged the demonstrators to 'tear down the wall and tear out their [Israelis'] hearts.'[11] Despite an informal ceasefire declared at the end of May 2018, the demonstrations and low-level conflict continued for a total of 20 months, ending in December 2019.[12]

In 2021, another round of conflict between Israel and Hamas began amid escalating tensions in Jerusalem, sparked by protests over the potential eviction of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah and violent clashes on the Temple Mount during Ramadan.[13] The violence intensified as Hamas and PIJ launched a massive rocket barrage targeting major Israeli cities, including Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Israel responded with extensive airstrikes, targeting Hamas' military infrastructure, including its underground tunnel network, rocket production facilities, and command centres. The 11-day conflict ended with an Egyptian-mediated ceasefire supported by Qatar and the UN. The agreement included a 'mutual and unconditional' cessation of hostilities, and Egyptian monitoring delegations deployed to both Tel Aviv and Gaza.[14] It also included the issuance of thousands of permits for Gazans to work in Israel. Afterwards, more civilian projects were promoted to help improve the quality of life in Gaza. The Israeli assumption was that these were means to prevent escalation and create for Hamas a disincentive for war.[15]

In August 2022, a brief, yet intense conflict occurred between Israel and PIJ. When intelligence revealed imminent attacks on Israeli civilians by PIJ, an operation was initiated by Israel with preemptive strikes targeting PIJ leaders. Over 3 days, the conflict escalated with the PIJ launching approximately 1,100 rockets towards Israel, prompting extensive use of Israel's Iron Dome defence system, which achieved a 97% interception rate.[16] Despite the violence, Hamas, the dominant political force in Gaza, notably refrained from engaging, which analysts at the time concluded was due to divisions within Palestinian factions. PIJ suffered substantial losses to its infrastructure and capabilities. The conflict ended with an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire, restoring a fragile status quo.

In May 2023, Israel engaged with PIJ again, following the firing of over 100 rockets by PIJ after the death of one of its senior members, on a hunger strike in an Israeli prison. Retaliatory Israeli airstrikes were met with more rockets, but broader escalation with Hamas was avoided. The operation ended after approximately five days with an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire.[17]

Work Permits from the Gaza Strip

Between 2022 and October 2023, economic activity and the flow of goods and people through crossings between Israel (Kerem Shalom and Erez) and Gaza increased significantly. In 2022, approximately 74,000 truckloads of goods, including construction materials, food, and humanitarian aid, entered Gaza via Israeli-controlled crossings - a marked rise compared to earlier years following the 2007 blockade.[18] Additionally, more than 17,000 Palestinians, primarily labourers, were granted permits to work in Israel, boosting Gaza's economy, with the Erez crossing recording its highest exit figures since the early 2000s. By mid-2023, this upward trend continued; in July alone, over 10,000 truckloads of goods entered Gaza, slightly above the monthly average for the first half of the year, with construction materials making up a significant share. Fuel and gas imports also rose, with industrial diesel volumes exceeding previous years' averages, enhancing power availability in Gaza.[19] Increased Egyptian cooperation through the Rafah crossing further supported goods and personnel movements. By September 2023, approximately 18,000 Gazans held Israeli work permits, injecting $2 million into Gaza's economy daily.[20]

In the weeks preceding 7 October 2023, the resumption of Palestinian border marches posed a growing threat along the border. These protests were marked by violent acts, including the throwing of explosive devices, and the detonation of bombs near the security fence along the border. On 13 September 2023, a bomb detonated prematurely near the fence, killing 5 Palestinians.[21] The resumption of the protests did not have the same public support as in 2018-19, and Hamas was criticised within Gaza for stoking violence.[22] Tensions continued to rise and on 29 September, Qatar, the United Nations and Egypt mediated an agreement between Israeli and Hamas officials to reopen the closed crossing points which Israel had shut due to security concerns. As such, the approximately 18,000 Gazans who held Israeli work permits, were able to return to work.[23] Vying for quiet the Israeli Defence Ministry pledged to increase the number of permits to 20,000, if the security situation permitted.[24] On 4 October, Hazem Qasem, a spokesperson for Hamas told the Guardian, that "the people of Gaza want to live in peace and dignity. Further unrest is possible if our conditions are not met."[25]

Israel on the eve of 7 October

Israel follows the Hebrew Calendar, which is lunisolar, so the Gregorian calendar dates do not correspond exactly. However, 7 October is the Gregorian anniversary of the Yom Kippur War 1973, when Egypt and Syria caught Israel off-guard in a surprise attack. In the days leading up to the 7 October 2023, Israeli national media had been filled with commemorations of the 1973 war and reflections of the trauma the unexpected attack caused.

On 7 October 2023, it was also the Jewish holiday of *Simchat Torah*, which celebrates the conclusion of the annual cycle of public Torah (the Old Testament) readings and the beginning of a new cycle. It typically would be marked by most Jews, even secular. While not all would be in synagogue, multiple generations of families come together in one place to be with one another. On a smaller scale, this is like the gatherings that happen on the Jewish Sabbath (Saturdays), where 18 to 22-year-olds who would be doing their conscripted military service would get a 'weekend pass' to go home.

In 2023, *Simchat Torah* in Israel fell between sunset on 6 October and nightfall on 7 October, which was also a Sabbath. Accordingly, across the Gaza envelope, families gathered in large numbers in their homes.

Similarly, the Nova Music Festival took place that weekend as everyone would have already been off work and schools closed for the festivals.

Military bases were at reduced capacity, as soldiers – including Commanders of the Gaza Division - were granted holiday leave and weekend passes.[26] At some outposts along the border, battalions were at less than 40% strength due to Shabbat and the religious festivals. One senior military officer estimated that about half the 1,500 soldiers in the area were away.[27] For example, Yaron Finkleman, head of the IDF's Southern Command, who had been on base near the Gaza border since Rosh Hashana (Jewish New Year) on 15 September, chose to go away with his family for *Simchat Torah*. The 29 September agreement made via Qatar, Egypt and the UN, which had quietened tensions also encouraged him to do so.[28]

The exact number of Israeli forces in the Gaza envelope on the eve of 7 October is not publicly known. The IDF is conducting an extensive review of the 7 October attacks which will include this figure. It is unlikely to be presented to the public due to the sensitive military content.[29] The IDF's Gaza Division, led by Brig. Gen. Avi Rosenfeld was responsible for the border with Gaza. It consisted of 2 brigades, one in the north looking to the border of northern Gaza and a southern brigade, commanded by Col. Asaf Hamami.

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Chapter 3 | Hamas' Aims and Plans

The 7 October attack by Hamas was meticulously planned over years. The assault was driven by Hamas' commitment to the destruction of the Jewish State, regardless of whether this was a realistic aim. The instructions were to "kill as many people as possible." The improving relationships between Israel and some of its neighbours in the Middle East were viewed as a threat to Hamas' vision and a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. First, there was the signing of the Abraham Accords and then the movement towards normalisation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2023. The 7 October attack was conducted by Hamas with the aim of kickstarting a new wave of Palestinian resistance, asserting itself as the leader of the Palestinian cause and reinstating the topic back to the forefront of the global conversation. To ensure maximum impact in the attack, they attempted to get regional support from Hezbollah, and Iran, employed a long-term strategy of deception and leveraged advanced training and intelligence gathering.

Origins

The exact date of when Hamas began planning the attack is not known, but according to "Palestinian sources close to the Hamas military leadership", the concept is believed to have taken shape before 2014, and preparations started to be made in 2021.[1] In 2014, Yahya Sinwar condemned then-Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh for what he believed to be a mishandling of the 2014 war, and vowed that the next would begin on Israeli territory.[2] An Israeli Defence Ministry memo noted, in 2016, that "Hamas intends to move the next confrontation into Israeli territory" and this would include "hostage-taking and 'occupying an Israeli community (and perhaps even a number of communities)'."[3]

Minutes of 10 secret planning meetings from January 2022- August 2023, of a small group of Hamas political and military leaders, which were found by the IDF in Gaza, and verified by The New York Times (NYT), outline the thinking and planning of the attack.[4] The minutes show that Yahya Sinwar, leader of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, attended all the meetings. In addition, Mohammed Deif, leader of Al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas' military force), can be identified as present at some, albeit referred to by his nom de guerre and nickname. The decision to carry out the attack and its timing, was reportedly centralised around 5 people: Yahya Sinwar, Mohammed Deif, Mohammed Sinwar (Yahya's brother), Rawhi Mushtaha (a founding member of Hamas, also close to Sinwar), and Ayman Nofal, one of Deif's close associates and the former head of Qassam Intelligence, the commander of the Brigades' Central Brigade, and the head of the joint operations room for the resistance.[5] (SEE Chapter 1.2 The Perpetrators)

The minutes from a meeting in June 2022, outline an attack strategy targeting 46 positions manned by the Israeli military division responsible for border security. The plan also included assaults on a significant air base, an intelligence hub in southern Israel, and nearby towns and villages. Leaders noted that overrunning military bases first would facilitate attacks on residential areas, a prediction that was validated on 7 October.[6] These plans were a more streamlined and slightly altered version of a more comprehensive battle strategy that Israel intercepted over a year before the 7 October 2023 attacks. The 40-page undated Hamas blueprint for invading Israel was titled "Jericho Wall" and outlined a battle plan that was followed almost identically on 7 October. It set out that any attack would begin with a rocket barrage, knock out security cameras and machine guns on the border using drones, and then have militants descend into Israel on paragliders, motorcycles, by sea and on foot.[7] Later documents discovered also included intelligence on Israeli military forces in terms of size and location and identified the specific intent to target the Re'im Base (home of the Gaza Division HQ) as this would hinder attempts to coordinate a military response by creating a communications blackout in terms of troop movements.[8]

Rationale and Objectives

Ismail Haniyeh, leader of Hamas in the Gaza Strip 2007-2017, and then Chairman of the Political Bureau, based in Qatar, afterwards, until his death in 2024, said in an interview in 2020, that one of Hamas' principles remained "Palestine from the river to the sea" – the river being the Jordan River and the sea, the Mediterranean, thus a Palestinian State in place of, not alongside, Israel. In 2022, Sinwar warned in a speech to

Israelis that Hamas would one day "march through your walls to uproot your regime."[9]

(In August 2005, the Quartet on the Middle East (the key mediators of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process - United Nations, the United States, the European Union and Russia – first established at the 1991 Madrid Peace conference) outlined three principles for diplomatic recognition of a Palestinian government, as part of a peace process: non-violence, recognition of the state of Israel, and respect for previous peace agreements (including the Oslo Accords). After Hamas won the Palestinian legislative elections in 2006, the Quartet reaffirmed these principles, but Hamas rejected them.[10]

Specifically mentioned in one of the secret planning meeting minutes in May 2023, was that Hamas sought to disrupt the normalisation of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia, that built upon the increasing normalisation between Israel and some of the Arab states - United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Bahrain, and the Kingdom of Morocco, as enshrined in the 2020 Abraham Accords.[11]

Hamas viewed the Palestinian Authority as having failed and been too conciliatory towards Israel; through the 7 October attack, it served to demonstrate an alternative model of leadership to the Palestinian people.

Hamas' purpose is to undermine the foundations of Israel's existence, paving the way for the latter's utter elimination.[12] It knew that military victory was unlikely and therefore the attack sought to trigger a fierce Israeli retaliation, which would isolate Israel internationally and create global outrage. Sinwar stated in a speech in 2018, that "We would rather die as martyrs than die out of oppression and humiliation. We are ready to die, and tens of thousands will die with us," hinting at a willingness to invite fierce retaliation to the Strip in order to fulfil his broader objectives.[13] Further confirming this intended aim, Ghazi Hamad, a member of Hamas' political wing, stated in an interview to the LCBI news station in Lebanon on 24 October 2023 "Will we have to pay a price? Yes, and we are ready to pay it. We are called a nation of martyrs, and we are proud to sacrifice martyrs."[14]

Deception

Hamas went to significant efforts to keep their preparations hidden. Following the 2021 Hamas-Israel limited conflict, Hamas engaged in an elaborate strategy of deception, lulling Israel into believing it sought to maintain a stalemate by ostensibly working to improve conditions for Gaza's civilian population. Israel, in turn, initiated policies aimed at enhancing life in Gaza through civilian projects, economic incentives, and employment opportunities for Gazans in Israel (SEE Chapter 2). The Israeli approach was based on the belief that fostering economic stability and improving quality of life would dissuade Hamas from pursuing further conflict, creating internal pressure against escalation, and eroding its ideological resolve.[15] However, Hamas exploited this dynamic to conceal its long-term preparations for a large-scale attack. Publicly projecting an image of governance and concern for Gaza's population, it did not join in when limited conflicts arose between the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Israel in 2022. However, covertly it continued to pursue its jihadist objective of destroying the State of Israel and killing Jews. As revealed by statements from an arrested perpetrator on 7 October, "The mission was simply to kill…kill every single one you see", "to kill and kidnap the ones we can", and "to cleanse and conquer the *Kibbutz*."[16]

They acknowledged internally in January 2022 – as evidenced in the meeting minutes - the need to avoid "skirmishes" to focus on the "big project". The deception continued throughout the following years. In an April 2022 meeting, Hamas acknowledged the success of passing through Ramadan without a major escalation. Tension on the Temple Mount, around the al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, has often served as a trigger point for conflict and in 2022, there were once again clashes between Israelis and Palestinians. Avoiding conflict helped Hamas to "hide our intentions" and "camouflage the big idea (our big project)" - they spoke about conserving ammunition and carrying out "a large and convincing disguise and deception process." Minutes from a meeting in June note the success of again avoiding a clash with Israeli ultranationalists in May 2022, during the proactive 'Flag March' through the Old City in Jerusalem.[17] Hamas then purposefully did not get involved in the exchanges between Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and Israel in August 2022 and May 2023, an act which was commended at the time.[18]

Allies

Hamas has long recognised the need for allies, but in light of recent regional developments, support from Iran and Hezbollah has been even more critical to Hamas' plans. The Islamic Republic of Iran is one of Hamas' chief financiers and supporters.

In the early 1990s, a delegation from Hamas, led by Mousa Abu Marzouk, engaged in discussions in Tehran with prominent officials, including Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran since 1989. During these talks, Iran committed to providing military and financial support, reportedly amounting to $30 million annually, alongside advanced military training for thousands of Hamas members at Revolutionary Guard facilities in both Iran and Lebanon. Hamas subsequently established an office in Tehran and announced that Iran and Hamas shared an ""identical view in the strategic outlook toward the Palestinian cause in its Islamic dimension."[19] Ties with Iran deepened following the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, which Hamas won. Iran supported Hamas in the First Gaza War in 2008-09, increasing aid and delivering more advanced rockets.[20] The outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, temporarily strained relations between Tehran and Hamas, as they found themselves on opposite sides, resulting in Iran cutting its monthly funding of $23 million in 2012.[21]

From 2017, the relationship between Iran and Hamas was publicly revitalised following meetings between Hamas leaders, including Saleh al Arouri and Supreme Leader Khamenei, where Iran resumed significant financial and military support. Iran became Hamas' largest backer, providing funds, weaponry, and advanced technology, with annual transfers reportedly rising to $70 million and later potentially increasing to $30 million monthly in exchange for intelligence on Israeli missile stockpiles. The bond deepened further after GenerAl-Qassam Soleimani's death in 2020, with Hamas leaders praising his role in strengthening their military capabilities. Iranian officials highlighted their contribution to Hamas' technological advancements, including rocket manufacturing, while Hamas leaders publicly acknowledged Iran's unwavering support.[22]

Captured documents reveal that since 2014, Iran has transferred millions of dollars to Hamas, $154 million between 2014 and 2020, and has had significant influence over the distribution of these funds.[23] In June 2021, Sinwar appealed to Iran for additional funding and training for an additional 12,000 fighters with the promise that he could destroy Israel in 2 years.[24] Another document dated 18 December 2022, revealed the transfer of an "ad hoc budget of $7 million per month throughout the year to prepare for confrontation with Israel" and included discussions of weapons smuggling originating from Yemen and even potentially using Iranian submarines.[25] In 2023, further meetings between Hamas and members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) took place in Lebanon, also attended on several occasions by representatives from Hezbollah, including a meeting on 2 October 2023. Some estimates have placed meetings between Quds force leaders and Hamas in Lebanon as occurring on a bi-weekly basis.[26]

The *New York Times* obtained meeting minutes recurringly reference the leadership's efforts to secure support from Iran and Hezbollah (its terrorist proxy in Lebanon and Syria). Minutes from an August 2023 meeting, reveal that Khalil al-Hayya, deputy to Mr. Sinwar, had discussed the plan in July with senior Iranian commander Mohammed Said Izadi of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. Iran had welcomed the plan and said they also needed time to "prepare the environment." Based in Lebanon, Mr. Izadi played a key role in managing Tehran's relations with Palestinian armed factions. The records also indicate that Mr. al-Hayya planned to present the plan to Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.[27]

Training, Intelligence-Gathering and Tactics

Advanced training programmes and meticulous intelligence gathering was used to achieve Hamas' goal of achieving maximum impact during the 7 October attack. For years, Hamas had been conducting training scenarios and stockpiling weapons to be used in an attack on Israeli territory. Hamas and five other Palestinian factions conducted 4 large-scale military drills under the codename "Strong Pillar," overseen by a centralised "joint operations room" established in 2018. These exercises, held at multiple sites in Gaza, simulated tactics such as hostage-taking, raiding true-to-scale mock ups of Israeli houses and military compounds, breaching Israel's defences, and destroying mock tanks and buildings.[28] The first joint training exercise was publicly announced by Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh as a "strong message and a sign of unity" between Gaza's various armed factions on 29 December 2020. The following year on 26 December the exercises targeted mock Israeli settlements, and in 2022 on 28 December, they focused on building clearance and tank overruns.

The last drill before 7 October 2023, held 25 days before the attack, on 10-12 September, incorporated Toyota trucks, surveillance of Israeli installations on the border, and training to storm a beach using a boat and underwater divers. Hamas did not publicise its training with motorcycles and paragliders as part of the Strong Pillar propaganda footage. Footage of motorcycles breaking through barriers and paragliders landing in a mock *Kibbutz* only surfaced after the 7 October

attack. A training video featuring paragliders, which was recorded before 25 August 2022 and stored under the name "Eagle Squadron," revealed that this tactic had been in development for over a year.[29]

The cornerstone of Hamas' attack was the "blinding plan" aimed at targeting the surveillance security system along the border. The training videos showed plans to shoot the skystar surveillance balloons out of the sky (3 out of 7 were non-operational on 7 October).[30] In addition, documents discovered in the aftermath demonstrated a deep knowledge of how to avoid sentry and surveillance towers, and plans to use UAVs to drop explosives on these surveillance towers, blinding the Israeli military.[31] Further documents also discovered in the aftermath, showed that Hamas had huge knowledge of vulnerability points on armoured vehicles and tanks. Other training videos showed role-playing scenarios featuring captured Israeli soldiers and hostage-taking.[32]

Members of the IDF 414th Combat Intelligence Corps Battalion stationed at Nahal Oz Base reported in June 2023, seeing Hamas operatives conducting training sessions multiple times a day, digging holes near the fence and laying charges along the border. Yael Rotenberg, who served in this unit, testified that she had observed "Palestinians dressed in civilian clothing approach the border fence with maps, examining the ground around it and digging holes" and individuals with binoculars at the fence. Other unit members stated that training included driving and taking over tanks, and preparations for crossing into Israel via tunnels.[33]

A Hamas "hostage manual" also described plans to use hostages as human shields in a protracted standoff with the military, and encouraged the use of "electric shocks" to subdue any resistance.[34] The manual entitled "How to take Captives" included instructions such as "Separate and isolate (women and children/men). Kill the difficult ones and those who pose a threat."[35] The manual also detailed instructions to "bind them [hostages] by their wrists and ankles, collect their identification papers and "kill the problematic."[36] Hostage taking as an intended goal was reaffirmed in a statement by a Hamas official in Beirut on 8 October: "We were shocked by the colossal collapse (of Israel's army). We planned and expected to win; enter the settlements and get what we wanted and take hostages."[37]

In July 2023, a Unit 8200 (Israeli intelligence) analyst raised an alert that Hamas was conducting daily training exercises that matched those outlined in the "Jericho Wall" document, including dry runs of shooting IAF combat helicopters, *Kibbutz* takeovers, and military base attacks.[38] Similar reports were flagged on the evening prior to 7 October, however they fit the pattern

On 12 September Hamas led the "Joint Operations Room" in a fourth annual training exercise named 'Strong Pillar.' They released a 3-minute propaganda video on their social media which included training and the storming of mock borders and Israeli villages. Source: Middle East Media Research Institute

A still from a training video released by the Palestinian "Joint Operation Room" in Gaza, which shows terrorists taking hostage those who are dressed like Israeli soldiers. On the building to the right in Hebrew is written "we will release all our prisoners." Source: Middle East Media Research Institute

of annual 'Strong Pillar' training exercises which had begun in 2020. Hamas' strategy of non-escalation in recent years had created a successful deception.[39]

Hamas used a combination of intelligence sources to gather information on the communities to maximise the outcome of their attack. Cheap surveillance drones and open-source satellite information had provided Hamas with intelligence relating to the layout of both the border communities and military locations. This was supported by further intelligence gathered by Gazan day labourers who entered Israel to work and through the monitoring of real estate and social media postings of those who lived in the border communities.[40]

Maps found on the bodies of dead terrorists in the aftermath of the attack, such as in *Kibbutz* Sa'ad, marked key locations such as "schools" and "youth centres" and the distance and time from areas of Gaza to the intended target. Other documents "revealed there were dedicated squads for each *Kibbutz*, town and city, with detailed instructions regarding the responsibilities of each squad and their weapons. For the *Kibbutzim*, Hamas knew the structure of each *Kibbutz*, its size and number of residents, as well as where the houses and other buildings in the *Kibbutz* were located. Regarding each building, there were instructions on the use of the facilities - for example, in the document for *Kibbutz* Sa'ad, the *Kibbutz* dining room and bomb shelters could be used to hold hostages. The operational plan details included the exact road and routes to be used, as well as the attack formation and types of vehicles."[41]

Similar maps and tactical plans were found in *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz (codenamed Operation 402) which detailed the estimated travel time from Gaza to the *Kibbutz*, aerial photographs of the surrounding farmland and operational orders which instructed how and where to gather hostages, methods for maximising casualties and capturing footage, and intent to target the communications system.[42] Maps were also found on attackers at Nahal Oz Base, which indicated the locations of the command centre, the generators and the men's and women's barracks.[43]

In *Kibbutz* Nir Oz captured maps and aerial photographs labelled key population centres, the home of the *Kibbutz Ravshatz*, the "Red Alert" rocket radar detection system and included operational plans on

how various assault teams would divide up the attack on the *Kibbutz* and attack via different entrances.[44] In *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza, a bag on one of the dead terrorists was found which contained an aerial photo of the *Kibbutz*, a detailed map of the *Kibbutz*, including where the *Ravshatz* lived and the location of the armoury.

Another 4-page document in Arabic, marked "top secret" and dated 15 June 2023, was found which detailed a plan to infiltrate *Kibbutz* Mefalsim, and take residents hostage, using two 5-person teams, led by a commander. They were to execute the operation on "Hour S, Day Y." The document included maps and aerial photos of the *Kibbutz*, noting its 1,000 civilians were guarded by a volunteer security team. It warned Israeli troops could arrive "within 3 to 5 minutes." The plan involved breaching the security fence with artillery cover and capturing hostages for use in negotiations.[45]

Maps were also found on the bodies of attackers in Ofakim, which had marked "places with crowds, synagogues and kindergartens."[46]

Some documents stated a purposeful aim to seize Highway 232 and block key intersections as a means of preventing quick responses to the attacked locations and provide opportunities to ambush incoming soldiers.[47] Handcuffs and gas cannisters, along with instructions to set homes alight as a means of forcing residents out of saferooms, were also found on the bodies of deceased terrorists.[48] Other documents found included codewords for operators in the field and Arabic to Hebrew phrasebooks with phrases such as "Come; Go; Drop the weapon; Raise your hands and spread your legs; Remove your pants; Do not talk; Where are the weapons? Do not look back; How do you use this weapon? Where is the road? You are wounded; I will kill you; Fast; Women here, men there, children here; Who speaks Arabic?"[49]

Finally, other recovered documents suggest Hamas anticipated strong resistance from Israeli forces stationed along the border. One sheet featured photographs of 8 types of Israeli armoured personnel carriers, with brief Arabic notes on optimal attack points and recommended explosives for disabling them. Another document detailed supposedly "weak points" in the Israeli Merkava battle tank, advising attackers to target it from 50 metres using an RPG-7 or similar weapon.[50]

Hamas monitored Israeli leaders, security officers, and communities near the Gaza border for at least 7 years before its 7 October 2023 attack. A document which was seized from 2020 showed Hamas had access to IP addresses and serial numbers of security cameras in the Sha'ar Hanegev area (the intersection of strategic highways Route 232 and 34) and Ashkelon beach areas, including *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza, which was one of the most heavily targeted communities. Another document listed security guards' phone numbers from communities such as *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza, *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz, and *Kibbutz* Mefalsim. Six pages of case files detailed attack plans for specific locations, including *Kibbutz* Be'eri's health clinic and kindergarten, as well as police stations in Ofakim and Sderot, dating back to 2016. Hamas tracked figures like Sdot Negev's Regional Council's Chief Tamir Idan and security officer Rafi Babian (whom Hamas had a photo of), and Sha'ar Hanegev's Ofir Libstein, who was killed in the attack. Former Eshkol leader, Gadi Yarkoni, revealed his previous home was marked for attack, noting the attackers had not known that he had moved.[51]

Hamas combined its intelligence gathering with an intelligence deception plan "using handheld radios, land-wire networks in the tunnels and other comms that we couldn't listen to, while using codes on the so-called open networks, which they knew we were listening to."[52]

A detailed map of Kibbutz Kfar Aza found on the body of an attacker.
Source: Terrogence Archive

A map showing the location of *Kibbutzim* Kfar Aza, Nahal Oz, Sa'ad and Mefalsim, which was found on the body of an attacker.
Source: Terrogence Archive

Unfulfilled Plans

Hamas completed its attack almost entirely as outlined in the "Jericho Wall" blueprint, however other documents revealed a spate of unfulfilled ambitions. For example, maps found on terrorists included the cities of Ashkelon and Kiryat Gat (20 miles inland), with plans to attack the maximum security Shikma prison detailing blowing up the main gate using explosives and then attacking the prison with anti-armour missiles with the aim of inciting prisoners to carry out attacks on guards.[53] It is believed that they planned to free prisoners but failed to do so after the unit who was intended to attack the prison never reached it and instead went towards Sderot because of a combination of navigational issues, checkpoints on Highway 4 and then later in the day IAF airstrikes.[54]

Maps found on terrorists who attacked *Kibbutz* Urim and the Urim military outpost also indicated plans to reach the West Bank and increase outreach to the Hamas branches operating there.[55] This was probably more aspirational that practical but is indicative of the scale of ambition and shows that the intent behind the assault was as much about taking a stand against the Palestinian Authority in terms of claiming to represent the Palestinian cause as it was about attacking Israel.

Large quantities of food including "dry food such as rice and lentils, pitta bread, shelf-stable milk and more" were also found on the bodies of terrorists indicating plans for stay-behind "sleeper squads" and a continued infiltration presence beyond 7 October.[56] The scale of weapons recovered by the National Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit also suggests unfulfilled plans for more larger attacks, with 10,000 weapons recovered by 16 October.[57] These weapons included those that originated from Russia, North Korea and Iran and included explosives specifically designed to breach walls, trapping devices, knives, anti-aircraft missiles and weapons which had been manually upgraded to be more destructive.[58] The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) has argued that these weapons and food are a clear indication of an intent to maintain a defensive position within Israel, as per their original planning documents, but that "the chaotic massacre that unfolded diverted efforts to prepare for a deliberate defence", a massacre carried out in large parts by the later waves of militants and civilians who breached the border.[59]

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Chapter 4 | Hamas' Weapons and Equipment

When thousands of Hamas terrorists and other armed groups invaded Israel on 7 October, they carried with them a large arsenal of weaponry to use in their attacks. The weapons used ranged from long-range rockets to assault rifles and improvised explosive devices. Most were of Russian design and imported from Iran, North Korea, and other countries, but many weapons were manufactured in Gaza itself.

Some of the weapons recovered inside Israel after the attack, including RPGs, modified TC-6 Anti-Tank Mines, grenades, garden-hose IEDs, Claymore-like charges, TNT (explosive bricks) and SA7 (anti-air) missiles. Source: Terrogence Archive

Rocket Attacks

The 7 October attacks began with a rocket bombardment of unprecedented size, aimed in the direction of civilian targets in the Otef Azza (Gaza envelope) and elsewhere in Israel, including the cities of Ashkelon, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The nearly 4,000 rockets and mortars fired on the Saturday, followed by further barrages on the 8 and 9 October, killed 18 people, 17 of whom were civilians. (SEE Chapter 6.10)

The most common projectiles were relatively short-range unguided rockets of the "Qassam" and "Quds" type, fired in multiple barrages from Gaza starting just after dawn on 7 October. (Qassam and Quds rockets are essentially the same – "Quds" is simply the name that the Palestinian Islamic Jihad uses for the rockets fired by its "Al-Quds Brigade".) Locally-made, Qassam rockets come in 4 sizes, ranging "from the 2-foot, 7-inch Qassam-1, which can travel no more than 3 miles [5km], to the 8-foot Qassam-4 which can cover up to 10 miles [16km]." These low-tech but effective weapons can be made using lengths of ordinary steel pipe.[1] Their design makes them inherently indiscriminate as they lack precision and accuracy.[2]

Hamas also fired a large number of Russian-designed BM-21 "Grad" 122mm rockets. Although Hamas makes its own version of the rockets, it favours Chinese-made versions of the design that have an extended range of up to 55km.[3] Hamas likely fired its domestically-produced 'M75' version of the larger Iranian Fajr-5 missile which can carry a 178kg warhead 75km.[4]

Hamas also has newer long-range rockets. These include the 100km range Syrian-made 302mm "Khaybar" rocket (based on the Chinese WS-1) supplied in large numbers to Hezbollah over two decades – which Hamas has proclaimed it could manufacture itself,[5] and A-120 missiles which have a range of 120km[6] or the even longer range SH-85, also known as Ayyash 250 which has a range of 220km, used for the first time in 2021.[7] Estimates say that that 60-70% of these projectiles in Gaza are produced within Gaza.[8] Hamas forces also fired hundreds of Katyusha-style 107mm unguided rockets from multi-launch rocket systems at the communities and army bases around Gaza, together with 120mm mortar rounds, many of which landed on and around Route 232 throughout the day.[9]

RPGs inside Israel after the attack. Source: Terrogence Archive

Drones

During the 7 October attacks Hamas' Al-Qassam Brigades broadcast footage of its successful drone attacks against IDF observation towers, communication and surveillance systems and vehicles, saying that 35 of its drones targeted Israeli positions.[10] Hamas is known to use a variety of drone types, including 3D printed Gaza-made "Zuwari" drones (an explosives-laden remotely piloted drone) and off-the-shelf, Chinese-made quadcopter drones.[11] Hamas drones were also used to gather intelligence and map targets in advance of the 7 October attacks.

Portable missiles

IDF tanks stationed near the border that first reacted to the invading forces were hit with anti-tank missiles in the form of hand-held RPGs.[12] They included the "Al-Yasin 105", a Gazan-manufactured copy of the Russian PG-7VR anti-tank projectile[13] which has a tandem, shaped-charge warhead "specifically designed to defeat reactive-armour systems like those used on Israel's Merkava Mark VI main battle tanks."[14] They are normally fired from standard 40mm RPG-7 launch tubes, but a Hamas video from 7 October shows a PG-7VR warhead also being dropped from a drone onto the turret of an IDF tank and piercing its armour.[15] Hamas may also have Russian-made PG-7VRs sourced from Syria as Bashir Al-Assad's army was supplied with large numbers of the weapons by President Putin.[16]

Hamas propaganda videos broadcast in the 3 years before the 7 October attacks show Qassam Brigades forces equipped with a variety of other advanced anti-tank weapons. These include the Russian Kornet laser-guided anti-tank guided missile (first used by Hamas in 2011 in an attack on a school bus) and Iranian copies of the Kornet, Konkurs and Fagot missiles. The North Korean Bulsae-2 anti-tank missile – a reverse engineered version of the Fagot – appeared in Hamas

photographs in 2014.[17] It is also in the arsenal of Al-Nasser Salah Al-Deen Brigades, the military wing of the "Popular Resistance Committees" splinter group in Gaza, which took part on 7 October. The Qassam Brigades have produced several types of anti-tank projectile weapons in their workshops, including RPG-7 copies and relatively simple wire-guided missiles.

Hamas has a variety of shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles (known as MANPADs) including the Russian designed SA-7. Ten of the latter were captured or recovered from the battlefield on 7 October.[18] Three helicopters, including a Sikorsky CH 53 'Yasur' heavy transport helicopter, sustained damage on 7 October when they were fired upon by the armed attackers. All had to make emergency landings, and one down in *Kibbutz* Be'eri was destroyed.[19] It is unclear whether they were shot down with surface to air missiles or RPGs or both.

As is clear from videos taken on 7 October and the patterns of destruction in the various places that Hamas attacked, the terrorists carried very large numbers of Rocket Propelled Grenades or RPGs based on the Russian RPG-7 anti-tank unguided rocket system. For the latter, they had not just regular anti-tank warheads and the advanced tandem-charge anti-tank warheads as discussed above, but also anti-personnel fragmentation warheads and 'thermobaric' warheads. "Half" of the "many hundreds" of RPGs captured by the IDF on 7 October were of the thermobaric variety.[20]

Pioneered as battlefield weapons by the Soviet military, thermobaric weapons, sometimes called 'enhanced blast weapons' 'vacuum bombs' or 'fuel-air explosives' ignite an explosive vapour. This gives them powerful blast effects, so that even a single RPG round is capable of collapsing a building.[21]

Small Arms: Firearms, Grenades and Bombs

The first wave of attackers used explosive changes to breach the border fence, including strip-and-frame charge explosive.[22] Cutting charges and shaped explosives were used to sever metal beams and posts along the fence. Attackers also carried Bangalore torpedoes (used for breaching barbed wire fences), domed frag charges (anti-personnel and anti-armour charges) and explosive bricks of plastic explosives

A CH-53 "Yasur" helicopter from the Israeli Air Force, which was forced to make an emergency landing in Be'eri, and was then struck by an anti-tank guided missile. Source: Terrogence Archive

Bangalore Torpedo-type breaching frames recovered in Israel after the attack. Source: Palestine Resistance Telegram

that can be attached to a target. The strip-and-frame charge explosive was one of the many weapons Hamas specially created for the attack and were also designed to be affixed to home saferoom doors in Israeli border communities.[23]

The Hamas *Nukhba* commandos and regular Qassam Brigades troops who initiated the 7 October invasion from Gaza mainly used 7.62mm AK-47 assault rifles, though Hamas propaganda has often depicted its troops carrying US-designed 5.56mm M16s and M4s. Thousands of the latter, which are used by the IDF, have been smuggled into both Gaza and the West Bank and some were seen in the hands of non-Hamas militants on 7 October.

The preferred use of AK-47 rifles by Hamas *Nukhba* and regular troops reflected the discipline and careful planning of the invasion; – it meant that only one type of ammunition needed to be brought to the battlefield, and that fighters could hear the difference between their own gunfire and that of the Israelis. Police officers in the attacked cities of Sderot and Ofakim noted the proficiency of the Hamas attackers with the AK-47.[24]

Hamas troops also carried "PK" 7.62mm light machine guns (mostly Iranian copies of the Chinese Type 80, itself a copy of the Russian PKM), 60mm mortars and Iranian-made Sayyad .50 calibre heavy sniper rifle, semi-automatic 7.62 mm calibre sniper rifles and M2 Browning HMG automatic 0.5-inch machine guns (most often mounted on a tripod welded to a truck bed).[25]

The attackers made liberal use of hand-grenades and bombs of various kinds, including fragmentation grenades, incendiary grenades, stun grenades and thermobaric grenades, throwing them into houses and cars as well as the hatches of military vehicles.[26] There is footage of Hamas gunmen repeatedly throwing grenades into rocket shelters packed with civilians. (SEE Chapter 5.7 and 5.8). There are many cases on 7 October of Hamas grenades failing to explode.

Thermobaric explosives also have a strong incendiary effect, akin to that of a flamethrower, and can cause fires that burn at temperatures as high as 3,000 degrees. Hamas attackers used thermobaric hand grenades as well as thermobaric RPGs – the canisters used are the same and were made in Gaza's factories.[27] A thermobaric rocket-propelled grenade was fired into the "death ambulance" at the Nova Festival, killing 17 civilians hiding inside. It took many weeks to identify the bodies incinerated as a result.

On multiple occasions on 7 October, Hamas operatives fired thermobaric RPGs or threw thermobaric hand grenades into houses at *Kibbutzim* such as Be'eri and Kfar Aza, as evidenced by the complete incineration of those houses – in comparison to houses hit by ordinary high explosive or anti-tank grenades, or set on fire using petrol or propane. The use of thermobaric grenades against civilian vehicles on 7 October was clear from the number of cars that burned at extremely high temperature.

Hamas troops and other Gazan attackers used propane and gasoline found in attacked communities as weapons, igniting fires with these accelerants to drive

Thermobaric IEDs recovered inside Israel. They have a strong incendiary effect, akin to that of a flamethrower, and can cause fires that burn at temperatures as high as 3,000 degrees. Source: Terrogence Archive

people out of their saferooms, kill them in their safe rooms, or to damage dead bodies.

Many Hamas attackers also carried large, bladed weapons including machetes and hatchets. This was apparently less for combat purposes than to enable post-mortem dismemberments. Many of the corpses, where the attackers had free rein for several hours, had legs, arms and in some cases heads removed.[28]

It was noted on 7 October that Hamas attackers, especially the *Nukhba* commandos who dominated the first wave of attacks, brought with them very large amounts of ammunition. Their vehicles were full of RPG rockets, rifle magazines, boxes of rifle ammunition, hand-grenades, claymore mines, magnetic mines, and other explosives. The pockets of their fighting vests, sometimes worn over body armour, were filled with spare magazines. The pairs of Hamas attackers who came by motorcycle and also those who arrived in motorised paragliders, carried backpack-style sacks full of RPG rockets.[29]

Where Hamas Weapons Come From

Most of Hamas' rockets and certain other weapons, such as RPG launchers, claymore mines, magnetic anti-tank mines were manufactured in factories in Gaza. The infantry weapons used in the 7 October attacks were all imported.

Imported Weaponry

The majority of the infantry weapons used by Hamas on 7 October were manufactured in Iran, China, Russia, North Korea and Bulgaria.[30] The last was a prime source of RPG warheads, though these also came from North Korea.[31] Most of the Hamas military's Kalashnikov-design assault rifles (predominantly the AK-47) came originally from China and North Korea, with older models made in Russia. Whether most were purchased in the region's many weapons markets or supplied by state actors such as Iran is unclear, though the former have been flooded with Kalashnikov-style rifles and other weapons since the outbreak of the Syrian and Yemeni civil wars.

The Iranian-made weapons in Hamas' armoury include heavy .50 calibre sniper rifles, sophisticated explosives, anti-tank guided missiles, machine guns, and larger mortars. Many of these Iranian weapons are brought from Libya and Sudan and then brought by smuggling networks through Sudan and Egypt.[32]

Hamas had sufficient numbers of imported infantry weapons for its 35,000 strong "Qassam Brigades" army to be equipped with them in a uniform manner, rather than with a mixture of weapons of different type and calibre, as common in guerrilla and militia forces in the Middle East and North Africa.

Almost all of these weapons were brought into the territory despite tight restrictions, imposed by both Egypt and Israel, in place since Hamas' takeover of the strip in 2007. The majority are believed to have come into the territory from Egypt, either through the large smuggling tunnels discovered after 7 October, or in vehicles through the Egyptian-run crossing.[33] The assessment to date is that most of Hamas's supply of imported weapons and components entered overland, in trucks and cars passing through border crossings. Some Hamas weapons were stolen from Israel's own arsenals. Grenades found on the body of a Hamas raider at *Kibbutz* Re'im on 7 October were Israeli military issue. There had been reports that thousands of bullets and hundreds of guns and grenades had been stolen from Israeli bases.[34]

Gaza-Made Weapons

Hamas technicians are known to have been brought to Iran for training. General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, the leader of the IRGC Aerospace Force, declared in 2021, that "Instead of giving them a fish or teaching them to catch a fish, we taught our allies and friends how to make a hook, and they are now in possession of missile capabilities and technologies."[35] These Gaza-made weapons include a launcher capable of firing 14 rockets simultaneously.

As well as many above-ground factories and workshops that date back to the beginning of the century, the Qassam Brigades weapon-making industry includes underground facilities in the Hamas tunnel system.[36]

To make relatively advanced weapons such as long-range rockets and anti-tank mines, "Hamas attempts constantly to smuggle into the Gaza Strip industrial raw materials, chemicals and electronics for its rockets industry and other military purposes through border crossings in cooperation with Palestinian and Israeli merchants."[37]

Materials for the manufacture of weapons in Gaza factories and workshops are dual use and therefore are included in aid and trade that enters Gaza. For example, lengths of ordinary 40mm steel pipe can be

and used to make the reloadable launchers for RPGs, while the rocket warheads are usually imported.[38] Some of the explosives that Hamas uses to make warheads for its weapons come from unexploded IDF munitions.[39]

Hamas Vehicles and "Technicals"

The majority of Hamas *Nukhba* commandos and regular Qassam Brigades troops crossed the border and drove to targeted communities in white Toyota pick-up trucks and on motorcycles. At Sderot and a few other places they also arrived in Israeli cars stolen or hijacked that morning. Advance teams of Hamas commandos arrived at some targets in powered two-man paragliders. At Zikim, north of the Gaza strip they came by sea in rigid inflatable boats.

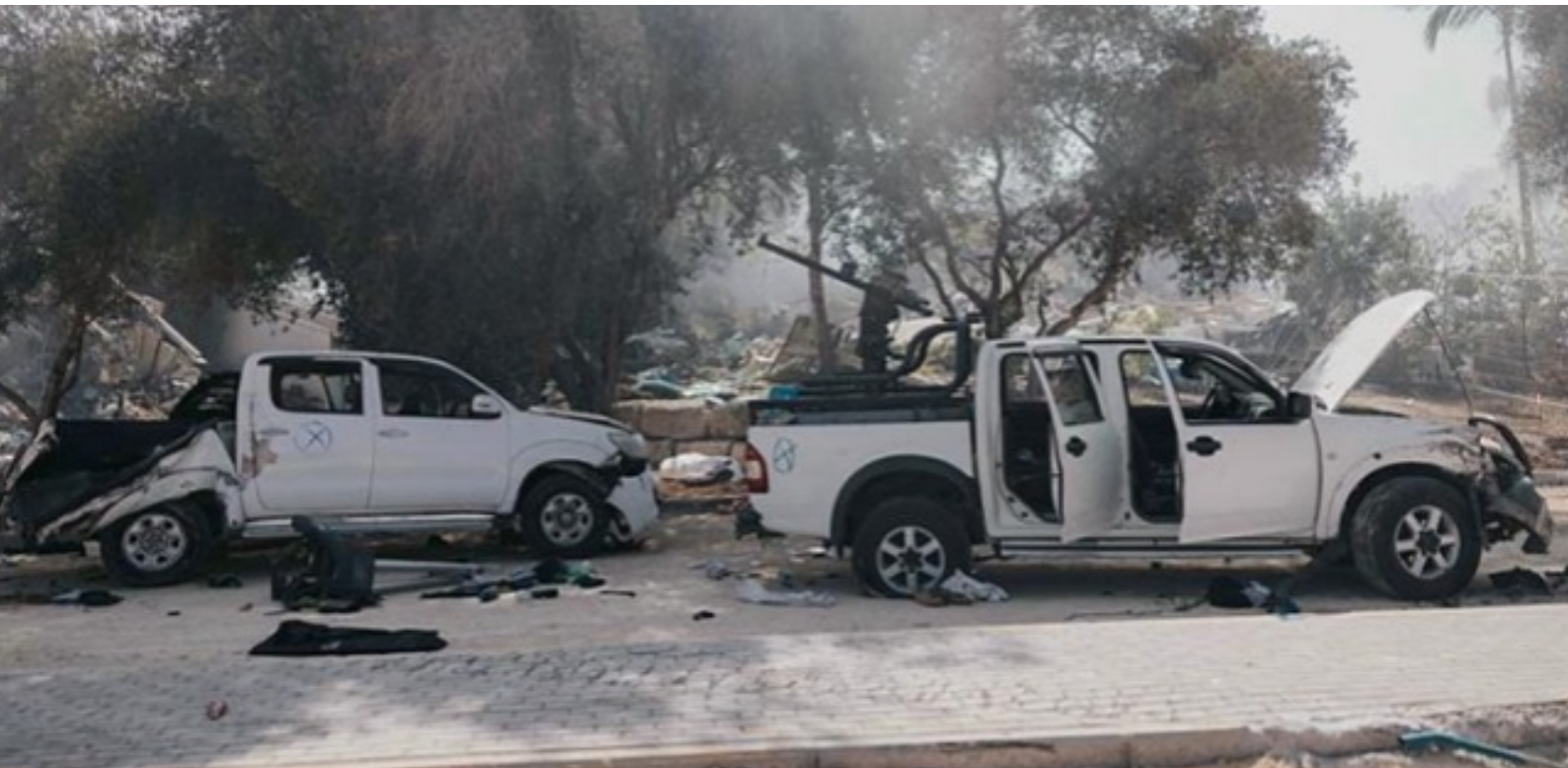
A small number of Hamas vehicles used in the 7 October attack were "technicals" – pickup trucks mounted with heavier weapons. One such vehicle that attacked Sderot had a KPM 14.5mm anti-aircraft machine gun on its flatbed. These weapons have been part of the Hamas arsenal since at least 2008, some smuggled from Egypt, others seized from the Palestinian Authority (PA) after takeover of Gaza. Another Hamas pickup truck that took part in the attack on Sderot had an RPK machine gun on the roof of its cab. The IDF captured four other "technicals" on 7 October that were mounted with DShK "Dushka" .50 calibre anti-aircraft machine guns.[40]

White pickup trucks used by the terrorists to invade Israel with mounted machine guns in the trunks. Source: Terrogence Archive

The thousands of Gazan civilians, who followed Hamas troops through the border breaches and joined in the attacks on nearby communities, came in every kind of vehicle: in pick-up trucks, in private cars, on all-terrain vehicles, motorcycles, on bicycles – especially the teenage and pre-teenage boys who joined in the looting of Be'eri and other *Kibbutzim* – and on foot. Many returned to Gaza in stolen vehicles, including golf buggies and tractors.

Non-Hamas Attackers

Most of the civilian attackers who formed the second or third wave of attacks on border villages, the Nova Festival site and army outposts did not carry firearms – though a small minority of them were armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles. Some of the civilian attackers carried bladed weapons and used them in kidnappings. They also used improvised weapons, such as the attempted beheading of a Thai worker with a garden hoe.[41]



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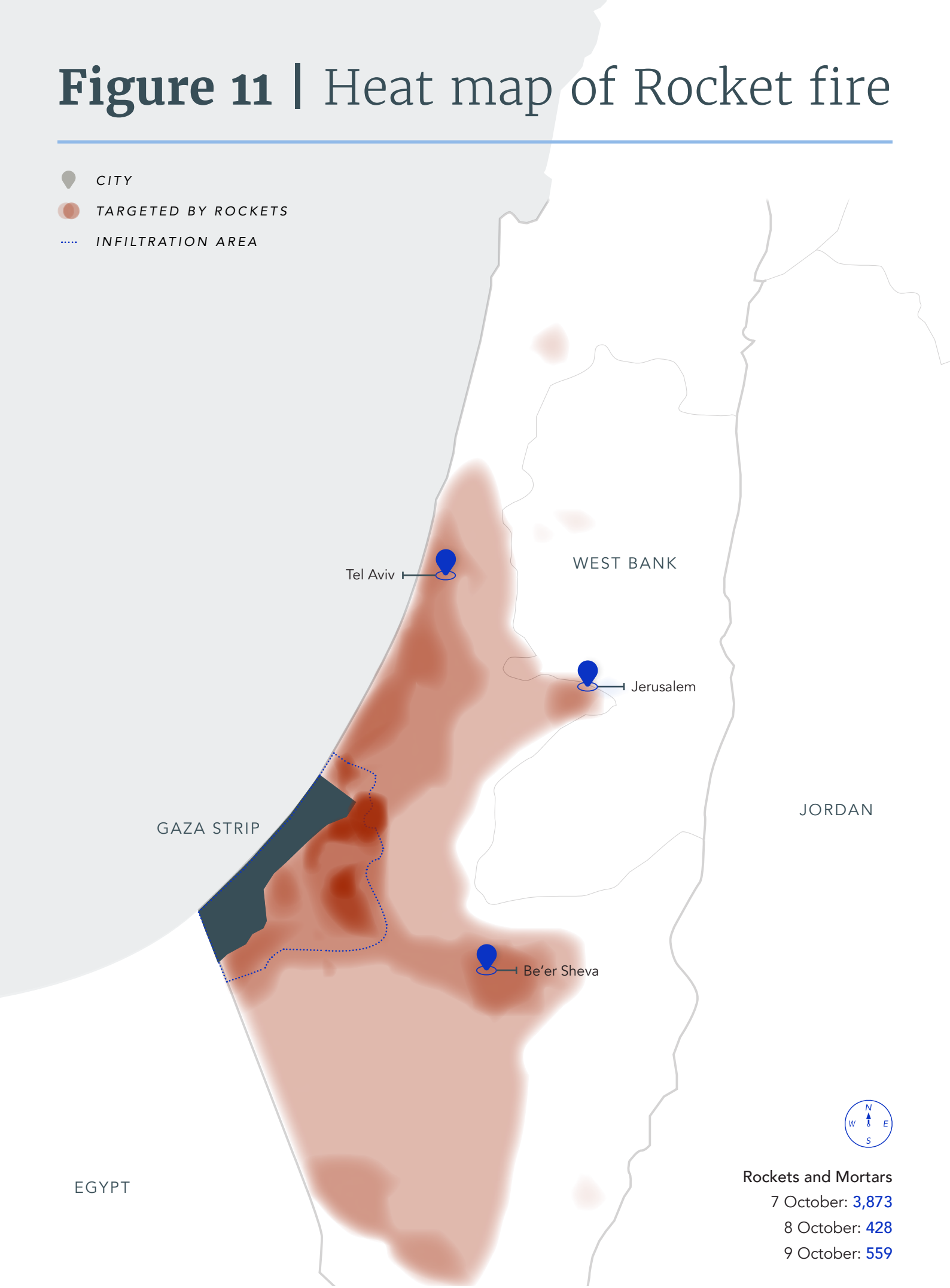
Chapter 5.1 | Rocket Barrages

At 06:29 on 7 October, *Tseva Adom* "Red Alert" rocket sirens sounded across the entire Gaza envelope region, as Hamas and other militant groups began an indiscriminate rocket and mortar barrage that would continue with minimal respite throughout the day. On 7 October alone, 3,873 rockets and mortars were fired, followed by a further 428 on 8 October and 559 on 9 October. This triggered 4,298 rocket alarms across 498 Israeli towns, placing approximately 75% of Israel's population – 7.3 million citizens – under direct threat from rocket fire. Due to the inaccuracy of Palestinian militant rocket artillery, this attack also placed a significant proportion of Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the West Bank under threat as well.

Screenshot of Hamas' broadcast on Telegram capturing the first barrage of rockets when it announced the start of 'Al-Aqsa Flood' (the 7 October attack)
Source: Terrogence Archive

Figure 11 | Heat map of Rocket fire



Of the 3,873 rockets and mortars fired on 7 October, the majority were launched from the 'Rajoom' short-range missile system, 114mm calibre, and were fired between 06:30 and 10:30, which coincided with the deadliest period of the ground attacks by Hamas and other groups in Southern Israel.[1] *Moshav* Netiv HaAsara, which borders the Gaza Strip, received more rocket alarms than any other town in Israel with 76 separate alarms.[2]

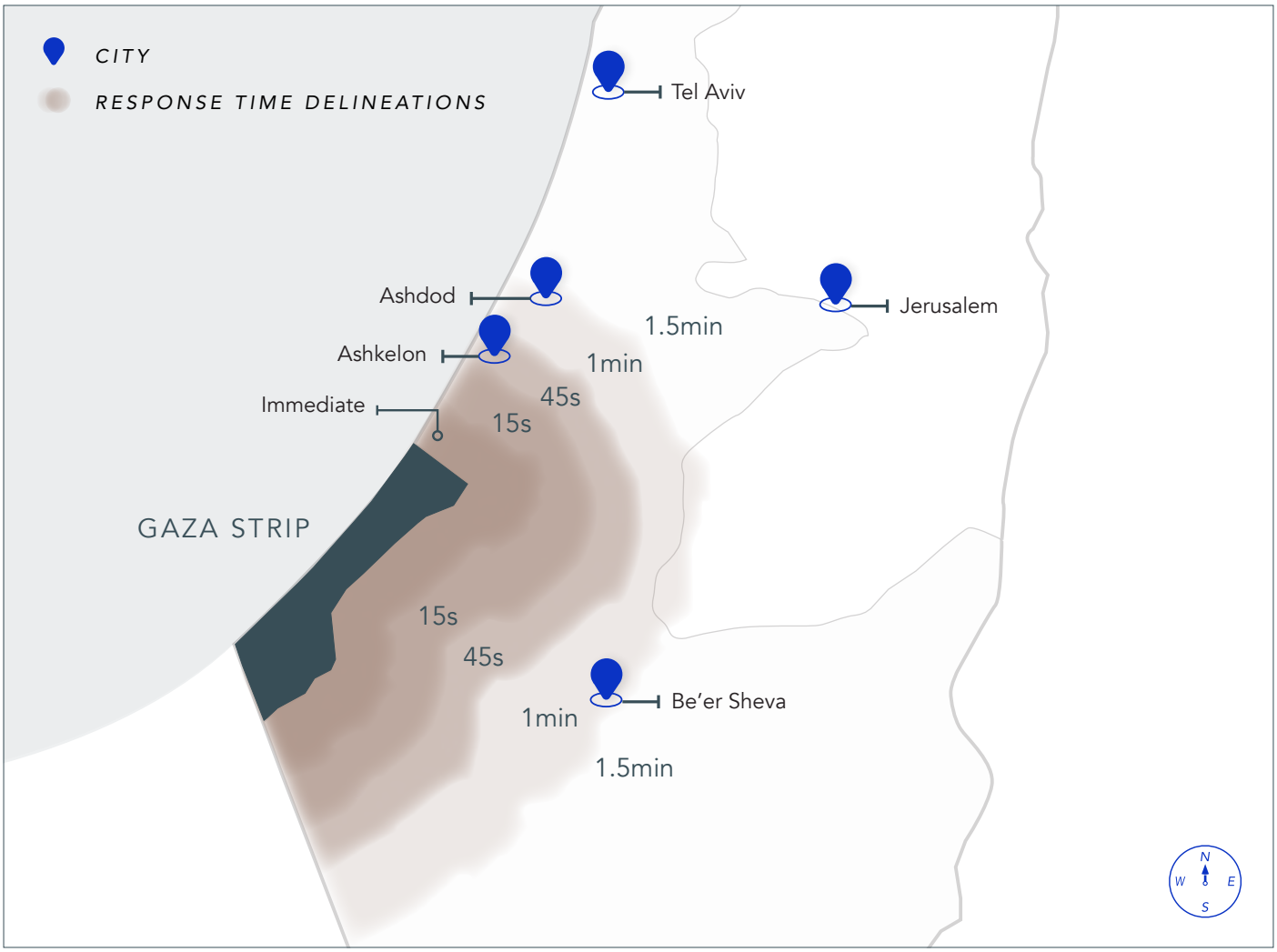
This rocket barrage formed a central part of the terrorists' strategy. It provided cover for the ground infiltration and stopped residents from leaving the envelope immediately, ensuring that the maximum number of civilians were still in the *Kibbutzim* when they were breached.

Upon hearing the rocket alarms, residents of the envelope communities and guests visiting for the religious festivals of *Sukkot* and *Simchat Torah*, ran into their rocket shelters. Due to the proximity of the Gaza Envelope communities to the border, residents only received a 10-15 second warning and in communities like Netiv HaAsara, this warning was even shorter.[3]

Testimony from residents of the border communities frequently referenced the constant sirens and sounds of rocket projectiles and intercepting missiles throughout the day.

Since 1951, it has been the law in Israel that there must be some kind of bomb shelter near or in all private buildings. In 1992, the state published specifications for "safe rooms" (*mamadim*) in family homes: they must have reinforced concrete floors and ceilings, external walls at least 8 inches thick, a metal screen on an airtight window, and a metal door. These shelters are designed solely to protect against rockets, mortars, or aerial bombardment. They are not secure rooms intended to keep intruders out. Instead, they are meant to allow rescuers access in the event of a bombing and, therefore, should not have locks on the doors. Over the course of the day, many residents fought to keep the door handles of their saferooms closed from attackers, and many were killed after being shot through the door or after grenades were thrown inside. Other residents were burnt alive or died from smoke inhalation when terrorists purposely set fire to the houses, knowing that civilians were hiding in their safe rooms.

FIGURE 12 | TIME AVAILABLE TO GET TO A ROCKET SHELTER



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In most communities, these safe rooms function as regular rooms within the house and are not reserved exclusively for sheltering from rockets. As a result, they are not equipped for extended use and lack essential facilities such as toilets, running water or dedicated air ventilation systems. On 7 October, civilians who ran into these shelters did so without anticipating being trapped there for up to 30 hours. Therefore, most did not have food, water, or defensive weapons. When power outages occurred in many communities, these rooms were left without air ventilation, forcing residents to compromise their safety by briefly opening a door or window to avoid suffocation.

Since 1992, all new buildings have been legally required to include internal shelters. However, for pre-existing buildings, only communities located within 12 miles of the Gaza border have received government funding to build shelters in their homes.[4] On 7 October 2023, residents living in pre-1992 buildings in communities like *Kibbutz* Urim and the city Ofakim, which are further from the border, were forced to run to community shelters, often located up to 30 seconds away. In Ofakim, terrorists specifically targeted older neighbourhoods, knowing that residents would be running from their homes to these shelters. Many were killed while attempting to reach or return from them.[5]

Data from the State Comptroller's office in 2020, stated that 2.6 million residents in Israel, 28% of the population, do not have adequate rocket shelters near their place of residence. Whilst those in the south were proportionally better off than the overall national statistic, with 100% protection for those within 2.5 miles of the border, 21% of those living between 5-12 miles from the Gaza border did not have standard protection.[6]

Many of those attempting to leave the Nova Festival or anyone driving or cycling along the highways took cover from rocket fire (and ground attacks) in roadside shelters (*migunitiot*), which can hold up to approximately 30 people standing and do not have doors. These shelters became ambush zones, as individuals were trapped inside unable to prevent terrorists from throwing grenades and shooting into the shelters (See Chapters 5.7 and 5.8).

The rocket barrage also affected communities outside the south of Israel. Whilst 75% were short-range rockets that targeted the south of Israel, which includes the Gaza Envelope communities, cities such as Be'er Sheba, Ashkelon, and Ashdod, and Bedouin townships in the Negev, a further 24% were medium-range rockets that targeted the centre of Israel, including Tel Aviv-Yafo and Jerusalem, and 1% targeted the north of Israel, with the furthest rocket attack location being Hadera.[7]

Alongside trapping residents in their safe rooms, the scale of the rocket barrage meant the Iron Dome anti-missile defence system was unable to intercept all rockets projected to hit civilian areas. As a result, at least 18 individuals in Abu Gosh, Alba-at, *Moshav* Amioz, Ar'ara, Ashkelon, Kfar Aviv, *Kibbutz* Holit, and Netivot were directly killed by rocket fire between 7 and 9 October. Many buildings were also damaged, including the Barzilai Hospital in Ashkelon, and shrapnel-related injuries were found amongst the wounded.[8] Three soldiers from the 947th Iron Dome Battalion were also shot dead whilst driving to restock the missile defence batteries.[9]

Hamas and other militant groups including PIJ have publicly claimed responsibility for this rocket barrage. In a pre-recorded message on Al-Aqsa TV, Mohammed Deif, commander of Al-Qassam Brigades, announced "the first strike, which targeted enemy positions, airports, and military fortifications, exceeded 5,000 missiles and shells." PIJ spokesperson, Abu Hamza, also highlighted continuing missile attacks by PIJ on "Israeli communities near the Gaza Border" without intent to distinguish these from military locations.[10]

The primary purpose of the rocket attacks was to breach the border and enable a ground incursion, providing covering fire, and preventing civilians from escaping the area. Although Hamas understood the Iron Dome's capabilities and its high success rate, even under heavy bombardment, they proceeded with the rocket attacks regardless. This is because they recognised the tactical advantage it provided for the rest of their attack.

The impact of a rocket which the Barzilai Hospital in Ashkelon, injuring 6 people on 8 October 2023. Source: Terrogence Archive

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Chapter 5.2 | Border Breaches

On 7 October 2023, the 40-mile long, 50-metre-wide Israel-Gaza border, was breached in 119 locations by the Hamas-led attackers. The breach overcame the sophisticated smart fence, with above ground and subterranean technology and defences.

The Border Infrastructure

The most recent updates to the border fence system were completed in 2021, and were subject to extensive media coverage, including in several defence and tech publications with coverage specific to the technology installed. The technologically advanced border barrier – dubbed the Iron Wall – includes an above-ground 20-foot "smart-fence" which features remote-controlled weapons systems.[1]

Along the "Iron Wall" are a series of surveillance and Sentry Tech towers. Surveillance towers have speed systems that can identify threats from up to 6 miles away using HD cameras, laser and infrared sensors and ground radar. Visuals and other data are sent from the surveillance towers to military outposts throughout the Gaza envelope, such as those near Re'im, Urim, and Nahal Oz, through hardwired cables.[2] The surveillance towers are complemented by approximately 100 Raphael-made sniper positions, armed with a 0.3mm machine gun with radar and optics linked to the Elbit Systems-developed MARS System, used by the female soldiers tasked with border surveillance who sit in the Outposts.[3] The system also has Sentry Tech towers, which are towers along the border outfitted with a Samson weapons array that includes remote-controlled machine guns and sensors. The towers are positioned every few hundred yards and outside key military facilities. They are nicknamed Roeh-Yoreh ("Sees-Fires").

The sensors in a surveillance tower will detect an intruder alert, at which time IDF personnel can fire the .50-calibre machine guns on top of the Sentry Tech tower. Seven SkyStar balloons were also deployed along the border to monitor hotspots of activity. The balloons have a long-range 360-degree camera, affixed to the ground with a metal tether. On the morning of 7 October, 3 of the 7 SkyStar balloons in Israel's fleet were non-operational and at least 1 of the operational balloons was cut loose by militants.[4] The border also has underground sensors for detecting subterranean tunnel activity.

There is also a maritime barrier designed to detect sea-based infiltration, placed near Zikim beach between the Gaza fishing zone and Israeli waters. The maritime border was installed after Operation Protective Edge in 2014, during which 5 naval commandos tried to infiltrate *Kibbutz* Zikim from Gaza but were eliminated.[5]

Implementing the Blinding Plan

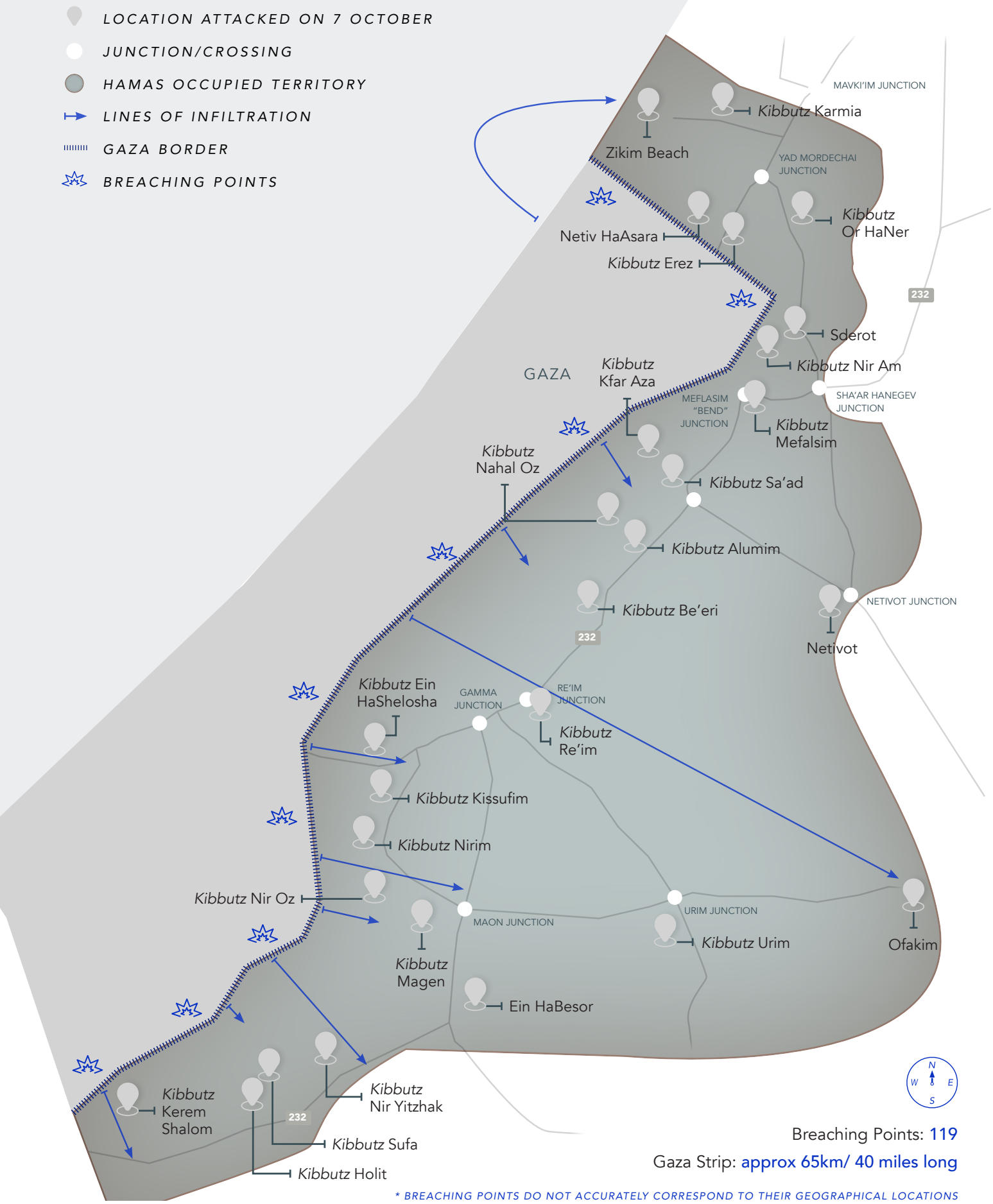
The first phase of the infiltration was a 'blinding plan' to ensure minimum resistance to infiltration. This phase involved coordinated rocket attacks and strikes on the border's Sentry Tech systems.

Hamas fighters began heading towards the border fence from roughly 06:15. Then at 06:29 on 7 October 2023, rocket alerts sounded in over 30 communities as rockets were launched from Gaza towards Israel.[6] The Iron Dome intercepted missiles, unintentionally masking the sound of snipers systematically eliminating cameras along the border fence. Simultaneously, 100 remotely operated drones targeted watchtowers equipped with machine guns and cameras that are connected to the border's thermal imaging sensors and to optical and radar detection systems.[7]

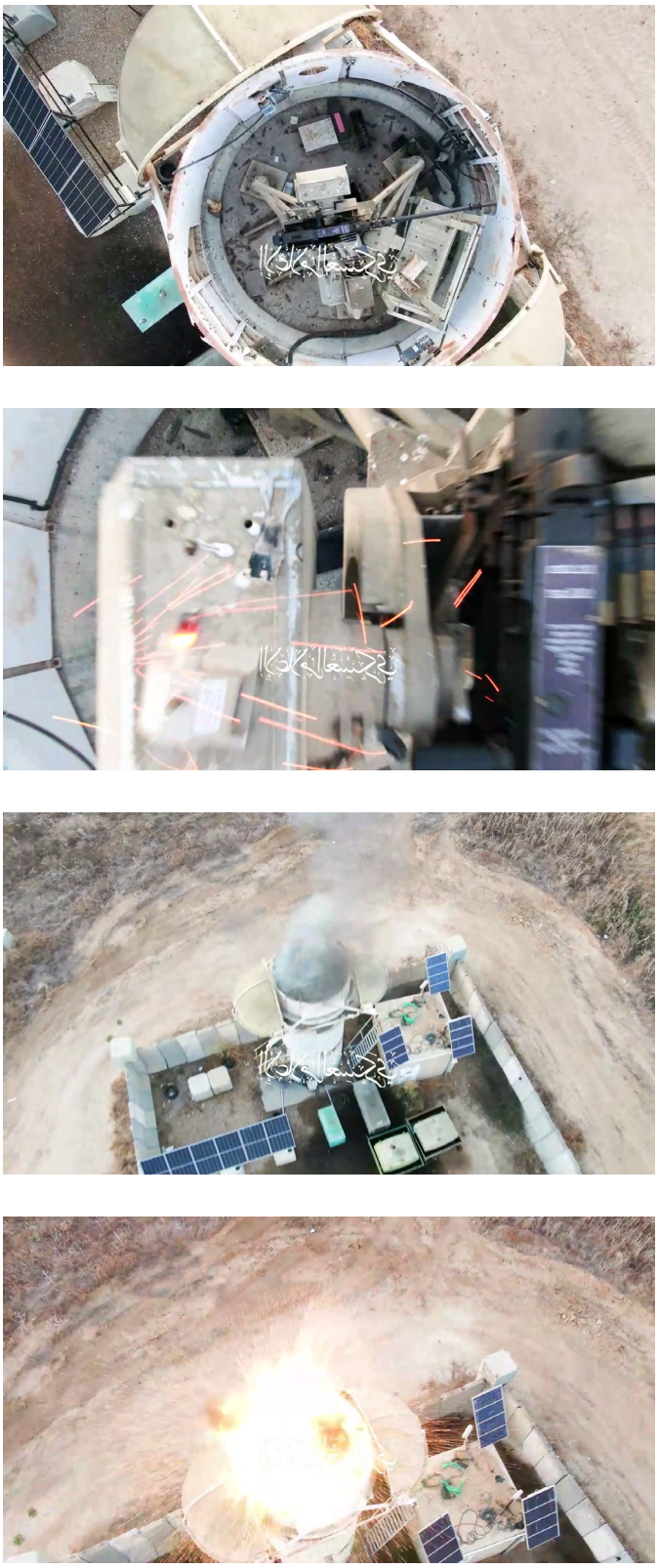
Hamas also dropped incendiary explosives from drones, fired RPGs and used sniper fire to attack several Sentry

One of the communication towers that was attacked along the border. Footage taken from Hamas' Telegram channel.
Source: Hamas Telegram Channel, Terrogence Archive

Figure 13 | Border Breaches



Tech systems along the border. Maps recovered from Hamas fighters showed these towers marked on satellite maps. Footage from Hamas' armed drones, uploaded to Telegram, show attacks on two of the towers. The tower near Kfar Aza was attacked twice by drones, IEDs were dropped on the Sentry Tech camera and specifically deployed beneath the weapons system, destabilising it. Where the Sentry Tech system was not damaged the IDF were able to see and repel incoming militants. The IDF released footage showing Israeli soldiers eliminate around a dozen fighters approaching the fence near Kissufim using the Sentry Tech system.[8]



Footage taken by a Hamas drone shows an Israeli observation tower on the Gaza border with a remote-controlled machine gun. The stills show the progression of an armed drone that drops an improvised grenade which targets the facility's control system. It detonates and disables the position. Source: Terrogence Archive

Breaching the border

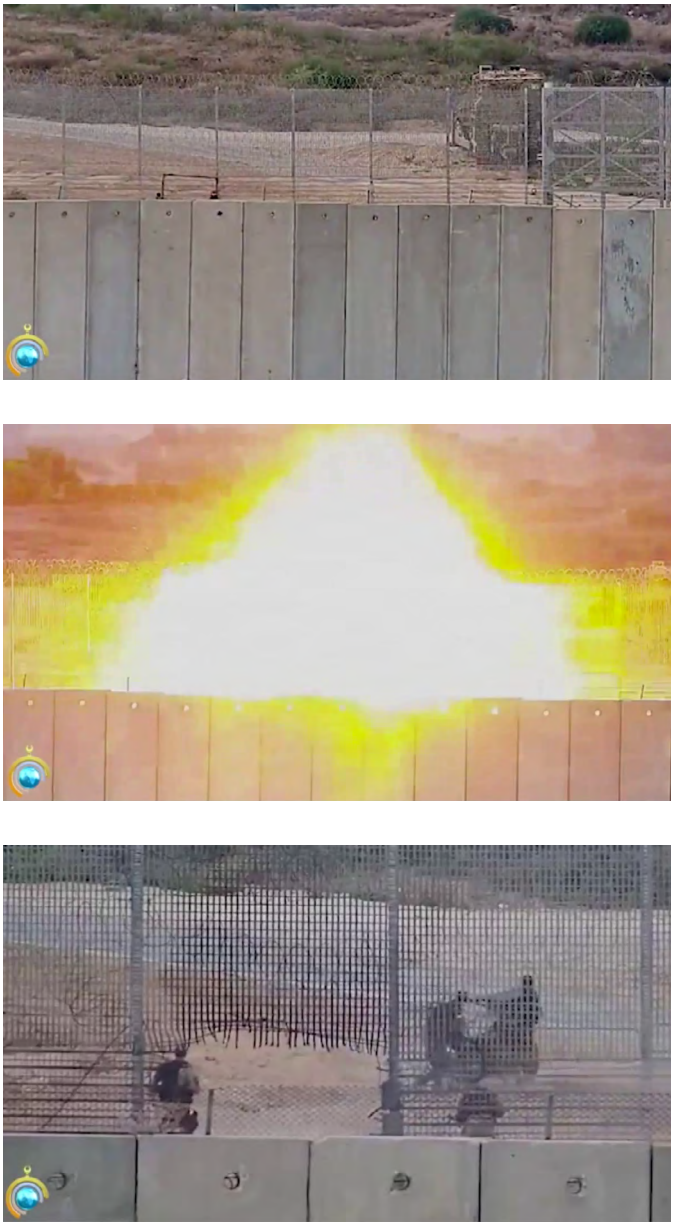
In the first wave of attack, approximately 30 breach points were targeted simultaneously. Small groups entered through these breaches on motorcycles, in pickup trucks with mounted weapons, or on foot. Initial targets for the infiltrators included command centres and communication lines, which disrupted Israeli defensive responses.[9] By the end of the day, the border had been breached in 119 locations – equivalent to nearly 3 breaches per mile.[10]

Specialised engineering teams were dedicated to breaking through barriers using tools like Bangalore Torpedo-type charges, linear shaped charges, and other explosives. Folding bridges were prepared to overcome obstacles, like concrete walls, enabling motorcycles and vehicles to cross.[11]

Hamas targeted key parts of the border fence system and exposed weaknesses caused by an over-reliance on defensive technology and remote surveillance. As Hamas fighters made the initial approach to the fence the rocket barrage began. At the same time, breaches were as big as bulldozed holes in the fence and as small as a gap between two concrete slabs.[12]

Trained fighters then began blowing holes in the fence using a wide range of explosives and munitions. With the surveillance systems around the border down, and Israel's defences blinded, it took minutes for Hamas attackers to cross into Israel.[13] Video footage from a fence infiltration

Members of Hamas' "engineering" team carrying portable folding bridges and explosives, the bridges allow motorcycles to pass concrete wall obstacles along the border. Image taken from Hamas' training videos. Source: Hamas Propaganda Footage via Telegram, Terrogence Archive



Progression shot of a breach of a section of the wire border fence with a Bangalore Type IED on 7 October 2023.
Source: Terrogence Archive

Tractors used to breach the border barrier on 7 October.
Source: Social Media post from 07.10.23, Terrogence Archive

near *Kibbutz* Be'eri captured militants fixing explosives and propping an anti-tank mine against the fence. Other methods to breach the fence include detonating a strip-and-frame charge explosive.[14] This was one of the many weapons Hamas specially created for the attack and were also designed to be affixed to home saferoom doors in Israeli border communities.[15] IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) were used to target and breach both wire fences and concrete walls. Tractors were deployed physically to dismantle sections of the barrier. Cutting charges and shaped explosives were used to sever metal beams and posts.[16]

With sections of the border open, militants crossed into Israel. Nine videos show the Qassam Brigades leading the attacks that breach the barrier separating Gaza from Israel; targeting military outposts near Kerem Shalom, Sufa, Nirim, the Erez crossing, and Paga military base, and attacking Israeli security forces.[17] Near *Kibbutz* Holit, multiple Hamas units attacked in the initial assault on motorbike, with anti-aircraft missile (MANPADS).[18] Near *Kibbutz* Sufa, Qassam Brigades militants joined a group of fighters on motorcycles and passed through a concrete barrier wall to breach the border.[19]

Members of Al-Qassam Brigades, Al-Quds Brigades, Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and the Palestinian Freedom Movement's Al-Ansar Brigades breached the border near Nahal Oz.[20] At approximately 07:30, Qassam Brigades militants broke through the fence near *Kibbutz* Kerem Shalom's northwestern point.[21] The breaches in the Nahal Oz sector alone, which included the areas of Re'im, *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza and Be'eri saw 600 to1,000 terrorists enter Israel.[22] Later, as members of Al-Ansar Brigades

were returning to Gaza, civilians breached the border through the open fence.[23]

The ground invasion was accompanied by an airborne and naval breach. Video footage of the early morning rocket attacks shows motorised paragliders crossing into Israel above the fence and below the rocket fire.[24] In addition, photos captured paragliders over Kfar Aza airspace at 06:32 and *Moshav* Netiv HaAsara at 06:34. At approximately 06:40, motorised paragliders could be seen airborne in the distance from the Nova Music Festival site.[25]

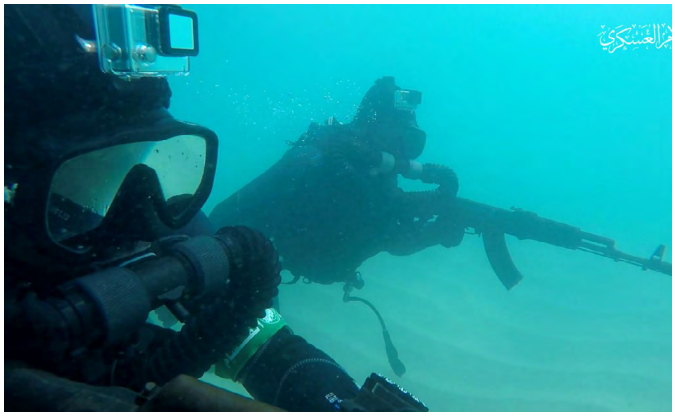
During the morning's first rocket attacks, which also targeted Israeli naval facilities, 4 dinghies with 35 armed militants exited the Gaza fishing zone and entered Israeli coastal waters.[26] Four fast boats of the naval commando of the military arm of Hamas approached, carrying 35 fighters of the Naval *Nukhba*.[27] At the same time, Hamas terrorists fired anti-tank missiles at the navy's observation posts.[28] The Israeli Navy's 916th Patrol Squadron sunk 3 of the approaching Hamas vessels.[29] This aligns with the video footage, showing one dinghy approaching and landing on Zikim beach (around 06:45). An estimated 11 terrorists made it to shore. Sometime later, a second boat made landfall and armed militants engaged in a firefight with the Israeli navy from the beach.[30] At 06:34, the Israeli Navy alerted the rapid response unit of *Kibbutz* Zikim that there was an active infiltration situation.[31]

Upon analysis of border breaches, a pattern emerges. Where the first wave of infiltration was successful, further waves of assault followed throughout the morning. At *Kibbutz* Be'eri, which was overrun by Hamas militants for several hours, a third wave of attack, which included mainly civilian looters crossing into Israel, took place around 11:00.[32] However, in locations where military personnel or civilian defenders were able to halt the Hamas attack, additional waves did not materialise. At *Kibbutz* Erez, on the northern side of the Gaza Strip, the security squad had warning of the infiltration from the Israeli Navy and was able to repel the first wave's infiltration. There they reported that the breach stopped after 3 hours, and no more fighters approached the *Kibbutz*.[33]

White pickup trucks used by the attacking groups can be seen driving through gaps in the fence. Source: Terrogence Archive

One of the first sightings of powered paragliders crossing into Israeli territory on 7 October. Source: Terrogence Archive

Hamas operatives on motorcycles breaching a hole in the fence near Kerem Shalom. Source: Hamas Telegram, Terrogence Archive



Armed Hamas naval commandos equipped with rebreathers and Go-pro cameras. Footage taken Hamas' social media.
Source: Hamas Telegram, Terrogence Archive

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Chapter 5.3 | The Attacked Communities

On the morning of 7 October 2023, 32 communities in the south of Israel, adjacent to Gaza were attacked. Most of these communities are *Kibbutzim* and *Moshavim*, collective villages and cooperative villages engaged in agriculture and some light industry. At the time they employed many Gazan labourers, as well as workers from several Asian countries, and provided study-work placements for students from several African countries.

Mostly founded in the 1940s and 1950s by members of progressive Zionist movements, the communities of what Israelis call 'the Gaza Envelope' vary in size and character. In the Autumn of 2023 the smallest boasted a population of just 200, the largest had just under 1,100 residents. Some are well-known tourist destinations. Several are populated primarily by families that migrated from specific countries or regions of Europe or South America. As a rule, the areas are well known in Israel for their progressive politics and as a bastion of the Israeli Peace Movement. Many of these communities are *Kibbutzim* and *Moshavim*.

A *Kibbutz* (pl. *Kibbutzim*) is a cooperative community rooted in socialist Zionist ideals, originally centred on agriculture. Since the 1970s, economic changes have brought privatisation and ventures into industry, high-tech, and tourism, moving away from the traditional collective model. Founded in 1910, there are now about 250 *Kibbutzim*, most are part of the secular *Kibbutz* Movement, with the rest in the Religious *Kibbutz* Movement. Though they make up less than 3% of Israel's population, *Kibbutzim* remain culturally significant and influential in Israeli society.

A *Moshav* (pl. *Moshavim*), established in 1921, offers more economic autonomy than a *Kibbutz*. Land is equally divided, taxes fund community projects, and profits stay with households. Focused on family life rather than communal living, they appealed to Mizrahi (Jews who originate from the Middle East and North Africa) immigrants. Initially agricultural, many now resemble rural suburbs. *Moshavim* are less culturally influential and internationally known than *Kibbutzim*, partly due to their lack of political alignment.

Although the Negev region is often imagined as mostly desert, the landscape between these villages near the Gaza border is a patchwork of intensely cultivated fields and plantations, nature reserves, Bedouin settlements, military outposts and bases, and stretches of forest, all of which are criss-crossed by hiking trails.[1]

After Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in August 2005, and especially after Hamas took over Gaza in 2007, these border communities became the target of frequent rocket attacks from the Strip. All built rocket shelters for their residents. Initially, these were just sections of concrete pipe or concrete sheds placed in open areas, but eventually most communities built single-family shelters attached to each home or required the provision of a *Mamad* or safety room. These *Mamad*im are not fortified 'safe rooms' designed to keep out intruders, but ordinary rooms with reinforced ceilings and walls to protect against rocket fire.

In response to the rocket attacks, Israel developed an early-warning radar system called *Tseva Adom*, or 'Code Red', and from 2005, began installing it in the border area. When the radar system detects a rocket launch it automatically activates the public safety loudspeakers which sound sirens or repeatedly broadcast the words '*Tseva Adom*'; it also sends alerts to mobile phones.

Every community maintains a small, unpaid civilian security team called a *Kitat Konenut*, numbering 4 to 20 people. Due to Israel's mandatory military conscription, most Israelis have basic weapons training and those in the *Kitat Konenut* often have more training. They would be in civilian clothing, and have access to small firearms, and in some cases a wider armoury but only with provisions enough to last until the arrival of the army, that is, not hours. Generally, the squad members' weapons were not kept at home but in a locked shed that served as an armoury due to concerns from the IDF over a series of thefts across *Kibbutzim*, which resulted in the loss of these weapons. Otherwise, the majority of the attacked

villages are surrounded by a wire perimeter fence and a large, motorised gate at the entrance. For some communities there would also be a guard on duty, potentially armed with a small handgun, but whose operation relies on recognition of the residents' faces, rather than using any sophisticated technology.

Past infiltrations from Gaza into Southern Israel had previously revolved around the cross-border attack tunnels built between, and with their exits close to the *Kibbutzim*. There had also been direct attacks on the military bases in the area. For 20 years, the primary danger the residents had faced from Hamas and Gaza's other armed groups was bombardment (by rockets or mortars) and, if close to the border, sniper fire.

7 October 2023

At 06:29, on 7 October 2023, the *Tseva Adom* alerts sounded across the communities in the Gaza Envelope signalling the start of an unprecedentedly large rocket bombardment that continued for the rest of the day. As residents and their family and friends went into their bomb shelters, the Hamas-led attack breached the fortified border fence using explosives; advancing by land in trucks, cars, motorcycles, on foot, by air in motorised paragliders and by sea with Hamas naval commandos arriving at Zikim Beach.

Of the civilian communities, the first to be infiltrated was *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza, with motorised paragliders entering the airspace of the community at 06:32; the last community was *Moshav* Yated which was attacked at approximately 09:15. In the communities where the attackers were able to breach the fences and overwhelm any organised internal defence, the terrorists went from house to house killing civilians. Those villages that were under control of the attackers for several hours experienced high numbers of atrocities, such as torture, sexual assault and the mutilation of the dead. There was widescale damage from the attacks and purposeful destruction of property, including arson attacks. Hostages were also taken from these communities (231 of the 250 hostages were taken from these communities, though not all were civilians).

The worst affected communities were *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza, *Kibbutz* Be'eri, and *Kibbutz* Nir Oz. At Be'eri over 100 civilians were killed, and 62 at Kfar Aza. Nir Oz suffered the most kidnappings with 75 hostages taken alive to Gaza and a further 7 bodies kidnapped.

This first wave of attacks was led by Hamas' elite *Nukhba* force followed over the next 2 to 3 hours by Hamas regular military forces, Al-Qassam Brigades, together with other Palestinian militias and terror groups, including Al-Quds Brigades (Palestinian Islamic Jihad), the Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), the Jihad Jibril Brigades (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command), the National Resistance Brigades (Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine), the Nassar Salah Al-Din Battalions (Popular Resistance Committees), the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades (ex-Fatah), the Holy Warriors' Battalions (Mujahideen) and the Al-Ansar Brigades (Al-Ansar Movement). Then, in mid-morning there was a third invasion from Gaza by several thousand Gazan civilians instructed or encouraged by Hamas officials to engage in looting and kidnapping. Many of the latter went back and forth across the border.

There is abundant footage of these attacks at every stage. The terrorist groups filmed their actions, and some of their footage was uploaded within hours or even minutes to social media accounts. In many attacked communities, the invasions and ensuing violence were simultaneously captured by CCTV cameras of the communities and in private homes.

The attacks on the *Kibbutzim* and *Moshavim* were aided by the simultaneous attack on the IDF outposts and bases in the area, which as part of their functions act as a first line of official defence. This compounded the ability of the Israeli forces to come to the aid of the civilian communities. Further adding to the chaos of the day was the deliberate sabotage of communication networks by the attackers as part of the border breach and hits on observation outposts. It took hours for the Israeli response units to fully understand the full picture of what was happening.

Hamas also took strategic control of the main highway, Route 232, that runs through the Gaza Envelope. By 07:30, Shahar HaNegev junction (the intersection between Route 232 and Highway 34), was under full terrorist control. The main intersections along Route 232, including the Re'im intersection and Gamma Junction, were taken in the next 10 minutes. This created chokepoints which prevented the entry of security and emergency services who tried to respond to the attack, as well as preventing civilians from escaping. By doing so, the attackers effectively created a confined killing zone, which enabled maximum impact (SEE Chapter 5.8 Highway Route 232).

Once Route 232 and its strategic junctions were retaken, Israeli forces were able to reach the *Kibbutzim* and *Moshavim*. Fierce battles ensued, with some areas

retaken by evening, though others, such as Kfar Aza and Be'eri, two of the hardest hit communities, remained contested for days. All the civilian communities attacked on 7 October were evacuated between 7 October and 11 October, as fighting continued and the last invaders were neutralised. Nearby communities that the attackers had not reached were also emptied; in all 89% of the civilians living up to 4.3 miles from the Gaza border were evacuated, with members from over 40 communities becoming internally displaced.[2]

I. Zikim Beach and Kibbutz Zikim

Zikim Beach, a popular destination for residents of southern Israel especially for surfing and fishing, lies immediately to the north of the Gaza-Israel border and is Israel's southernmost beach on the Mediterranean Sea. Inland from the beach are two Israeli army outposts (Masha Erez, approximately 0.06 miles/100 metres from the coastline, a communications and vehicle maintenance base – not to be confused with Erez Crossing a border crossing into the Gaza Strip – and Yiftach), and the Home Command training and rescue base (Zikim Training Base), and *Kibbutz* Zikim. On the beach itself there is a public shelter and a toilet block.

During the early morning of 7 October, the commander of the Ashdod naval base received a warning of increased activity on the Palestinian side of the border fence. The commander alerted the 916th Patrol Squadron and in particular, the Dvorah boat on patrol in the area. Also ordered to sea was an additional Tzir'ah patrol boat on which were placed soldiers from the anti-infiltration Snapir unit.[3]

On the day, 18 individuals were killed at Zikim Beach, 17 civilians and 1 military personnel.

The rocket barrage began at 06:29, and at the same time anti-tank missiles were fired at the Navy's observation posts and destroyed part of the border fence.[4] Shortly after, 4 fast attack boats of 35 Hamas naval commandos attacked Israel from Gaza via sea. Three of these were intercepted and destroyed by the naval vessels which had been sent to the area.[5] The remaining boat made landfall by 06:45. Sometime later, a second boat reached the shore and armed militants engaged in a firefight with the Israeli Navy from the beach. Three of the 11 infiltrators who landed on the beach were killed shortly afterwards by fire from the Israeli naval vessels, but the 8 remaining attackers began firing on the civilians on the beach. The Israeli naval vessels were also able to destroy two further Hamas boats which subsequently tried to join the attack.[6] Hamas frogmen found in the area were also neutralised by Snapir unit – the Navy's harbour security force.[7]

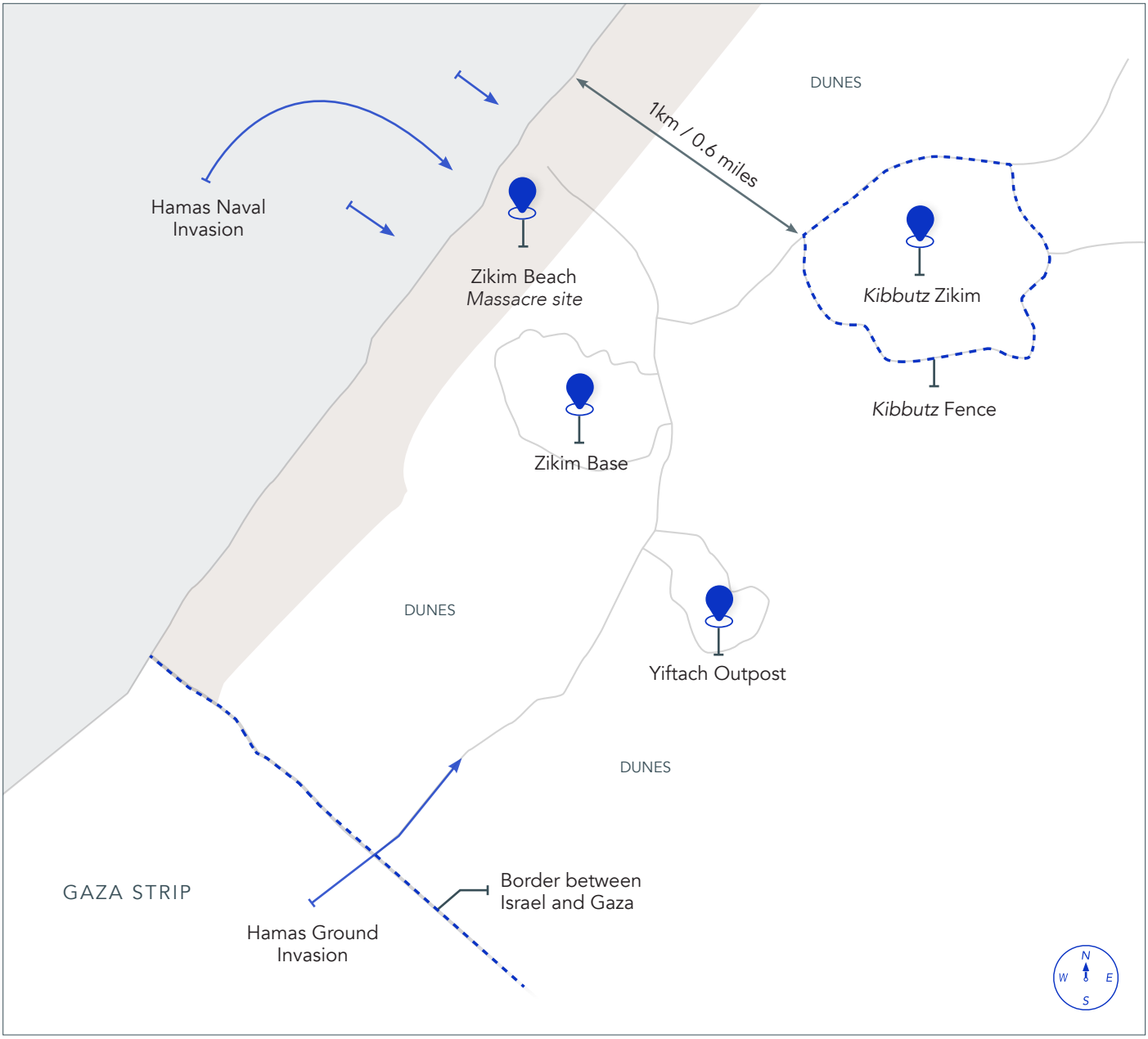
This battle was witnessed by Yarnin Ashkenazi who, together with his friend Kobi Danon, had arrived on the beach the night before, at 22:00, to do some fishing. Woken up by the incoming rockets, Yarnin, a medic and ambulance driver, noticed a couple in the sea and that the woman was in shock. He started to attend to her when he noticed gunfire coming towards them from the sea. In addition to this older couple, there was a younger group of two men and a woman nearby. They all began to run for cover. Yarnin and Kobi went east to get off the sand and from this position he saw that terrorists were landing and shooting directly at them. To their right they saw an area of tall reeds and ran and hid amongst them. From there he texted his sister whose son was in the IDF and serving at the army base nearby in Zikim to come to their aid.

For hours, the two men hid among the reeds surrounded by heavy gunfire, afraid that they would be spotted by Israeli drones which might mistake them for Hamas. A mortar shell landed just 5 metres from him but buried itself in the sand and didn't explode. After 7.5 hours they were finally rescued when he heard a young woman shouting to IDF 13th Golani Brigade soldiers not to kill them. For all those hours the three young people had been hiding just 10 metres from Yarnin and Kobi without either group being aware of the other. Later, Yarnin heard that his sister's son had been killed in the battle at the IDF base and that the older couple were missing, their "blood-stained phone" found in the toilet block on the beach.[8]

On hearing gunfire from the beach, 4 soldiers from 51st Battalion of the Golani Brigade, stationed at the nearby Masha Erez outpost, just 100 yards from the beach, drove there in a 'Savannah' military vehicle.

Hamas naval commandos making landfall on Zikim Beach on 7 October 2023. Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

FIGURE 14 | MAP OF ZIKIM BASE, BEACH AND *KIBBUTZ*



One soldier, Corporal Dvir Lisha got out to fight but was immediately killed. The other three, outnumbered, abandoned the vehicle.

Sometime between 06:45 and 06:49, the 8 gunmen on the beach attacked the toilet block killing the civilians who had been hiding there. [9] A video circulated by Hamas shows scenes shot inside the toilet block with Hamas' armed wing claiming responsibility for killing those inside.[10] Five teenagers (four boys and one girl) and one of the two fishermen who had hid in the toilet block were all killed. The five teenagers were 17-year-old Shahaf Kariaf, 17-year-old Alina Weisbourg, 17-year-old Nadav Tayeb, 16-year-old Or Ta'asa (his father would also be killed on 7 October in *Moshav* Netiv HaAsara) and 17-year-old Tal Keren. The fisherman was Avi Hasdai. Or Ta'asa spoke to his mother Sabine on the phone at 06:39, telling her he was at the beach and under attack, but by 06:49 he no longer answered the phone, and when his body was recovered, he had been shot 6 times in the head.[11]

It is possible that two others died in the toilet block. Crutches belonging to Yuri Lisovoi, 63, and the mobile phone of his wife Svetlana, 61, were found there but it is unclear where their bodies were eventually found.[12] Before he died, Shahaf Kariaf filmed the scene inside the toilet block. In the clip an Israeli soldier can be seen taking cover in the toilet whilst changing magazines on his gun. The soldier then returns to fight the terrorists.[13] This was one of the 4 soldiers who had arrived in the Savannah vehicle. He later rejoined the other 2 soldiers and they succeeded in returning to their base.[14]

Avi Hasdai had been fishing with two friends 'L' (his name has not been publicly released) and Na'or Salah,

when rockets started falling on the beach at about 06:30. He ran to the toilet block with 'L', while Salah decided to make for the shelter 50 metres further away. 'L' would be the only survivor from there. He hid in the last cubicle and pretended to be dead leaving the door ajar. He later told his friends that he stayed there for 3 hours, hearing explosions and gunshots in the background, but nobody returned to the block. At 10:20 he came out of hiding, ran toward the nearby military base and identified himself as an Israeli.[15]

At approximately 06:50, Hamas gunmen entered the shelter further inland, where Salah was hiding along with 13 others, including 4 fishermen whom he recognised from previous fishing trips. The shelter was 3.5 metres long, and Salah sought to hide himself at the back of the shelter in an electricity supply cupboard, which "in hindsight probably saved [his] life." As he was crouching down, a grenade was thrown in the shelter, and 2 terrorists wearing armoured vests, "kitted up from A to Z", withdrew their Kalachnikovs opening fire, "each one firing off a magazine."[16]

Nine people, including a father and son, Aryeh and Eliyahu Uzan (aged 68 and 42), were killed in the shelter, 5 survived including Salah. One of them said that she survived by pretending to be dead and that the survivors extracted themselves from the shelter after hiding for several hours.[17] Another of them, Oshri Tuto a 27-year old amateur fisherman from Sderot, was shot and wounded in the eye, mouth, hand and chest but was later able to drive himself to Barzilai Hospital in Ashkelon, half an hour away.[18]

A total of 18 individuals (17 civilians), including five children, were killed on the beach. Some 20-30 civilians were able to run to safety to Zikim Training Base which was successfully defended by the IDF soldiers stationed there. By 07:00, the Hamas attackers had moved on from the beach, taking the abandoned IDF Savannah and drove to attack *Kibbutz* Zikim.

Hamas attempted to infiltrate Israel via Zikim Beach even after 7 October. On 8 October, the 916th Patrol Squadron killed the last 5 Hamas terrorists hiding on Zikim Beach. On 13 October a further Hamas frogman was neutralised, and the following day on the 14 October, Israeli Security Forces sank another Hamas boat at sea.[19]

Kibbutz Zikim ("point of light") is a *Kibbutz* in the far northwest of the Gaza Envelope, 1.86 miles from the northern Gaza border. The community was established in 1949, by young Romanian Jews from *Hashomer Hatzair*.[20] The *Kibbutz* abuts the Zikim Sands nature reserve, a popular tourist destination and is less than a mile from the well-known Zikim Beach. It is connected to that beach and the 3 nearby IDF posts by route 3411 and the main highway 4 to Ashkelon.

The *Kibbutz* has the largest dairy farm in the country, and its farm produces mangoes and avocadoes.[21] Most of its farm labourers are Bedouin, though until the attacks, it also employed Thai and Nepalese guest workers – whose place has now been taken by Malawians. *Kibbutz* Zikim's largest source of revenue is a pair of factories: one that makes Israel's leading brand of mattress - Polyron, and another plant, Polyrit, that manufactures polyurethane seats for trains and vehicles around the world.[22] At the last conducted census in 2022, *Kibbutz* Zikim had a population of 918.[23] On 7 October, 2023, *Kibbutz* Zikim suffered no casualties.

On the morning of 7 October, the *Kibbutz* rocket alarms sounded at 06:29. Residents took shelter in their safe rooms. Later they recalled "a huge barrage."[24] The unprecedentedly heavy bombardment killed 4 cattle in the *Kibbutz* dairy.[25]

At the same time as naval commandos breached Zikim Beach, Hamas combat engineers breached the Gaza border fence south of Zikim. After which, groups of Hamas fighters on motorcycles and in pick-up trucks sped to targets that included the *Kibbutz* and 3 adjacent military facilities, the Yiftach and Erez army outposts and the 'Bahad-4' (Zikim) Training Base.

At 06:45, the Israeli navy, which had a post in one of the adjacent military bases monitoring cameras at the beach, and whose patrol craft had intercepted one of several attack boats that set out from Gaza, contacted the community's security coordinator, Eviatar Amar Werbner. The naval officer told him that there was an

The stolen military vehicle which the terrorists drove from the coast outside the perimeter of Kibbutz Zikim.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

active infiltration.[26] At the same time, several members of the village's 12 -person *Kitat Konenut* civilian security squad heard gunfire from the beach.[27]

At 06:47, Werbner sent a series of WhatsApp messages summoning the squad 'Good morning, combined assault/ At the moment 3 have managed to reach the beach/ Attack also on the lane Motorcycles/drones."[28] Some members of the squad went to the highest point in the *Kibbutz* from which they could see the fighting on the beach and at the nearby military outposts.[29] The security squad then divided into pairs and took up positions around the 2.17 mile perimeter fence, behind concrete blocks.[30]

The first Hamas attackers arrived by road, driving the IDF Savannah vehicle that had been abandoned on the beach, shortly beforehand, by the 4-man patrol of Golani Brigade soldiers.[31] When the vehicle was later recovered, scuba diving equipment was found in it.[32]

One member of the civilian security squad, Kobi Pode, 69, – the manager of the Polyron mattress factory – was standing guard as the van pulled up opposite the fence. "I thought it might be special forces coming to help us at the community."[33] He watched as "2 guys dressed in black come out. The third one comes out with an RPG. That's when I realised it was special forces, but not ours."[34] Pode opened fire on them before they could deploy the RPG. The infiltrators returned fire but missed Pode. As Pode was joined by other members of the squad, the attackers pulled back behind the van and moved to another area of the fence.[35]

Firefights between the civilian squad and the heavily armed Hamas attackers continued for an hour and a half with the Hamas invaders trying to breach the perimeter fence with grenades and other explosives.[36] The security squad was assisted by IDF Maj. Avi Yofef in the Maglan Commando unit who was home for the holiday. Two members of the emergency squad were wounded by grenade blasts during the battle, but the Hamas infiltrators were unable to penetrate the community's fence. Around 07:20 the attackers withdrew and then set up an ambush position on the road that leads to the beach and bases, from which they fired on passing vehicles. An operative from the Shabak security service, Michael Ben Moshe, who had driven from Ashkelon to Zikim, encountered the infiltrators on the road and got out of his car. Armed with a pistol, he killed one of them but was himself killed as he tried to get back into his vehicle and drive into the *Kibbutz*. Soon afterwards, an officer in the Golani Brigade who was on his way to the Yiftach base, saw the infiltrators on the highway, fired at them and then turned into the *Kibbutz* where he joined the security squad.[37]

About 09:00, between 6 and 8 more Maglan commandos arrived from their base 16 miles to the north, having been contacted by Maj. Yosef. With their help, 4 of the Hamas attackers were killed by 10:00. Five others retreated to the beach. The slain terrorists were found to have been carrying very large amounts of ammunition and a drone.[38]

Intense fighting continued in the dunes around the *Kibbutz* and in the adjacent nature reserve for the rest of the day. Around 20:00 the community's leaders decided to evacuate the village, despite uncertainty as to the security of the road from Zikim to the highway north. Some 70% of the residents left in a large convoy. Among those that remained were the *Kibbutz*' agricultural interns from Ghana, Tanzania and Cambodia – who, along with other *Kibbutz* residents had continued to milk the community's cows during the fighting.[39]

The IDF arrived at *Kibbutz* Zikim at 19:00, 13 hours after it was first attacked and began to evacuate families with small children, in protected armoured vehicles. The security squad stood down at 02:30 on 8 October. Heavy rocket barrages from Gaza continued throughout the night.[40]

While *Kibbutz* Zikim was effectively defended, the nearby Yiftach and Erez military outposts and Zikim Training Base were also attacked, and suffered significant loss of life. (SEE Chapter 5.9 Attacked Military Facilities).

II. Kibbutz Karmia

Kibbutz Karmia is situated at the northeast corner of the Gaza Strip, inland from Zikim Beach and close to *Kibbutz* Yad Mordechai and *Moshav* Netiv HaAsara. It was founded in 1950, by French and Tunisian members of the Jewish progressive youth movement *Hashomer Hatzair*. It has a vineyard and a solar farm and until the October attacks, it hosted Israel's 'Eden' home for abused girls. The *Kibbutz* is bordered on one side by the Karmia Nature reserve, one of the country's best known hiking areas, which in 2018 was partially destroyed by incendiary balloons sent from Gaza. Its population was 656 in the 2022 census.

Like the other communities of the Western Negev, Karmia came under heavy rocket attack just after dawn

on 7 October 2023. However, no Hamas or Hamas-led terrorists made it to the *Kibbutz*. Those who might have intended to attack it did not reach it: the road routes from the Gaza border to Karmia go via Yad Mordechai and Zikim, two *Kibbutzim* where civilian security teams and military reinforcements prevented the invaders from penetrating deeper into the Gaza Envelope.

Although there were no casualties at *Kibbutz* Karmia, the military ordered its evacuation in the afternoon of 7 October, 2023, and residents were not allowed to return until March 2024.

Fighting continued in the area around *Kibbutz* Karmia. For several days after 7 October 2023, the *Kibbutz* faced continued infiltration threats from attempted crossings onto Zikim Beach by Hamas frogmen.[41]

III. Kibbutz Yad Mordechai

Yad Mordechai sits 2 miles east of the Gaza border. It was established in its current location in 1943 but was originally founded further north at Netanya in 1936. The *Kibbutz* is home to one of the largest rural communities of the Western Negev, with 900 residents, it is a major producer of premium olive oil and fruit preserves as well as honey.[42] It is renowned in Israel for its role in the 1948 independence war, where a five-day battle occurred with Egyptian troops. The *Kibbutz* is named in honour of Mordechai Anielewicz, the leader of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising,

On 7 October, 2023, 2 civilians and 2 military personnel were killed within the grounds of the *Kibbutz*. The Red Alert rocket sirens sounded at 06:29. Most residents quickly gathered in the *Kibbutz*' communal rocket shelter. The *Kibbutz Ravshatz* (head of the civilian security team) Micha Regev, a 68 year-old farmer, cancelled a triathlon scheduled for that day as part of the *Kibbutz*' 80th anniversary celebrations, secured his grandchildren and wife in the safe room of his house, and scrambled his 16-person squad.

The civilian guards at Yad Mordechai were better prepared than their equivalents in many other communities, equipped with body armour, helmets and modern gunsights for their rifles. Uniquely in the region, they kept their weapons at home rather than in a locked central armoury. As community director, Omri Peri, later put it "We kind of didn't listen to what the army said, which was to store the guns."[43] Regev's squad was joined by 2 off-duty soldiers staying at the *Kibbutz* for the weekend and immediately began to patrol the fence around the community. Within 10 minutes of the sirens, the external electricity supply to the *Kibbutz* was cut off and mobile phone reception ceased to work with any consistency.

While standing guard outside the main gate around 07:00, Regev caught sight of a Hamas motorised paraglider landing at nearby *Moshav* Netiv HaAsara, and then spotted vans and motorcycles nearing his *Kibbutz* on Route 4. He and his team opened fire on them, but the vehicles continued on to the nearby intersection.

Kibbutz Yad Mordechai is also home to a post of the "*Magav*" Israeli Border Police. When the rocket alarms went off, its 12 police officers initially went to their rocket shelter. However, police radio systems were still functional, unlike the military's communications, and the police in the shelter received an alert for a hostile incursion. Four border police officers therefore left the *Kibbutz* while under heavy mortar fire to patrol the highway.[44]

At the strategic Yad Mordechai intersection - which controls the main roads to the cities of Ashkelon (6.21 miles to the north) and Sderot (4.69 miles to the east) – the policemen were confronted by 16 to 18 heavily-armed terrorists on motorcycles. A firefight broke out. Within a few minutes, a 7-man team of "Yamam" Israeli special police arrived from the north and joined the fight. The battle ended about an hour later, with all the attackers dead.

Around 08:30, 27 Toyota trucks full of terrorists approached the back of the *Kibbutz* via its dairy farm and stopped in an orchard. As they dismounted, they were engaged by Regev and the civilian security squad. The latter were joined by the Yamam police team, who killed the attackers. On their bodies were found maps of various targets including the Tel Nof Israeli Air Force base.[45]

Rockets fired from Gaza continued to land on the *Kibbutz* for the rest of the day, falling mostly on the farm and around the dairy barn. At times, the civilian security guards found themselves taking shelter from the projectiles in hilltop trenches left over from the 1948 battle, that had been preserved by a heritage organisation. Half of the security squad on 7 October 2023 were third generation descendants of the men and women who defended the *Kibbutz* 70 years earlier.[46]

Several residents came to assist the security team during the afternoon, though most of the terrified residents were told to remain in their shelters. At 19:00 on 7 October 2023, the civilian security team found and

rescued 2 young women who had fled from the Nova Festival massacre and were hiding in foliage near the Mordechai junction.

When the attack began soon after dawn, 3 joggers from a Sderot running club had been out on their morning run south of the *Kibbutz*. They hid from roving terrorists in roadside bushes. A team of soldiers went looking for them. They found them around noon, but soon afterwards, the runners and the three soldiers protecting them were attacked with grenades and rifle fire. Two of the runners were killed along with 2 of the soldiers.[47]

The majority of residents of the *Kibbutz* were evacuated between 17:00 and 22:00 although 20 refused to go for several days. The Security Squad stayed behind. At 02:00, an army artillery company arrived and took over from the security squad. However, it was ordered to move on 4 hours later, and the joint force of civilian volunteers and police officers were once again alone guarding the community. Fighting continued on and around the *Kibbutz* farmland for 2 more days. After it was over, the bodies of 33 terrorists were found.[48]

IV. Moshav Netiv HaAsara

Moshav Netiv HaAsara is an agricultural community originally founded in the Sinai desert in 1973. It moved to its current location in 1982, after the Camp David Agreement with Egypt and Israel's resulting withdrawal from Sinai.

According to the most recent census conducted in 2022, the population of the *Moshav* was 948.[49] Its farms specialised in flowers, exotic varieties of tomatoes and peppers, and raising turkeys. The village is well-known in Israel for the beauty of its setting – it has been described as "a bucolic wonderland of whitewashed cottages with red-tiled roofs, all laid out in neat rows with gardens of all shapes and sizes"[50] - and also for the frequency of rocket, mortar and incendiary balloon attacks from Gaza. (Between 2005 and 2023, 5 people were killed in rocket, mortar and anti-tank missile attacks on the *Moshav*).[51]

Paraglider about to land in Moshav Netiv HaAsara captured by amateur photographer and resident of the Moshav, Ronen Avisror.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

Netiv HaAsara is the nearest Israeli community to Gaza – one side of the village is less than 400m from the border, and behind it the Gazan city of Beit Hanoun. Israel's Red Alert system divides the country into warning areas as to how many minutes or seconds residents have to get to a shelter once the sirens have gone off; Netiv Hazara is so close that it is deemed to be in the 'immediate' impact area and therefore gets no warning at all.[52]

Because of its proximity to Gaza, Netiv HaAsara has an alarmed fence on its perimeter, plus 3 high concrete walls on its Gaza-facing side designed to protect residents from gunfire. Its most celebrated tourist attraction was a community art project entitled 'Path to Peace' in the form of coloured mosaics that visitors were invited to attach to a concrete wall. Designed by a *Moshav* resident, ceramicist and peace activist, Tzameret Zamir, the mosaic faces Gaza and was the site of gatherings and ceremonies by Israeli peace activists.[53] In August 2007, 2 Gazan terrorists from the DFLP organization attempted to infiltrate the community but were stopped by soldiers from one of the nearby army posts. In 2014, a Hamas tunnel was discovered near the *Moshav*'s community swimming pool.[54] The following year the community's synagogue was hit by a bullet fired from a Hamas training facility in Gaza.[55]

On 7 October 2023, a total of 22 individuals were killed, including 18 civilians and 4 soldiers. As a rocket barrage began at 06:29, Moira Dror, a longtime *Moshav* resident who emigrated from Scotland in the 1970s, ran down to the shelter with her husband. She noted that "unlike the usual bombardments it did not stop."[56] (Dror knew her barrages, having previously survived the landing of a mortar shell in her yard while hanging laundry) "Then we heard shooting and there was no electricity or water or telephone… We had no idea what was going on." Shortly afterwards, Dror received a WhatsApp message saying that "'there are terrorists in the *Moshav*. Hamas'". Shortly after, the *Moshav* lost power and cellular signal due to the rocket barrage, Dror and other residents in their safe rooms were without electricity and therefore in the dark for up to 12 hours. Internet and phone access were also intermittent.[57]

Avi Firuz, 62, was awoken that morning by the sound of shooting. Soon afterwards, his son phoned from Portugal and told him and his wife that there were

news reports of terrorist infiltrations from Gaza. The couple shut themselves in their safe room, with a cast iron pan and kitchen knives as last-ditch weapons and remained there for the rest of the day, during which time their friend Gil Ta'asa and their neighbours Gilad Kfir, Shlomi Molcho and Ayalet Molcho were all killed.[58]

At 06:20, fellow resident Ronan Avisror, 56, was driving out of the *Moshav* to take photographs of the sunrise when "a rain of rockets started. I had never encountered such a flood". He left his car and ran to a small rocket shelter by the side of the road. He was poking his head out to photograph the rockets when he "heard a noise like a drone flying low. I raised my head, and above me were 2 paragliders. For a moment, I thought they were Israelis who wanted to see the view from above and got caught in the shooting. I entered the shelter again, and maybe half a minute later I heard small arms fire. At that moment I realised that this was a raid and that I could not return to the *Moshav*." He hid in a shelter next to a nearby greenhouse until rescued by the *Moshav* security team in the afternoon.[59]

His friend, Amnon Ziv, was preparing his motorcycle for a ride when he too caught sight of the paragliders "about 20 seconds before the rocket fire began". He watched as the formation of 3 gliders split and flew down to different parts of the *Moshav*.[60] Ziv, the security chief for the Hof Ashkelon region of the western Negev, realised that an attack was taking place. He alerted the *Moshav*'s security team and those of nearby communities, making use of a walkie-talkie network recently donated by a Christian charity.[61] "Before I could scream 'terrorists in Netiv' a third time, there was gunfire."[62] Ziv's warning came too late to prevent the penetration of the *Moshav* but it enabled the security teams at neighbouring Zikim, Yad Mordechai and Karmia *Kibbutzim* to mobilise and engage with attackers outside their perimeters.

Three soldiers, Company Commander Itai Maor, and 2 soldiers from his unit, Amit Tzur and Uri Locker, of the 51st Battalion of the Golani Brigade witnessed some of the earliest attacks of the day, as their military compound was just 100 yards inland on Zikim Beach. After confronting terrorists at the Masha Erez outpost, they went in an armoured jeep to help try and protect the *Moshav*. The three soldiers were vastly outnumbered but did kill a number of terrorists attempting to infiltrate the *Moshav* by foot, battling for an hour before they too were killed.

Moshav Netiv HaAsara was penetrated by some 35 Hamas operatives, most of them belonging to the *Nukhba* special forces' "Daraj Tuffah Battalion".[63] The attack on Netiv HaAsara was coordinated by Nassem Abu Ajina, a commander in Hamas's Northern Division. He had previously overseen Hamas's aerial capability development and UAV and paraglider usage.[64] The first 6 attackers – including their commander - arrived on 3 paragliders. The first person they shot was Gilad Kfar, 48, a keen photographer whom they gunned down from the air. His camera with photos[65] of the paraglider coming into land was found near his body a few days later.[66] The rest of the *Nukhba* company came in cars after using a shovel-tractor to breach the *Moshav*'s fences. Some of the attackers went from house to house and attacked the residents they found.

The *Moshav*'s civilian security squad was joined by 2 police officers resident on the *Moshav* and other armed *Moshav* residents. They fought the intruders in various parts of the village. Four of its members were also killed in the ensuing battles. The attackers not only outnumbered the civil security guards but possessed heavier firepower "One *Nukhba* terrorist had 2 LAW missiles, 2 RPGs, 10 grenades and 8 magazines" according to Amnon Ziv.[67] The intense fighting damaged much of the village.

Moshav residents sheltering in safe rooms became aware that the *Moshav* had been penetrated by hearing shooting outside or from WhatsApp messages from neighbours. Musician, Micha Biton, found out both ways. "At 08:30, my 17-year-old daughter Libbi got a message from a friend who said that her father and uncle, Amit and Igal Wax, 2 close friends of mine, were murdered. Suddenly, my world went dark. I understood the severity of the situation. Anyone with me in the shelter could be next. I had a feeling that this was the end and that only God could help us. Shortly after, we got another message that my good friend Oren Stern was murdered with Danny Woveck …. Then we heard gunshots close by and it turned out they had entered the Akuni's house next door and murdered Ruti, Arieh, and their daughter."[68]

Nurit Berger, 59, was killed when terrorists saw her in her bathroom and lobbed a grenade into it – subsequent photographs show splashes of blood on the walls behind and next to the toilet.[69]

The attackers killed Yakov Yinon, 78, and Bilha Yinon, 75 – lifelong peace activists[70], and the parents of well-known activist Maoz Inon[71] - they were burnt alive in their house. At 07:30, shortly before they were killed, Yaakov Yinon had WhatsApped their daughter Maayan to say that they were in the safe room of their

house but could hear shooting and rockets outside.[72] "By 07:45 they were already disconnected and not answering."[73]

Yakov Yinon's charred remains were found amidst the ashes of the house; his wife's were not. "Even fingertip searches in the ash and debris. Failed to find a trace of Bilha's DNA."[74] Bilha Yinon was therefore listed among the missing, until 10 months after the attack, when 2 of her teeth were found near the wreckage of the house.[75]

Shlomi and Ayalet Molcho were killed along with their dogs and the cats they looked after.[76] Around 08:00 Shlomi Molcho was gunned down outside their house; Ayalet Molcho was shot with her two dogs, inside the safe room. Both apparently tried to fight off the attackers with pistols. Before they were killed, they were able to call their son at the Nova Festival and tell him to flee, likely saving his life.[77] After their deaths there was a battle inside their house between intruders and the security squad during which one of the latter, Adi Bahrav, was killed by grenade.

Marina Almagor, 76, a retired nurse born in the former Yugoslavia, was staying with her partner at the *Moshav*, Yoel Berger, 80. At 07:00 he was heading to the safe room from the living room when terrorists fired at the house and was hit by 4 bullets. She was already in the safe room, but when her beloved dog ran out, she chased after it and was shot in the head. Berger survived despite his severe wounds. (His daughter-in-law and son-in-law were also murdered that day.)

CCTV cameras in the house of the Ta'asa family captured in detail one of the home invasions. The footage shows Gil Ta'asa, a firefighter, rushing 2 of his sons, all of whom are still in their underwear having just awoken, to the bomb shelter at the back of the house. He pushes the boys, 12 and 9 years old respectively, into the shelter and as he does so one of the terrorists throws a grenade into its doorway. Gil falls on the grenade to take the full force of the explosion. The attackers check he's dead, shoot him again in the head and usher the 2 children, bleeding from shrapnel wounds, into the kitchen. One of the terrorists – believed to be the commander of the entire raid, Ahmed Fawzi Nasser Muhammad Wadiyya, a *Nukhba* force commander in the Daraj-Tuffah Battalion – opens the fridge, drinks from a cola bottle and asks the children if they want water. He assures the boys "We don't kill children." The Hamas operative then leaves the boys in the kitchen as they then proceed to confirm to one another that their father is dead, and the younger reveals he is blind in one eye. Another terrorist went on Facebook on the older boy's phone to post his killing of the father.[78]

Shortly afterwards, the Ta'asa boys escaped the house and ran to their mother Sabine's home next door. Unknown to them, their older brother Or had also been murdered. He had gone surfing at Zikim Beach early that morning. When the Hamas terrorists landed there, Or Ta'asa phoned his mother and told her "Don't worry mother I'm in a shelter." Shortly afterwards, the shelter was attacked by Hamas gunmen. (See Zikim Beach)

In all, 3 Netiv HaAsara residents were killed outside the *Moshav*. The second was Or Ta'asa's friend Tal Keren, 17, an accomplished surfer, who was killed at Zikim Beach.[79] That morning he sent a voice message saying "You won't believe it, we're seeing rockets exploding in the water right before our eyes, five metres from us, rockets flying in the sky, boats fighting other boats, it's insane, I've never seen anything like this."[80]

The third was Haim Ben Naim, a landscape architect and "legendary mountain biker in the south of Israel." He was shot while on a training ride along with 3 other members of his cycling group,[81] at about the same time that his father-in-law Yoel Berger was shot 4 times back in the *Moshav*.

There was another wave of attackers around 12:30, mostly composed of civilian looters from Gaza. "The response team reacted quickly and stopped them at the first house" according to Amnon Ziv.[82] An army unit arrived at Netiv HaAsara around 17:00 and the village was evacuated soon afterwards.

V. Kibbutz Erez

Kibbutz Erez is a village in the northwestern corner of the Gaza Envelope, situated just 0.6 miles from the Gaza border. It abuts Route 34, a highway leading to *Kibbutz* Yad Mordechai to the west and the city of Sderot to the east, and also Route 4, a main road that leads to the Erez Crossing (the only civilian crossing between Israel and Gaza) and the Gazan city of Beit Hanoun.

Erez (Hebrew for 'Cedar') was founded in 1949, by socialist veterans of the Palmach pre-independence armed force. Before 7 October 2023, it had a population of 580 people, having benefited from a general resumption of interest in *Kibbutz* living

during the previous decade[83]; its application list for new residents was heavily oversubscribed. Erez has a dairy farm, orchards, citrus groves, a chicken coop and greenhouses but is best known for its apiculture. Every year it produces 30 tons of Erez Honey,[84] developed by renowned beekeeper Yehuda Shachor, an Independence War veteran still living at the *Kibbutz* on 7 October 2023.[85] The *Kibbutz* also has a factory that produces technical 'thermoplastic' textiles for maritime use.[86]

At one edge of the *Kibbutz* is the site of a large fifth century Byzantine villa where a mosaic was discovered that is now in the Israel Museum. Over the years, the Jewish National Fund planted trees all around the community to protect residents from rocket and gunfire from Gaza[87] though on 7 October 2023, they provided cover for the Hamas and other attackers.

On that day, one civilian, a member of the security squad, was killed in the assault. Residents of the *Kibbutz* were awoken at 06:29 by Red Alert rocket sirens going off in neighbouring *Moshav* Netiv HaAsara,[88] followed by their own sirens, 2 minutes later. At the same time, large numbers of rockets began to fall on the fields around the *Kibbutz*, but throughout the day the *Kibbutz* itself was significantly damaged by rocket fire. Most residents went immediately into rocket shelters and safe rooms.

Sagit Levi Gelfarb, the *Kibbutz* official in charge of emergencies, recalled feeling that this was not a normal rocket attack. Even before the *Kibbutz*' own siren sounded, she went to unlock the community's Situation Room, hearing 'intense gunfire' from the Erez Crossing as she left the house. She texted the *Kitat Konenut* Stand-By Unit to come, and handed out two-way radios. By 06:45 "the sound of gunshots, rockets and missiles was non-stop".[89] Members of the community began to bombard Gelfarb with phone calls from their shelters; the calls increased as the residents saw reports on social media of attacks elsewhere.

Liora Clark, a *Kibbutz* resident and surgical nurse at the Barzilai hospital, had just woken up when the sirens went off. She and her husband rushed their children out of the *Sukkah* in which they were sleeping, due to the Jewish festival, and into their safe room. Then they went outside to see what was happening. "We instantly understood this is not the usual red alert, because it wasn't accompanied by the usual 'boom' but an insane noise from all the barrages. Then immediately, it was accompanied by a new sound,

Direct RPG hit on the Regev Family Home in Kibbutz Erez.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

which was the sound of small arms and continuous firing".[90] Clark and her husband rushed back into the safe room.

That morning, the leader of the *Kibbutz*' nine-person civilian security team was away in Jerusalem. His deputy assembled the rest at a monument that is the highest point of the village. From there they could see evidence of heavy fighting at the Erez Crossing facility. They went to spread themselves out around the perimeter. After 20 minutes, a lookout with a radio spotted vans and motorcycles on Route 4, heading towards the *Kibbutz* from the breached Crossing.

A pair of residents who had gone on a bicycle ride half an hour earlier raced back to the *Kibbutz*, made sure their children were in shelters, and grabbed pistols and ran towards the fence. One of them, Amir Levkowitz, recalled that there was already "non-stop gunfire" with "bullets whistling between the houses". He "saw 2 figures clad in black from head to toe messing with the fence" and fired at them with his pistol. At the same time explosives went off, tearing a hole in the fence, but the attackers briefly retreated. Using walls as cover, Levkowitz and his cycling partner tried to keep the terrorists from coming through the breach by firing single shots from their pistols.[91]

By 07:20 Hamas attackers had set up firing positions in the trees and bushes that surround *Kibbutz* Erez, while others assaulted it from different sides. As elsewhere, they had brought with them in their vehicles a large supply of ammunition for small arms and RPGs. During an intense firefight for the front gate of the *Kibbutz*, one of the civilian security team, engineering student and expectant father Amir Naim, 27, was killed by sniper fire originating from the bushes, and 2 others seriously wounded.[92]

The security team were in intermittent phone contact with their director, Or Hava, who had spent the night in Jerusalem and was racing down the highway to the *Kibbutz*. After trying without success to reach the military, he called his opposite number at neighbouring *Kibbutz* Or HaNer – which was not under attack - and asked for assistance.

Three members of the Or HaNer security squad arrived at the *Kibbutz* just as the 2 guards at the front gate were pinned down by heavy fire and the whole team were running short of ammunition. The defenders were then reinforced by 4 soldiers who had driven down from central Israel on their own initiative, enabling the reinforced squad to send fighters to join the pair of cyclists, defending the breach in the fence, at the other side of the *Kibbutz*. At 08:20, Or Hava, the security director who had driven down from Jerusalem, arrived at the *Kibbutz* with his brother-in-law and 3 more civil guards from Or HaNer. They joined the battle for the Erez perimeter, which lasted for more than 2 hours, the attackers firing RPGs at those defending the *Kibbutz*. By 10:00, 3 of the terrorists had been killed after which the attackers pulled back.[93]

During the fighting, the Erez security team moved the wounded and dead to a house on the *Kibbutz* belonging to Meital Regev, not far from the main gate. The terrorists fired several RPGs into the house, spraying the wounded and family with shrapnel and glass and injuring a squad member, Yossi Haddad, in the eyes and ears.

At 09:20, Liora Clark received a phone call from Sagit Gelfarb requesting that she come to the *Kibbutz* Situation Room to treat the wounded.[94] She left the family shelter and ran across the *Kibbutz* through the ongoing attack. At the Situation Room she found a member of the security squad who had been wounded in the head and leg, and another with a bullet through his throat. Knowing that there was little she could do for them and that no ambulances would be coming "I very simply made a decision." She ran back to her house to get her car, drove it to the Situation Room, where the 2 severely wounded men were loaded into it and then raced out of one of the *Kibbutz* gates amidst a hail of automatic weapons fire. The car's engine was hit but continued to function until just before she reached *Kibbutz* Zikim. An ambulance there took the 2 wounded men to a nearby hospital, after which Liora drove to her own hospital, which was already full of wounded from other communities.[95]

At 20:00 a larger military force arrived that began the task of combing the *Kibbutz* and its field and facilities for terrorist stay-behinds. It was only at 00:00 that residents were given the OK to leave their shelters, though they were forbidden to leave the *Kibbutz* itself. At 01:30 an army officer declared the *Kibbutz* a military zone and ordered its evacuation. Sagit Gelfarb went around the community to pick up the elderly residents and put them on a bus. However, at 03:45 they were told that they could not leave because "there are terrorists in the vicinity of *Moshav* Yakhini". The residents went back to their homes and only began to be evacuated at 12:30 the following day. Sagit only left when the *Kibbutz* was entirely empty. She said that "it was 30 hours of hell on earth, which is now told in stories. And every little story within the stories is a world with fear and luck and pain."[96]

VI. Kibbutz Or HaNer

Kibbutz Or HaNer (the name means "candlelight") is a medium-sized agricultural community, located north-east of Gaza, close (3.5 miles) to the city of Sderot. It was founded in 1955, by immigrants from Argentina and Chile who were members of the Dror, HeHalutz and Gordonia youth movements. Many of its residents are Spanish-speakers and it is famous in Israel as "the Argentinian *Kibbutz*".[97]

According to the 2022 census, Or Haner had a population of 835 people.[98] It was an important tourist destination in the region thanks to its Argentine restaurant, its vineyard, and an art installation known as the "Mural Path" created by visiting South American artists.[99]

Or HaNer was not attacked from the ground on October 7 2023, though like all the communities in the region it was bombarded by heavy rocket fire from Gaza. When neighbouring *Kibbutz* Erez was infiltrated by large numbers of Hamas terrorists, the head of its security team called for help. (See *Kibbutz* Erez) Eight members of the Or HaNer civilian security squad went to its assistance and took part in intense combat for over 2 hours. No members of the *Kibbutz* Or HaNer community were injured or killed on 7 October 2023 , though the son of a resident living at Kfar Aza was kidnapped there and died in Gaza. The *Kibbutz* was given a mandatory evacuation order on 8 October 2023 , which expired in February 2024.

VII. Kibbutz Nir Am

Kibbutz Nir Am is 1.2 miles from the northeast corner of Gaza, and 0.6 miles from the city of Sderot. It was founded in 1943, by refugees from Bessarabia (now Moldova) who were members of the Eastern European, Gordonia Zionist youth movement. It was

the first community in the region to locate a source of subterranean fresh water, a discovery that made possible the subsequent agricultural development of the northern Negev region. Nir Am itself farms citrus groves, field crops, and dairy cattle.[100]

Nir Am had a population of 726 at the last recorded census in 2022[101] and is famous in Israel as the home of "Michsaf" the country's most popular make of kitchen cutlery. It also hosted the SouthUp business start-up "incubator"[102] and benefited from tourism, in particular visitors to its Museum of Water and Security.[103]

From 2005 onwards, Hamas' Qassam rockets that failed to reach the frequently targeted city of Sderot have often landed on Nir Am, making it the second most bombed community in the region.[104] On 7 October 2023, it was one of the first villages to come under attack from Gaza, but it successfully resisted attempted incursions and suffered no civilian casualties, although 1 first responder and 2 military personnel died whilst 1 individual, was taken hostage.[105]

Soon after the rocket alarm sounded at 06:30 and the power in the *Kibbutz* went out, the community's *Ravschatz* Inbal Rabin-Lieberman, assembled and armed her 11-person security team and dispatched the team to fighting positions on each side of the perimeter.

Rabin-Lieberman told the *Kibbutz* infrastructure coordinator not to switch on the emergency generator to ensure that the main gate could not be opened. "We knew already there was a pickup truck of terrorists who had driven up to the main gate, seen it closed, then done a U-turn and driven off towards Sderot."[106]

About 12 terrorists approached the perimeter at about 07:00.[107] One reached the fence before he was killed. The resulting initial battle for Nir Am lasted for 3.5 hours. There then was a lull. "Then came the second wave, between 8 to 10 terrorists with machine guns, with rocket-propelled grenades".[108] It too was repelled.

When the *Kibbutz* was first attacked just after 07:00, a second large group of terrorists barricaded themselves near a henhouse, 200 metres from its fence. There were 6 labourers already at work in the hatchery. Four hid from the attackers, but 1 of them, Samer Fouad al-Talalka, an Israeli Bedouin, was kidnapped and taken to Gaza.[109]

The terrorists at the hatchery fired on 2 vehicles of the IDF's Golani Brigade arriving at the *Kibbutz* gate. The vehicles drove into the field adjacent to the hatchery and the battle lasted for several hours, during which 1 soldier, Cpl. Yaron Zohar, was killed. At about 08:30 they were reinforced by a Namer armoured personnel carrier, and the Hamas terrorists were reinforced by more attackers from Gaza after 09:30.

At 10:30 the armoured personnel carrier was disabled by an RPG. Shortly afterwards, the attackers were able to throw a grenade into the vehicle. One of the 7 soldiers inside, Sgt Matan Abergil threw himself on the grenade and was killed.[110]

More Hamas vehicles, including "technicals" – pickup trucks mounted with machine guns - arrived at the chicken hatchery in the early afternoon. According to one account, a force of more than 40 Gazan attackers then massed at the hatchery preparing to attack the *Kibbutz*.[111]

A security squad member called the police who dispatched a large tactical unit. At around 11:00 the YAMAM police arrived in vans, cars and on motorbikes and turned the tide of the battle. One police officer, Sgt Maj. Roman Gandel, was killed in the fighting.[112]

At about 17:00, the *Kibbutz* security squad rescued a group of 10 Gazan workers who had hidden in an avocado plantation, after their vehicle, taking them from the Israeli Arab city of Rahat to Nir Am's pomelo groves, was shot up by Hamas terrorists.[113]

Fighting in the *Kibbutz* Nir Am area continued through the night of 7 October 2023, along with rocket barrages from Gaza. Residents of the *Kibbutz* nursing home were evacuated in the early hours, followed by the rest of the community around 03:00. Several terrorists remained hidden in the fields of the *Kibbutz* for the next few days.[114]

Although no residents died at Nir Am itself, one was killed at the Nova Festival, Ziv Pepe Shapira, 26.

VIII. Kibbutz Gevim

Kibbutz Gevim ('cisterns' in Hebrew) was founded in August 1948, by members of the Labour Zionist movement who had fought in the Palmach (the elite unit of the Haganah, the precursor to the IDF, the paramilitary of the Jewish community in Mandate Palestine). Located just over 2.5 miles from the Gaza border, it has dairy and poultry farms, an avocado plantation and a plastics factory partly owned by a

German company.[115] Many of its 617 residents work not on the *Kibbutz* but in nearby cities. In recent years it has been a target of arson balloons launched from Gaza.[116]

Although no casualties occurred within the *Kibbutz* itself, 2 of its members were killed on Route 232 and at the Nova Music Festival. (According to the methodology of this report, they have been counted as victims at both of these locations.) In the morning of 7 October, the community's Red Alert siren sounded at 06:37. The *Kibbutz* civil guard security coordinator, the *Ravshatz*, Ziv Aviv got into his vehicle to patrol the perimeter fence and ensure the village's gates were closed. At about the same time, resident Meir Hanukah, went looking for his dog which ran away when the siren sounded. While searching for it on the road he was shot and wounded. The rockets achieved direct hits all over the *Kibbutz*. Unknown to Ziv Aviv, the petrol station next to the *Kibbutz* was being attacked. The manager had given shelter to some cyclists and motorists wounded by Hamas gunfire on the highway. He took them into the safe room of the station's convenience store. A vanload of terrorists tried unsuccessfully to get through its fortified door.[117]

At 07:25, Aviv WhatsApped his civil security team, told them to get their weapons and set out for the main gate. Simultaneously a white Toyota pickup truck pulled up at the gate, and its occupants opened fire on one of the residents, Pini Dadon, who was approaching it in his car, wounding him in the head and hand, and prompting his vehicle to crash.[118] Aviv pulled up soon afterwards and fired at the terrorists. Eventually the 56-year-old grandfather was shot in the legs, shattering his knees.[119] Another member of the squad – Ohad Charnis- drove to the gate to rescue him but was also shot and wounded. As he retreated, the attackers threw grenades.

Hagay Charnis, Ohad's brother, also a member of the civil guard squad, was on his way to join the team – without his weapon as he did not have it at home – when Pini Dadon, who had been shot, arrived at his house "covered in blood and shrapnel." Charnis went to the Dadon's car to get his personal gear and saw the whole thing had been perforated by bullets. Charnis and his wife, Lital, tried to call the Magen David Adom Ambulance service but could not get through. They then called the nearest army division and spoke to female soldiers who said "They are shooting at us, we are in pyjamas and we don't have weapons" before the conversation cut off.[120] Ziv Aviv and Ohad were both brought injured to Hagay's home, and with the neighbouring paramedic, Avi, they all managed to stabilise Pini.

At 11:00 the civil guard squad was informed that an armoured evacuation vehicle was just north of Sderot. They were able to get Aviv and Pini there, from where they were taken to hospital. The Emergency Medical Team member (EMT) who treated Aviv, said he continued to check on the status of his team the whole time that he was in an ambulance.[121]

Terrorists arriving to the petrol station next to Kibbutz Gevim. Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

By 15:30, things were quiet enough for the Gevim security squad to leave the *Kibbutz* and rescue the 12 people hiding in the petrol station safe room. Together with a Border Police unit, the security squad searched the *Kibbutz* and surrounding fields. At 17:30 they found and neutralised 3 terrorists.[122] With permission, Hagay Charnis had evacuated his family around midday and saw "numerous cars with punctured tyres, some overturned and burnt, and also a body lying on the side of the road."[123]

Most of the residents evacuated the *Kibbutz* the following morning. Although the consequences of the attack on *Kibbutz* Gevim were minimised due to the early response of its security team, 2 *Kibbutz* Gevim residents were killed on 7 October 2023. Shlomi Davidovich, 50, had gone out for an early cycle ride. He was passing *Kibbutz* Mefalsim on route 232 when he heard the sirens go off. Leaving his bike on the verge he went into the nearest roadside rocket shelter. The shelter was attacked, which like all *Migunim*, has no door. When Hamas operatives threw in a grenade, Davidovich picked it up and threw it back, but was killed soon afterwards. Ziv Hajbi, 24 was one of almost 400 young people killed that morning at the Nova Festival.

IX. Moshav Yakhini

Yakhini is a religious *Moshav* located 3.7 miles from Gaza which was founded in 1950[124] by the Jewish Agency to initially house refugees from Iran and Kurdistan and then in 1952, it was re-established with immigrants from Yemen. It had a population of 730 at the last recorded census in 2022.[125] The *Moshav* produces organic pomegranates among other crops.[126] It also hosts a student village for students from nearby Sapir College.[127]

Rocket sirens sounded at 06:29 on 7 October 2023, causing all residents to run to their shelters and placing the security squad on alert. The team leader of the civilian security squad, Ariel Zehavi, was on holiday in Thailand but was able to coordinate its efforts by telephone.

At 07:38 a man and 2 women who had just escaped from the Nova Festival arrived at the main gate in their car, its tyres shredded out by gunfire. CCTV footage from the gate shows them entering a small rocket shelter just inside the *Moshav* gate. Seconds later, Ilan Avraham, left to get something from the boot of the car, he saw a white pickup truck with 9 terrorists turn off the highway towards the *Moshav*.[128] He ran to the shelter.

When the terrorists arrived, Avraham left the shelter and tried to persuade the terrorists he is alone.[129] However, the heavily-armed terrorists quickly found the 2 women – one of them Avraham's wife Ayala. Avraham was taken away and killed, his remains were found 18 days later.[130]

A terrorist then led the 2 women to a car outside the gate, intending to take them to Gaza. At that moment the 2 women ran away from the gate. The terrorist chased and fired at them. They climbed into the boot of a car and the gunman continued firing.[131] Moments later, 5 *MAGAV* border policemen arrived and engaged the terrorists.[132] One of the officers was wounded in the firefight but both women were rescued. The Border Police moved into the *Moshav* and continued to engage the intruders.

At about the same time, *Moshav* resident, Peleg Salem, an army major home for the weekend, took a handgun and went outside on hearing shots and shouting. He confronted terrorists near the main gate and was killed.[133]

At 07:45 another group of 5 terrorists infiltrated the *Moshav* through a side gate and made their way immediately to the home of security director, Zehavi. Although he was away, his family were not. The attackers shot his nephew, Yonatan Zehavi-Hajbi, who had come out onto the balcony. Unable to be evacuated due the lack of ambulances and their inability to reach the *Moshav* due to the chaos, he bled to death as his family attempted to treat his wounds.[134]

Two other civilians, Izhar Hajbi, a 60-year-old agro-business manager, and Elitzur Tzuriel Hajbi, 60 (no relation) were also shot and killed by terrorists.[135]

Another handful of border police arrived at the *Moshav* and joined those already there, who were fighting Hamas intruders alongside the village's civilian security team. One of the officers, Sgt Ravit Chana Assayag,

Terrorists arrive at the gates of Moshav Yakhini at 07:39.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

19, was killed as she led the clearing of a house on the *Moshav*. The IDF did not relieve the *MAGAV* border police forces and local civilian security squad until that evening, when they arrived to remove an unexploded grenade from the residence of *Ravshatz* Zahavi, where his nephew Yehonatan had been killed.[136]

X. Kibbutz Mefalsim

Kibbutz Mefalsim was founded in 1949, by Jewish immigrants from Argentina and Uruguay. (Mefalsim means "to clear a path"'). The community farms about 2,700 acres/1100 hectares and according to the 2022 census was home to a population of 1,057.[137] In 2017, *Kibbutz* Mefalsim played a role in lobbying the Israeli government to increase the number of entry permits given to Gazans, so that the latter, rather than Asian guestworkers, could be employed in the *Kibbutz* orchards. In 2018, it was the first *Kibbutz* to suffer major fire damage from incendiary balloons launched from Gaza.

On 7 October 2023, rocket alarms sounded at 06:30 and most *Kibbutz* residents went into their bomb shelters and safe rooms. Several houses were hit by rockets.[138] Shortly afterwards, the *Kibbutz* was attacked in four locations by 25 to 30 terrorists from Gaza, although no one was killed.[139] There is footage of these attacks both from CCTV and terrorist body cameras.

After breaching the fence, one group of attackers headed for the *Kibbutz* main gate while another went to destroy the generator. Detailed plans for the attack on the *Kibbutz* were found later on the body of one of the attackers.[140] The documents included maps which detailed the structure of the *Kibbutz*, in terms of size, number of residents, and location of key buildings like bomb shelters and communal dining spaces, and they highlighted the roads and routes to be used to access the *Kibbutz*.[141] Another document found was a 14-page operational plan for infiltrating the *Kibbutz*, labelled "top secret", in Arabic, and dated 15 June 2023. This document included maps and aerial photos of the town and a description of how an infiltration would be broken down into 2 teams, one to breach the fence and the other to provide covering artillery fire and gave instructions to take hostages "for negotiations".[142]

The head of the village's civilian security squad, Moshe Kaplan, realised that the *Kibbutz* was under attack when his car came under fire as it passed by the main gate. He immediately texted the security team that there was a shooting at the gate and drove home to pick up his weapon. Once armed, he went to check another gate on the southwest corner of the property, and discovered that intruders there were already inside the fence. He sent out a second message, this one read 'Terrorists in the *Kibbutz*!".[143]

The civilian security squad assembled and was joined by 7 residents who were IDF soldiers, home for the *Simchat Torah* holiday. At 06:56, just as the civil security squad was gathering near the armoury, terrorists who had arrived at the main gate opened fire, killing a civilian, on the Mefalsim 'bend' of Route 232. This was the site of approximately 60 deaths throughout the day. CCTV cameras show multiple civilians being shot at, and people seeking shelter in the bushes being hit with grenades.[144] (SEE Chapter 5.7 Nova and 5.8 Roue 232).

At 07:05, 2 members of the civilian security squad arrived at the main gate and engaged with 10 attackers in civilian clothing. As elsewhere, they believed their mission was to hold off the attackers long enough for the army to arrive, which they expected would be a matter of minutes. However, the resulting firefight lasted almost an hour, after which the defenders ran out of ammunition and had to retreat into the *Kibbutz*.

Beginning at 07:10, there was a simultaneous battle at a second gate, where a security squad member killed 1 of 3 attackers. At 08:00 another group of Hamas attackers blew up a pedestrian entrance into the *Kibbutz*, enabling more to penetrate into the *Kibbutz*. A number of them went to the village's main residential neighbourhood.[145]

Their first stop was a bomb shelter in which twelve Thai farmworkers had taken refuge from the rocket attack. (Before 7 October 2023, more than 5,000 Thai guestworkers worked on farms in the south of Israel[146] and another 20,000 elsewhere in the country. Thais made up the second largest group of hostages after Israeli nationals[147]).

At around 08:30 the terrorists rounded up the Thai workers – except for one who had hidden under a bed and took them outside. Then they ordered them at gunpoint to get onto a wagon attached to a tractor. The attackers drove the tractor and wagon to the main gate, but having cut off electrical power to the village, were unable to open it. The terrorists therefore left the *Kibbutz* by a pedestrian gate, pushing their Thai hostages in front of them, and then blew up the main gate with a rocket propelled grenade.[148]

Outside the gate they forced the Thais to sit on the ground. As the terrorists took their photographs and demanded their names in advance of taking them to Gaza, Israeli security forces approached through the forest.

One of the Thais saw them and shouted at his fellows to lie down. The Israeli commandos then opened fire, killing 1 of the terrorists. The rescued Thais were taken back into a safer area of the *Kibbutz*.[149] Although Mefalsim's contingent of Thai guestworkers survived, 39 others based in the region did not, and 31 were kidnapped to Gaza.

At 08:45 other terrorists walking through other residential neighbourhoods were engaged by the civilian security squad. At 09:25, almost 3 hours after the initial attack, a second wave of attackers reached the *Kibbutz*. Ten terrorists approached one of the side gates but were repulsed by the security squad. A few minutes later, a team of Israel's YAMAM Border Police and operators from the Shin Bet security service arrived at the *Kibbutz* from the main highway. It was they who rescued the kidnapped Thai workers.

By 10:30 the attack had been neutralised and the defenders, together with a newly arrived unit of Sayeret Matkal commandos, were able to begin a cordon and search operation for terrorists hiding in the *Kibbutz* and its farm. Most of the *Kibbutz* residents were shut in their safe rooms through the afternoon. The *Kibbutz* residents were ordered to evacuate and left by 9 October 2023. Over the next 3 days, the Israeli military searched house-to-house for any remaining "stay-behind" units of terrorists. They found the bodies of 8 attackers and killed a further 2 who had been hiding in the cow shed.[150]

Although no residents were killed within the gates of the *Kibbutz*, at least 4 people were killed, including cyclist Shlomi Davidovich (resident from *Kibbutz* Gevim), in a small rocket shelter right next to the Mefalsim's main gate. The Mefalsim 'Bend' of Route 232 also saw a significant number of the highway killings.

XI. Kibbutz Kfar Aza

Kfar Aza ("Village by Gaza") is a *Kibbutz* in the northern third of the Gaza Envelope, 1.4 miles from the Gaza border, and behind it, Gaza City. It sits on the main highway that runs between the villages of Sa'ad and Mefalsim and continues to the nearby town of Sderot. It was founded in 1951, by Jewish refugees from Egypt and Morocco. It is a secular community that became privatised in subsequent decades, though it still has a communal dining room.[151]

Kfar Aza is well known as a pioneer of automated irrigation systems. Like all the *Kibbutzim* in the region, Kfar Aza developed industrial enterprises to support its agricultural economy in years of poor harvests. Its primary industrial activities include a plastics factory (3 of whose employees were killed on 7 October) and a carbon-capture start up (whose deputy CEO was killed on 7 October).[152]

Like other border communities it was subject to frequent rocket and mortar attack from the early 2000s onwards, and then arson attacks by incendiary balloon.[153] In 2008, a resident, Jimmy Kdoshim was killed by a mortar bomb.[154]

Kfar Aza was prominent even among border *Kibbutzim* for the peace activism of its residents and hosted an annual festival during which kites were sent to Gaza with messages of peace.[155] (The 2023 festival was scheduled for the afternoon of 7 October).[156]

According to the latest census of 2022, Kfar Aza had a resident population of 787[157] but on 7 October this number was higher as the *Kibbutz* also housed foreign workers and students at nearby Sapir College.

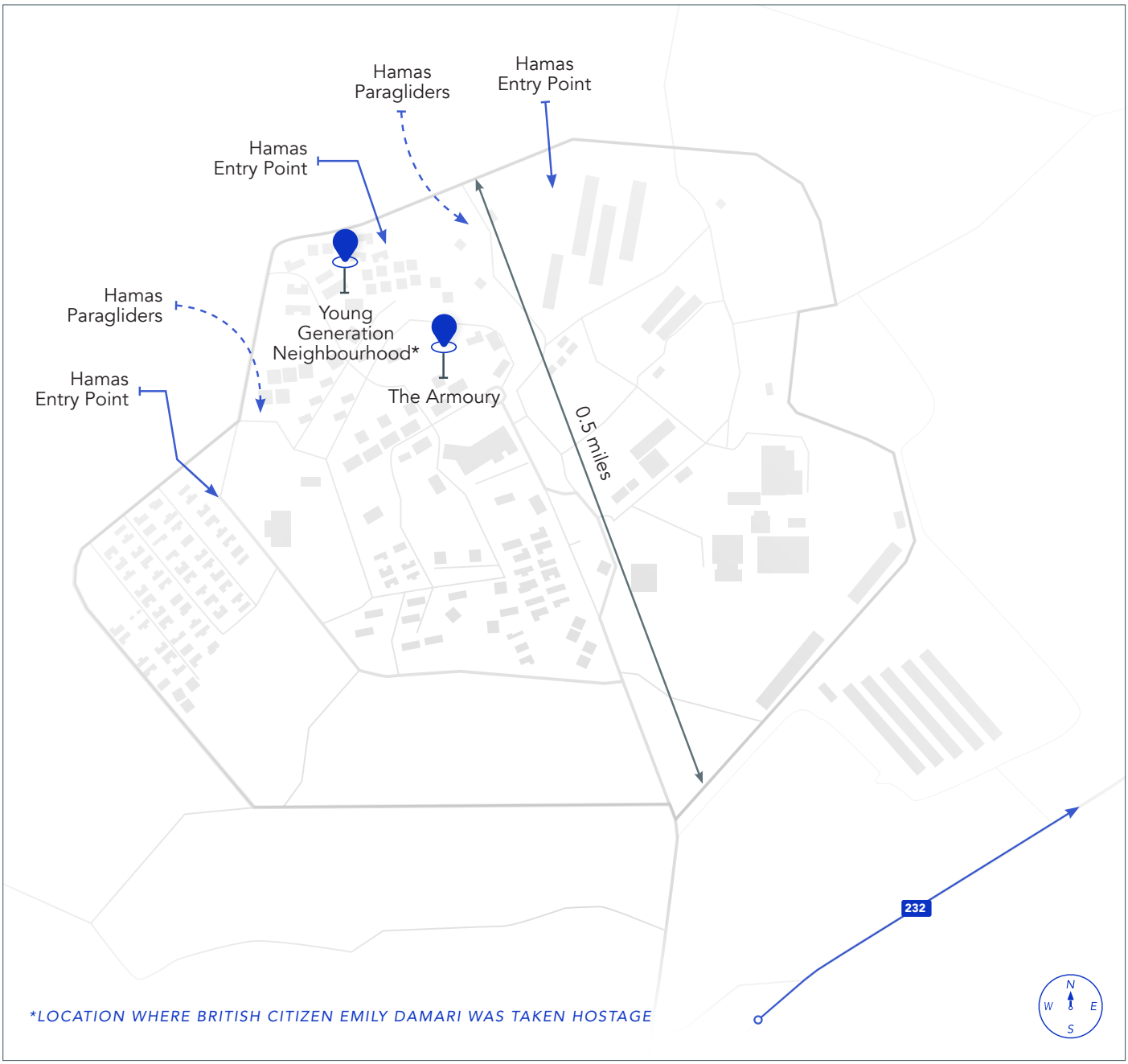
On 7 October 2023, 81 people were killed in the *Kibbutz*, of whom 62 were civilians, 1 was a first responder, and 18 were military, including a British-Israeli soldier – Sgt. 1st Class Yosef Guedalia. Additionally, 20 civilians were taken hostage, including British citizen Emily Damari. Kfar Aza was the *Kibbutz* with the second highest fatalities from the 7 October 2023 attack, and also the fourth highest location from where hostages were taken. On that day, the *Kibbutz* was attacked by an estimated 270-300 Hamas gunmen who came in paragliders, motorcycles and pickup trucks – some of them 'technicals' equipped with machine guns. They were joined after 3 hours by a second wave of several hundred Gazan civilians. At noon, a wave of looters entered the *Kibbutz*, arriving on foot and by bicycle – and on tractors which were then stolen to the Strip. During the seven-hour attack, 10% of the Kfar Aza's resident population were kidnapped or killed. It took IDF forces two days to retake the *Kibbutz* from the terrorists.[158]

Kfar Aza resident Roee Idan's last picture showing a terrorist landing on the Kibbutz via a motorised paraglider. Roy was killed in the attack. Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

On that morning, rocket alarms sounded at 06:29, moments before a heavy bombardment, prompting its residents, including members of its *Kitat Konenut* (civilian security squad), to go into *mamad*im (home shelters) within the 8-second interval. The alarms continued for 15 minutes, according to surviving residents, much longer and more intense than the usual rocket barrage. Media consultant Avidor Schwarzman, 37, recalled "We woke up from really loud explosions that felt right next to us. It didn't sound like interceptions by Iron Dome." He went straight to his safe room with his wife and child.[159] At 06:32, the first 6 Hamas attackers infiltrated the *Kibbutz*, arriving in pairs on three motorised paragliders.[160]

The landing of one of the Hamas aircraft was filmed by Roee Idan, a photojournalist for Ynet who had gone outside to shoot the rocket launches and Iron Dome interceptions.[161] The paraglider-born Hamas gunmen began immediately to attack the residents in their houses. When Idan returned to his house shortly afterwards, he found that his wife, Smadar Idan, had been shot dead through the window of the safe room where she was sheltering with her children. Idan left the house with the three children, carrying the 3-year-old, Avigail, but was shot dead in the street with her in his arms.[162] The two elder children fled back to the house, after witnessing their father's death, and hid in a closet in the safe room for the next twelve hours. Avigail Idan crawled out from under her father's body and took refuge at a neighbour's house. She

FIGURE 15 | MAP OF KFAR AZA



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was kidnapped shortly afterwards, together with the neighbours and taken as a hostage to Gaza.[163] She was released in the November 2023 ceasefire.

David (Kachko) Katzir, had set out in his jeep at around 06:25 to go on a day trip to the desert. Katzir called his wife when he saw the unusually large rocket barrage and told her to go to their shelter. His wife – Ayelet – asked David to "stay put and find shelter as well but knew he wouldn't listen." Instead, he tried to return home to Kfar Aza and was shot at the gate of the *Kibbutz* by the terrorists when still in his jeep.[164] In her safe room Ayelet texted her son, Yanai, that there was "incessant gun fire" and that she didn't know where his father, David, was.[165]

Soon after the landings of the paragliders, 3 drones and approximately 110 terrorists, who belonged to elite *Nukhba* commando units, crossed the open fields between the village and the breaches in the Gaza border fence, blasted open the main gate with explosives and made three other breaches in the 1.5 mile long fence around the community.[166]

After the initial explosions, resident Maor Moravia, had gone out onto his porch. "I started hearing gunshots from assault rifles from all over, from every direction. I knew that something weird and unusual was happening and told my wife and kids to go back into the safe room and I locked all the doors and windows." Once inside they received "a text message from the village administration saying that terrorists had entered the *Kibbutz*."[167] The Moravias could not lock the door of their safe room but tried to block it with furniture as messages came to the family's phones about deaths around the *Kibbutz* and the noise of gunshots and shouting outside grew louder.

At 06:45, Shahar Aviani (58), the *Kibbutz Ravshatz* (security coordinator), messaged the 13-member *Kitat Konenut* (civilian security squad) "This is not a drill. Please get to the armoury! There are terrorists in the *Kibbutz*."[168] Tal Eilon, the squad leader, and Uri Russo, both of whom lived near the armoury, took rifles and rushed to the Idan house but were shot dead en route. Uri Russo's gun was found with 6 missing bullets and around him lay the bodies of 6 dead terrorists. A few minutes later, squad member Ofir Libstein, the head of the Sha'ar HaNegev regional council, left his house for the armoury and was killed. His wife – Vered - in the family safe room had already heard that her mother had been killed. Worried about Libstein, she had her sons look for the location of his iPhone. It was almost next to the house. Gan Sousanna, a member of the *Kitat Konenut* said "His son found him with three hits on his body, and only three rounds left in his rifle."[169]

One son went outside, saw the father's body and realised that he had been killed.[170] The infiltrators, well informed of the *Kibbutz* geography and the addresses of its administrators and security officials, had made straight for his house.[171] Libstein's 19-year-old son, Natan, was killed elsewhere in the *Kibbutz* a little later on, as was Vered Libstein's mother, Bilha Epstein, who was killed at her front door.[172]

Another of the *Kibbutz*'s first victims was Modi Amir, who died just after 07:00 when the terrorists broke into his home. He instructed his two daughters and granddaughter to hide in the shower that he had built in their reinforced safe room. He decided to stay in the main section of the room, knowing he was unable to lock the door, and hoping that the terrorists would believe he was there alone. He body blocked the bathroom door, and his daughters and granddaughter were undetected, and evacuated over 24 hours later.[173] Aran Goren, 33, was also found in the safe room, at his mother Tova's house, both are believed to have died at 07:00.[174]

Four other squad members including the *Ravshatz* Aviani arrived at the armoury within 5 minutes. They were ambushed by Hamas infiltrators who had made immediately for the area, after breaching the perimeter fence, and who fired rifles and RPGs from a building that overlooked the armoury.[175] Deputy security coordinator, Avi Hindi, 38, was killed.[176] Surviving members of the civilian security squad would later testify that this was clearly a planned ambush. They found a bag on one of the dead terrorists which contained an aerial photo of the *Kibbutz*, a detailed map showing the "exact location of everything", including where the *Ravshatz* lived and the armoury was located, so they knew where to go to "paralyse the *Kibbutz*."[177] During the first 20 minutes of the attack, half the security squad was killed. At approximately 07:40, the remaining members of the security squad decided to split up.

Avichai Brodutch got to the *Kibbutz* emergency room, in the same building as the communal dining area, in the centre of the *Kibbutz*. There he was wounded by an RPG. Another member, Sergei Yankelovich, tried to reach him but was also shot and wounded. (The pair were rescued a couple of hours later by two police officers).

At the same time as the ambush of the security squad, another group of gunmen broke into the house of the Kutz family. Livnat, 49, a consultant who had established the *Kibbutz*' well-known crafts workshop, her husband Aviv Kutz, 53, a graphic designer, and their three children, Yiftach ,14, Yonatan 16, and Rotem, 18, were all sheltering in the safe room.[178] The gunmen forced their way into the room and shot them all, their bodies were found together on the safe room bed, hands clasped.[179] Aviv Katz, had founded the *Kibbutz*' annual "Kites for Hope"[180] event in 2018, after the first incendiary kite and balloon attacks from Gaza. The family's peace kite which he planned to launch later that day was found on the floor of the living room after the attacks.[181]

One member of the security squad, Yaniv Ohana, a drummer, was able to get to the armoury without being ambushed, having left his wife, Yula and 9 and 12 -year-old children in the safe room of his house.[182] While he was driving to the armoury, Hamas troops broke into the house. Yula Ohana and the children hid under the bed in the safe room. The intruders forced their way in but did not see them. One even sat on the bed. When they left, they set the house alight. Yula Ohana and the children jumped out of the window of the burning house, hid in bushes and then when the gunmen moved away, ran to the *Kibbutz* warehouse where they hid for the rest of the day. Ohana came back to the house from the armoury, saw a group of gunmen and opened fire. He killed two or three of them but was wounded in the hand.[183] With the security squad effectively neutralised, the first wave attackers had free rein of the village.

Around 07:20, armed men wearing tiger-striped military uniforms and green Hamas headbands moved into the "grandmother's neighbourhood" of the village. An hour later they were seen approaching the house of Shay-Li Atari and her husband Yahav Wiener, 36. The pair had hidden in their safe room and closed its window screen and door on hearing gunfire and shouts in Arabic. Wiener, a filmmaker, messaged a friend that gunmen were outside their safe room window. Shayli, a singer-songwriter, recalled afterwards, "We heard the terrorists outside our house, so my husband and I switched to silent mode and spoke in mime. We agreed with our gestures that if the terrorists came in, he would hold the door and I would run away with Shia, our month-old baby."[184] As the infiltrators tried to climb in through the window, Atari fled through the front door with their baby, who was asleep at the time. The Hamas troops then threw several grenades through a window. The explosions killed Yahav Wiener and set the house alight. Shay-Li Atari ran with her baby to a neighbour's house.

Young Generation neighbourhood, Kfar Aza, August 2024.
Source: image taken on Lord Roberts' visit to Kfar Aza in August 2024.

"I knocked and there was no answer. I hid in the bushes and then behind doors. I heard them approaching again and entered the warehouse. The shots continued and I put garden planters over us." The baby began to cry, drawing the gunmen. "I ran outside and knocked on the door of neighbours who saw me thanks to the cameras." Atari and her baby took refuge in their safe room along with their 3 children."[185]

Resident, Idan Schlesinger, was able to drive out of the *Kibbutz* to the Kfar Aza junction on the main highway. There he encountered security squad members from *Kibbutz* Sa'ad which had successfully repelled an attack on their *Kibbutz*. Members of Sa'ad's squad rushed to Kfar Aza, arriving shortly after 09:45. A pair of police officers also arrived on a motorcycle, who first went to the situation room to check on the two wounded security squad members and to receive information about the location of terrorists in the *Kibbutz*.[186]

One of the Sa'ad civil guard, Hagiv Hacmon, was also a volunteer *Hatzalah* EMT. When he entered the *Kibbutz*, he saw bodies "scattered on the grass."[187] He was able to treat multiple wounded people, including a father whose hands were injured, and was "propelled through the air" when a device exploded on his safe room door. He had been gripping the door handle to keep the terrorists from getting in.[188] Hacmon spent the rest of his day treating as many wounded as he could and returned home to Sa'ad at 03:00 on 8 October.

Around 08:30, the first IDF unit to respond to the attack on Kfar Aza arrived at the main gate: an armoured personnel carrier with approximately 10 soldiers from the Golani Brigade, who after 30 minutes seized an RPG.[189]

Resident, Elinor Bariakh, hid in her family's safe room with her husband, three children (ages 19, 17, and 14), and their dog during the attack. Residents tracked

the attackers' movements through WhatsApp groups, learning they were moving from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. "We were lucky; our house was far from where they entered," she said. Advice in the group, like breaking door handles to secure shelters, proved crucial. "My husband managed it, but many couldn't, and it led to deaths," she noted. Bariakh described how the WhatsApp groups were then infiltrated with messages sent by attackers using stolen phones to lure others. When the attackers reached the Bariakh home, she "saw their shadows and heard them trying to break in." Her husband and sons armed themselves with knives. The attackers moved on without breaching their safe room. The family was rescued by IDF soldiers at 10:30 and evacuated by bus at 14:30.[190]

At 09:30, a second wave of attackers, over 260 terrorists, arrived at the *Kibbutz* in 5 vans and 15 motorcycles, including civilians from Gaza. They arrived at a gate on the northern side of the *Kibbutz*, the back gate, adjacent to its "Young Generation" neighbourhood for single residents aged 18-35. After the gate was breached the attackers went straight to this neighbourhood. 11 of the 37 residents of the "Young Generation" neighbourhood were killed and 7 were abducted to Gaza. At 10:30, two teams from Sayeret Matkal and a Duvdevan unit entered the *Kibbutz* and tried to engage the second wave of attackers but were unable to reach the kidnapped civilians; 6 soldiers died in the attempt.[191]

As resident, Bar Kislev's apartment, in the 'Young Generation' neighbourhood, overlooks the back fence of the *Kibbutz*, he witnessed the entire infiltration and many of the abductions. He described the group of attackers as including 14 -16 year olds and older men in their 60s, as well as men of standard military age (20s-40s), who were "all armed to the teeth with AK-47s, RPGs, grenades, grenade launchers and Israeli M16s that they [must have] stolen from an outpost."[192] The terrorists gathered under Kislev's apartment, so he was able to watch them carefully through the shutters on his safe room window. He saw the younger members of the group open their backpacks and pass out ammunition, following which an order was given in Arabic and the terrorists ran and began breaking into apartments one by one. Kislev recalls the messages of the young people's WhatsApp group coming in "like dominoes," each saying "They're trying to break in." His apartment was broken into too, but he was able to hold his safe room door shut against an attacker's attempt to infiltrate. Leaving Kislev in the safe room, the terrorist set up a war-room in his kitchen, opened snacks, made coffee and smoked cigarettes, and every 10 minutes would try and open the safe room door again.[193]

Kislev, as well as Hadar Haniya and Nadav Alon, two other residents of the young neighbourhood, all testified to hearing terrorists shouting "Allahu akbar", "Massacre the Jews!" and "Everyone out, Jews, everyone out!"[194]

Ofir Libstein's 17-year-old son, Natan Libstein, who lived in that neighbourhood[195] was shot soon after it was attacked. He telephoned his mother Vered Libstein. "He told us he was shot in his hip through the shelter door, we told him how to do a tourniquet and spent two hours with him on the phone until his battery died. We asked him to hang on until help will arrive."[196] His body was recovered a few days after the attack.

A young neighbourhood resident, Yuri Levin, had arisen at 6 to go for a run with a friend. He decided at the last minute not to join the running group, all of whom were killed in Sderot.[197] Levin was hiding from the terrorists, under his bed, when they used grenades to breach his door and start a fire in his house. Unable to breathe from the smoke from the fire, he tried to escape through his bedroom window. As he was partially through, he saw three of the attackers. He raised his hands to show that he was unarmed, and they pulled him to the ground, shoved a Kalashnikov into his face and pushed him onto the street. Fearing he would die if he was kidnapped, thinking he only had a "10% chance of survival [if taken hostage]" , he made a run for it. Barefoot, and only in his boxers, he managed to escape and hid in a large bush for 3 hours. IDF soldiers found him and took him to a friend's safe room where he remained until 08:00 on 8 October.[198]

One of the 7 who was abducted from the Young Generation neighbourhood to Gaza was British-Israeli Emily Damari. She was messaging her brothers – also British citizens – two of whom lived elsewhere in the *Kibbutz*, as did her mother, Mandy. Emily was in the safe room, which was her bedroom, from approximately 08:00, along with Gali Berman (who was also taken hostage, along with his twin Ziv). Emily's apartment is close to the security fence. The exact timing of Emily's abduction is unknown but at 10:24 she sent her last message on WhatsApp to her brothers. Emily was shot in the hand during her abduction, which might have happened when the attackers shot her dog, who she was holding in her arms. The dog was found in Emily's room later. She also suffered shrapnel wounds to her leg. Emily's wounds were reported by hostages who were released during the November 2023 ceasefire,

who had seen her in the tunnels in Gaza. At around 10:45 or 11:00, Bar Kislev testified he saw "Emily's car drive in the direction of a side street [and] enter the neighbourhood". He saw "one of the terrorists driving the car," and it then "raced out the back gate." This is the moment that it is understood that Emily was abducted to Gaza - in her own car – along with the Berman twins.[199]

At 10:10, Yotam Haim, 28, another resident of the Young Generation neighbourhood, messaged his family that the attackers were inside his house and shooting at his safe room door. The terrorists lit a fire in Yotam's flat; at 10:44 he said that he was afraid to leave the room as "everything was burning" and by 10:47 he said the fire had started to enter the safe room. At 10:49 he was taken hostage. Yotam survived for 65 days in Hamas captivity. After managing to escape with fellow hostages Alon Shamriz, 26, also from Kfar Aza, and Samer Talalka, he died in an incident of friendly fire by the IDF on 15 December 2023 in Gaza.[200]

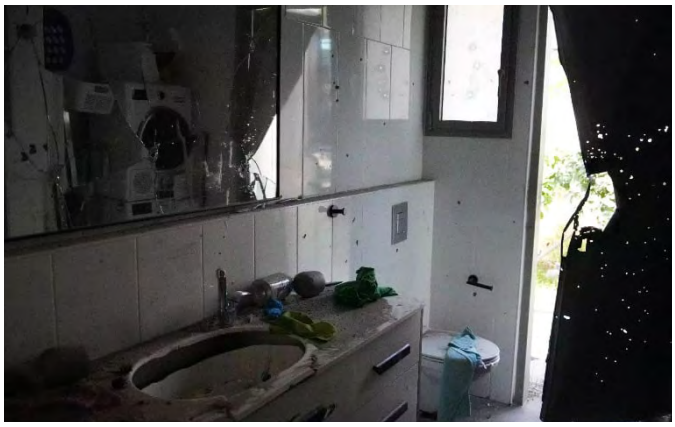
Aviad Edri, 31, was on his roof when he saw the terrorists enter through the fence. He went to his safe room but as the door was not working, he told his sister he was going to Alon Shamriz's flat. When the terrorists took Alon hostage, Aviad was hiding under the bed in the safe room and was not seen. At 11:00 he spoke to his father and assured him he was alright, but when he went to close the safe room door he was spotted and shot. Aviad was considered missing for a week until his body was identified. It was later revealed that his body was buried without its head, which was found weeks later (it is not known whether decapitation happened pre or postmortem). His family was not informed to protect them, but he was reburied 5 months later with it.[201]

At approximately 11:15 Sivan Elkabetz and Naor Hasidim, a married couple, were killed inside their home in the Young Generation neighbourhood, shot to death from heavy gunfire. In order to keep her family safe, Sivan disconnected her phone. In her last message she asked if everyone was ok. Sivan and Naor had tried to hide under their bed in their safe room. Footage of their house shows the walls and ceilings covered with bullet holes and the floors covered with blood.[202]

Elsewhere, in the centre of the *Kibbutz* at 10:30-11:00, gunmen used an explosive charge to blow open the back door of the house of Nadav Goldstein and Chen Almog. The couple were hiding in their safe room with their 4 children. The Almog-Goldsteins had barricaded themselves in their 20-year-old daughter Yam's bedroom, which served as the safe room of their

The inside of the house of Sivan Elkabetz and Naor Hasidim both killed during the attack. Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

home. Hamas gunmen screaming "al Yahud" (Yahud is the Arabic word for Jews) entered the house and Nadav Goldstein, the father, who tried to brandish a piece of the bed as a weapon, was immediately shot dead. Four or five terrorists entered the safe room and yelled at Chen and her 4 children, Yam and her siblings aged 17, 11 and 9, to get dressed as they were in their pyjamas and leave the house. The family stepped over and around Nadav's body as they exited and Yam fainted. At the same time, the terrorists who'd been rifling through Yam's bedroom found an IDF service shirt and began shouting. It belonged to Yam who was off duty that morning and had 2 months left of her service. Two of the siblings were already outside, as Chen tried to revive Yam by splashing water on her face. Chen ran outside to check on the safety of her children and saw them standing with a group of terrorists. She then went back inside to Yam and found that she had been shot in the face. There was a "hole in her cheek and she was gasping her last



The Goldstein-Almog's bathroom where Yam was shot and killed. Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

breaths. There was an exit hole on the other side and her head was bleeding profusely."[203] The intruders then abducted the mother and 3 surviving children to Gaza where they were driven to a courtyard of a residential block and into a hole in the ground that led to a tunnel. The family was released five weeks later in the November 2023 ceasefire.

At 11:30, Hamas militants broke into the house of Israeli-Canadian Netta Epstein, 22 and his Israeli-Italian fiancée Irene Shavit, 21. The couple were hiding in their bedroom, which was also the safe room of the two-room bungalow. Epstein had already received messages informing him that his uncle and grandmother had been killed elsewhere in the *Kibbutz* (the latter was shot when she went out to her mobility scooter to get her phone.) The militants tossed in a grenade which exploded on the far side of the bedroom without injuring the couple. The second grenade they threw was close enough to batter and singe both of them. The attackers rolled rather than threw the third grenade.[204] "I remember watching [it] rolling along toward us" recalled Shavit afterwards. Netta Epstein, who had recently completed his military service and was studying to be a football coach, threw himself on top of it. Shavit testified that the explosion did not kill him immediately, but the gunmen fired into his body to complete the task.[205]

With Epstein's body blocking the doorway into the safe room, the gunmen threw a fourth grenade into it, one that ignited a fire. After arguing in Arabic and taking beers from the fridge, the intruders then left. Shavit was able to extinguish the fire.[206] She then hid behind and under Epstein's corpse. She remained there unmoving for the next 5 hours, even as militants returned to the house on several occasions first to loot it and then to use it as a firing position against IDF soldiers.[207] Shavit was rescued from the house by IDF troops in the early afternoon. She and her rescuers immediately came under fire from a sniper on the rooftops, and after that threat was neutralised were trapped by a red alert and rocket fire. Shavit was evacuated that night. Ongoing fighting in the *Kibbutz* meant that Epstein's body could not be removed for another 3 days. Netta Epstein's cousin, Nitzan Libstein, was also killed on 7 October in the *Kibbutz*, after terrorists entered his apartment at approximately 12:15 and shot him in the leg, through the safe room door. He wrapped his own tourniquet and managed to escape through the safe room window and run. However, he died from his wounds and blood loss sometime later.[208]

Image from the safe room of Neta Epstein, who was killed by a grenade during the attack. Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

Hadar and Itay Berdichevsky, both 30, were shot dead inside their home. The position of their bodies suggested to investigators they had been in the middle of changing the nappies of their 10-month-old twins when the gunmen broke into the house.[209] The babies survived for 14 hours before they were rescued.

Nira Ronen, 86, was on the phone to her daughters, Nitzan and Chen, at 09:10 when she suddenly heard the sound of gunfire. Her daughters tried to calm her down, asking her to breathe and stay quiet but a few seconds later the call was disconnected. Nira could not be reached thereafter. Nira was killed in her apartment with her Filipina carer, Angelyn Aguirre, when gunmen broke into it and shot them both.

One of the gunmen left a note in Ronen's daybook which said in Arabic "Izz ad-Din Al-Qassam Brigades passed through here and removed the Zionist occupiers. You will die, and you will not stay here."[210] Angelyn's sister stated on "9 October 2023, I received a phone call from Nitzan one of Nira Ronen's daughters that Nira and Angie were found dead in their shelter".

Neta Portal, 22, saw 10 to 15 terrorists "standing on a car with a big machine gun, smoking cigarettes and laughing like they were on vacation," and wanted to stay inside her safe room with her boyfriend, but when a grenade was thrown into her room, they both had to jump out of the window. The terrorists shot indiscriminately, "like [Neta and Santiago] were nothing," she was hit 6 times but managed to be carried to safety by her boyfriend, where they hid under a pile of rubbish, until rescued by Neta's father, a policeman.[211]

Three members of the Peled family, Izhar, 62, a retired border police officer, Gila, 59, and their son Daniel, 28, were all killed during the attack at the *Kibbutz*, when

terrorists entered the family home. Daniel held the door of the safe room closed until he was unable to any longer.[212]

Eitan Ziv and his wife Tami Peleg Ziv, 74 and 72, were also killed during the attack. In an unusual coincidence of fate, Tami's brother was killed on the eve of *Simchat Torah* during the Yom Kippur War and Eitan and Tami's daughter was also killed on *Simchat Torah* in 2004, in a terror attack in Egypt.[213]

Amit Soussana, a lawyer, 39, was abducted from her house and taken by foot to Gaza by 5 armed men. CCTV footage of her struggling to escape, kicking and flailing at her captors despite having her arms tied behind her back, was broadcast widely in the aftermath of the attack.[214] Soussana was released from captivity after 54 days. She testified to the UN Security Council that as a hostage she was "chained by the ankles with a metal shackle, unable to move, and forced to beg to use the bathroom." She was also forced into a shower and sexually assaulted. Amit was moved to a different location, watched over by different captors who hung her upside down, beat her and humiliated her.[215]

Since her release, Agam Goldstein-Almog, also recounted that several female hostages confided in her about being sexually assaulted by their captors, including one woman who was raped at gunpoint by a Hamas guard.[216] A number of female residents were sexually abused before being killed while others were sexually mutilated afterwards. According to a report by the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (SRSG-SVC), Pramila Patten, "The recurring pattern of female victims found undressed, bound, and shot – indicates that sexual violence, including potential sexualised torture, or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, may have occurred."[217]

The pattern of killings and abductions remained the same for at least 3 hours. In many places the infiltrators fired RPGs at front doors to get into locked houses, often setting houses alight in the process.[218] Nearly half of the village's houses were destroyed or severely damaged by the attack.[219] The worst affected area of the *Kibbutz* was the young adult's neighbourhood – the area from which British-Israeli hostage, Emily Damari, was abducted. All of its houses were wrecked by gunfire and most of them were burned.

At noon, a wave of looters entered the *Kibbutz*, arriving on foot and by bicycle – and on tractors which were then stolen to strip. Some of the infiltrators used fire rather than guns or blades in their attacks on civilians at Kfar Aza. Davidi Ben-Zion, deputy commander of IDF Unit 71, paratroopers' battalion, described that many members of the *Kibbutz* were burned by Molotov cocktails.[220] Ellay Golan, a doctor, Ariel Golan, a social worker, and their 18-month-old daughter Yael were hiding in their safe room, when attackers used a burning tyre to smoke them out. When that failed, they ignited a butane gas cylinder in order to set the house alight.[221] Running barefoot, surrounded by thick smoke they tried to escape their burning house. Ellay described the heat as being "like a flamethrower all around us". Seeing the house collapsing the attackers left, and the family was able to escape the flames through the bathroom window and run into the agricultural fields of the *Kibbutz*. They were able to get to the main gate of Kfar Aza where the IDF picked them up. A soldier at the scene said their clothes had been burned away or into their skin.[222] Second-and third-degree burns covered 60% of Ellay's body, 45% % of her husband's and 30% of her baby's. Yael was put into an induced coma for 8 days. Ellay, the most severely injured of the three, was put into an induced coma for 58 days.[223]

Ram Itamari 56, a transportation manager, and his wife Lili Itamari ,63, a teacher were killed after their home was set on fire whilst they were inside.[224] The house was burned so thoroughly and at such a high temperature that when the authorities went in, they could not find any traces of their bodies. Their deaths were confirmed 3 weeks later after archaeologists from the national Antiquities Authority examining ashes and debris found slivers of bone that could be DNA tested.[225]

Several peace activists and residents involved in improving conditions for Gazans were killed or kidnapped during the attack. One who survived was 71-year-old peace activist and photographer, Batia Holin. She and her husband, Nahum, took refuge in their safe room when prolonged rocket alarms signalled danger. On the way, Batia saw three armed

The remains of the Golan Family safe room (also baby Ariel's bedroom) after terrorists set it alight. Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

men in her garden through her kitchen window. "If they had stood at a different angle, they would have seen me," she said.[226] From a security camera linked to her phone, Holin saw terrorists on her roof and heard screams, gunfire, and explosions as they attacked neighbours. Seven months earlier, Holin met amateur photographer "Machmud" virtually in a Facebook group and they spent several months sending each other photographs of daily life on both sides of the fence.[227] This led to a joint exhibition at a gallery in *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz entitled *Oz Banegev* "Between Us".[228] On 7 October, she received a call from him using an Israeli number. At first, she thought he was concerned for her, but he instead asked about Israeli soldiers. Realising his intent, she hung up. Holin and her husband endured 26 hours in their shelter without food, water, or electricity before being rescued by IDF troops.[229]

IDF forces began to enter the *Kibbutz* in small numbers at 13:10,[230] and then in larger numbers from 14:00, some 6 hours into the attack. Intense fighting continued over 36 hours as the forces were unable to close the various entrances to the *Kibbutz*, which allowed the terrorists to continue to infiltrate.[231] Eighteen IDF soldiers, many from elite units, were killed in the battle to retake Kfar Aza. One of these soldiers was British-Israeli Yosef Guedalia, who returned to the *Kibbutz* 4 times under fire to rescue residents. It was on his "fourth journey, his armoured vehicle was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade and he was shot as he fled." His body was nearly taken hostage by the attackers but this was thwarted.[232]

To help the IDF's efforts to evacuate residents to safety, Gali Eilon, 15, started a makeshift operations room from her house. Her father Tal, had been a member of the civil guard and was killed at the initial ambush at the armoury. She took on the role of dispatcher and began collecting the locations of the injured residents, and shared up-to-date information from her mobile phone with the soldiers. She also texted the residents when IDF solders were near their houses, and sent recordings of their voices so that they would recognise them and know it was safe to open their doors".[233]

It was not until the early hours of Sunday 8 October, after 03:30, that the security forces achieved sufficient control of the village to begin the evacuation of its residents. Shai and Hava Hermesh, described the evacuation as the military "leading them on a mile-long "death march" as gun battles raged around them."[234] By then many residents had been confined to their safe rooms for up to 30 hours, often without food, water, and light. At least half the *Kibbutz* lost power during the attack: the cables were cut at some point and a back-up generator failed to switch on. Omer their son was injured yet managed to upload a Facebook post but he died soon afterwards.

The last family to be evacuated was the Ades family, who lived in the house adjacent to the one that 15 terrorists had made into a headquarters. The family – Tomer, Amit and their 3 children aged 7,5 and 1, managed to stay undetected in their safe room for 35 hours, 15 of them without electricity or communications. Whilst there, their 4 year old, turned 5 as it was his birthday on 8 October. Their rescue took so long as the IDF believed the house to be similarly occupied by terrorists. When rescued the family saw the ZAKA truck with piles of dead bodies in body bags.[235]

It took another 4 days to completely clear the village and its surrounding farms of attackers. Due to the scale of damage across the *Kibbutz*, the Israeli government has estimated that it will be at least 2 years before residents will be able to return to Kfar Aza. Damage includes burnt and bullet ridden buildings, as well as the total collapse of other buildings by tank shells when soldiers had to fire upon houses to collapse them with terrorists inside.[236]

XII. Kibbutz Sa'ad

Kibbutz Sa'ad ("assistance" in Hebrew) is situated 2.3 miles from the Gaza border. It is one of a handful of religious communities in the Western Negev, set up in June 1947. Its founders were locally-born members of *Bnei Akiva*, a Jewish youth organisation that grew out of the *Mizrachi* Religious Zionist movement, and is devoted to *Torah v'Avoda* – "God's Teachings and Labour". Most of the original settlement was destroyed during the 1948 Arab-Israel war and it was rebuilt in 1950.[237]

The *Kibbutz* had a population of 838 as recorded in the 2022 census.[238] It is a major agricultural producer, growing potatoes, avocados, almonds, flowers, citrus fruit, and a quarter of Israel's carrot crop. It is also the site of a geriatric home, girls' boarding school, a therapeutic petting zoo, a kosher catering service, a popcorn production plant and the Syfan factory that makes recyclable shrink wrap for foods.[239]

Sa'ad is sited near *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza, one of the worst affected communities on 7 October 2023. After 2005 it became a frequent target for Hamas rocket attacks. In

April 2011, Hamas fired an anti-tank missile at a yellow school bus just outside its gates, mortally wounding a teenage passenger.[240]

On the morning of 7 October 2023, *Kibbutz* Sa'ad was hosting scores of guests from around the country who had come to celebrate the religious holiday of *Simchat Torah*. Most of the residents of *Kibbutz* Sa'ad were already awake when the rocket sirens went off at 06:30 because they were preparing for services. One rocket did penetrate the roof of a 92-year-old resident but her and her nanny were unharmed as they were on the floor below.[241] All of the *Kibbutz*' gates were closed for the holiday, enhancing its security during the subsequent attack. No casualties were recorded at *Kibbutz* Sa'ad.

After the attack, Israeli officials found documents on Hamas militants which detailed their plans for the attack on Sa'ad and included comprehensive maps giving the exact time to target (7 minutes). The attackers were ordered to breach the perimeter fence, then drive to the guard booth at the main entrance to the *Kibbutz* and destroy it. They were then to take over the new school on the *Kibbutz* along with the dining hall, to which hostages would be taken. Some were to be taken to Gaza, others held in Israel. The orders, analysed by various organisations , revealed extensive detailed knowledge of the *Kibbutz*, including the size of the security team and the military divisions responsible for the *Kibbutz*' security and protection.[242]

The acting head of security, Hagiv Hacmon, "woke up at 06:26 to a burst of rocket fire that continued for 30-40 minutes,"[243] with one rocket falling in the parking area around his house.[244] At 06:45 Hacmon assembled the security team and issued them with weapons from the armoury. The 13-man squad split into smaller groups and took positions around the *Kibbutz* perimeter. A member of the squad telephoned the IDF facility at Nahal Oz only to find out that the base itself was under heavy attack and that its operations room had fallen.

A badly-wounded Lt-col arrived at the gate from Mefalsim in a car perforated with bullet holes and alerted the *Kibbutz* to the presence of terrorists on the highway from Sa'ad to Sderot. As members of the squad went out to close off the highway, cars full of escapees from the Nova Music Festival arrived at the *Kibbutz* gates and asked for the road to be opened. The security team explained that the highway was not safe, invited them to shelter in the *Kibbutz*, and gave medical treatment to the wounded in the *Kibbutz* clinic.[245]

Sara Jackson, 88, recalled "I woke up early to go to the synagogue, and suddenly red alerts went off one after the other. I go outside, and suddenly I see a group of young people before I can think. Four boys and [a girl] who escaped from Nova, came to the house and locked the front door, pushing a heavy chair in front of it." The escapees from the Nova Festival took knives from the kitchen and hid with Jackson, a Holocaust survivor, in her rocket shelter.[246]

There was considerable fighting at the front of the *Kibbutz* due to the position of Sa'ad in relation to the neighbouring *Kibbutzim* of Kfar Aza and Alumim, and the roadside bomb shelters of Route 232 which were targeted as Nova escapees attempted to hide inside. At 12:50 a group of terrorists fired on the entrance to Sa'ad but were prevented from entering by a team of soldiers and policemen, who suffered some injuries which were treated inside the *Kibbutz*. Around 13:00, the defenders of the *Kibbutz* were aided by the arrival of a lone tank from the 401st Brigade, which fired on a group of terrorists surrounding the entrance to the *Kibbutz*. The tank then left and continued south to *Kibbutz* Be'eri and the site of the Nova Festival near *Kibbutz* Reim.[247] No attackers made it into the *Kibbutz* and the first wave was not followed by reinforcements from Gaza or the other attacked *Kibbutzim*.

Some Sa'ad residents subsequently refer to the *events of the day as a* "miracle", because of the apparent unlikelihood of its surviving the day largely unscathed while both of its neighbouring *Kibbutzim* suffered heavy losses.[248] Its fellow religious *Kibbutz*, Alumim was however the scene of many killings. The *Kibbutz* was evacuated on 8 October 2023.

XIII. Kibbutz Nahal Oz

Kibbutz Nahal Oz ("mighty stream") is located in the north-west Negev, 0.8 miles from the Gaza border. The *Kibbutz* was founded in 1951 and in its early years it was frequently raided by fedayeen guerrillas. It was the country's first Nahal security settlement – spearheaded by the Noar Halutzi Lohem or NAHAL "fighting pioneer youth" programme, which combined Israel's mandatory military service with a community service programme of social volunteerism and agriculture. Later, Nahal Oz was incorporated into the civilian United *Kibbutz* Movement, linked with the Mapai socialist political party.[249] Through the 1990s, "older members of Nahal Oz used to regularly drive a few miles west, to shop in Gaza City's markets", and until the 7 October 2023 attacks, some remained in touch with friends on the other side of the border

fence.[250] Nahal Oz' location meant that since 2002, the village was the target of frequent bombardments from Gaza by rocket and mortar.[251]

Nahal Oz is a secular *Kibbutz*. Its farms grow carrots, cotton and wheat and it also has a dairy farm.[252] Its population at the last recorded census in 2022 was 479.[253]

On 7 October 2023, 14 civilians died, 1 police officer and 3 soldiers. Nine hostages were taken. Seven were civilians and 2 were the dead bodies of 1 civilian and 1 military personnel.

During the fighting in the morning, a number of volunteers and retirees drove down to the *Kibbutz* from cities as far away as Tel Aviv. Among them were 2 former generals. Organized IDF troops arrived after 6.5 hours of fighting on the *Kibbutz*. The IDF estimated that a total of 100 gunmen infiltrated the village on 7 October but never achieved complete control of it.[254] The attack had been coordinated by the Shujaiya Battalion under the authority of Commander Wessem Farhat, who also orchestrated the attack on the neighbouring military base.[255]

The attack began at 06:29, when *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz was hit with rocket and mortar shells from Gaza. No alarm sounded for the initial mortar shells because they arrived too quickly to trigger rocket detection systems. However, Red Alert sirens quickly followed to signal the incoming rocket barrage.[256] The shelling wrecked several houses and destroyed the *Kibbutz* dairy barn.[257] At 06:45, the entire *Kibbutz* lost electric power. Residents then heard automatic weapon fire, at first in the distance and then close at hand. The intensity of the mortar bombardment soon began to diminish.

Resident Amir Tibon, a journalist, noted that as the barrage eased "the gunfire was growing closer. And then it was inside our neighbourhood, right near the window of our house. We heard shouting in Arabic and immediately understood what was going on." Tibon received a message from a neighbour saying "Hamas has invaded the *Kibbutz*."[258]

Moments later Tibon "heard bullets smashing through our living room window", and soon afterwards he heard a man outside the window of his safe room ordering others to break into houses. As the Tibon family kept as silent as they could in the darkness of the safe room, Amir Tibon received a message from a journalist colleague telling him that there was a widespread attack from Gaza and that he should stay where he was. He then got messages from one neighbour after another "that terrorists were entering their homes."[259]

Tibon and other residents assumed that help would soon come from the adjacent IDF outpost, which on normal days housed some 200 soldiers. However, it was attacked simultaneously with the *Kibbutz*.

The killing of civilians started soon after the initial infiltration. Yonchi Brosh and his wife Shoshi, 85 and 84, were in their safe room at 06:50 when gunmen fired through its window (the steel shutter was not down), wounding them with shrapnel. The infiltrators then broke into the house, and fired several magazines' worth of bullets and threw a grenade which did not explode. The gunmen identified the safe room door and fired through it, hitting Shoshi Brosh twice and killing her. Yonchi Brosh opened the safe room door to find a gunman standing outside. The gunman fired at him, wounding him in the hand, and then left, apparently believing that both residents were dead. Brosh was able to message for help. At 09:00 members of the security squad and soldiers arrived, confirmed that his wife was dead and took him to a neighbour's house where they treated his wound.[260]

Shlomo Ron, 85, a retired locksmith and co-founder of the *Kibbutz*, was shot dead in his living room. He had told his wife, 2 daughters, and grandchildren to remain in the safe room and then sat outside it in an easy chair. The infiltrators who broke into the house shot him immediately. As he had intended, the attackers presumed the rest of the house was empty and left.[261]

At 07:04, Ari Yefet, a member of the *Kitat Konenut* (civilian security squad), went out into his garden. He immediately saw 5 motorcycles outside the fence, each carrying 2 armed men. As some of the gunmen came through the back gate of the *Kibbutz*, Yefet phoned the village's deputy security coordinator who asked if it was "anything urgent". He replied "yes, there is a terrorist infiltration at the back gate."[262] Of the 20 members of the *Kitat Konenut*, only 2 had rifles at hand. The others' weapons were all locked in the armoury on the orders of the military, in case of theft. The rifles could not be reached once the attack was underway because the weapons safe was an electric one and the attackers had disabled the *Kibbutz* electricity supply.[263] Several members of the squad never left their safe rooms during the day as a result. They included dairy manager Nadav Peretz, who reflected "there's a weapons cache stored 2 metres away from our house, and I couldn't do anything."[264]

However, a pair of squad members, one with an M16 rifle, came to be reinforced near the front gate by a

Image from inside the Cherry Family Home with blood on the floor.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

small group of YAMAS Border Police officers who had been stationed at the *Kibbutz* a week earlier following marches to the border by Hamas.[265]

At 10:00 the terrorist numbers were bolstered by third wave looters from Gaza, who entered the *Kibbutz* and began to steal valuables, technology, children's toys and clothes. Resident Adi Cherry, testified that she could hear these looters inside her house, whilst she hid with her husband and 3 children in their safe room, and that among the looters she heard voices of young children and their mothers.[266]

At 10:30, infiltrators broke into the house of Noam Elyakim and his partner Dikla Arava, who ran the education system in the *Kibbutz*. They fired through the door of the safe room where the couple were sheltering with his 2 young daughters and her teenage son. The bullets struck Elyakim in the leg and broke the lock on the door. The Hamas attackers took the family out of the safe room and into their kitchen, where they were filmed and questioned; their captors livestreaming the results on Dikla Arava's Facebook page.[267] Noam Elyakim said to the camera that the family was in Nahal Oz, that Hamas had commandeered their home and that he had been shot in the leg.[268] (The blood from his wound is visible in the footage.) The video was shown on Israeli media, some of the first to be seen by the Israeli public that day.

The infiltrators then took Dikla Arava's 17-year-old son Tomer out of the house and forced him to accompany them from house to house. At every door they stopped at, the gunmen had the 17-year-old beg the residents inside to come out, saying if they did not, his captors would kill him. He assured them that if they did so "no harm will befall you." In most of the houses, the residents refused. Tomer lied to his captors that certain houses were empty, in an effort to save some of his neighbours.[269] One of the houses that the Hamas gunmen took Tomer Arava to was that of Tsachi and Gali Idan, and 3 of their 4 children, Mayaan, 18, Yael, 11, and Shahar, 9. Hiding in their safe room, the family heard in Hebrew "open the door, open the door" but Tsachi Idan refused to open it. Tsachi's British cousin Adam Ma'anit, has testified that the gunmen then fired through the door and that Maayan was "shot in the head and [died] on the floor of their home. The balloons from her 18th birthday party, still up in the house."[270] The gunmen then broke through into the safe room and forced the family outside at gunpoint, whilst livestreaming the process and posting it on the mother, Gali's, Facebook account.[271] Ma'anit identified Tsachi Idan in these videos and described "his face portraying profound shock and grief. Maayan's blood still soaked on his clothes from desperately trying to save her."[272]

At 10:50, terrorists forced Tomer Arava to make the Miran family open up their safe room by threatening to kill him if they didn't.[273] Omri and Lishay Miran had been hiding in their safe room with their 2 -year-old daughter and baby since 10:30 when gunmen kicked in their bathroom window and invaded their house.[274] After Tomer Arava made his gunpoint appeal, the family came out of their safe room. At approximately 11:10 the attackers then took the Miran family to the nearby home of the Idan family, taking video of the process and posting it on Facebook.[275] After some time, Tomer was able to escape his captors but an IDF inquiry concluded that it is highly likely he was then mistakenly killed by IDF fire due to a misidentification as they sought to retake the *Kibbutz*.[276]

The same group of gunmen then stole the Arava family car. They forced Noam, Dikla, and Noam's 2 daughters inside and started driving them to Gaza. On the way there, the vehicle was hit by gunfire, and Dikla Arava was killed. Dafna, 15, and Ella, 8, were then taken by a separate vehicle into Gaza while their wounded father was taken there by foot. He did not survive the journey and his body was found near the border fence 10 days later.[277] The 2 girls were stoned by crowds when taken to captivity in Gaza.[278] Another resident, 84-year-old Elma Abraham, had been kidnapped on a motorcycle to Gaza shortly before this and was also mobbed upon arrival by an angry crowd who threw objects at her. Footage of her kidnapping was posted on Telegram.[279] She suffered heavily in captivity and returned in critical condition during the November ceasefire with a temperature of 28 degrees and pulse of 40 which required hospitalisation for 5 months.[280]

At 13:30, the terrorists took Omri Miran and Tsachi Idan, along with 2 Americans, a mother and daughter Judith and Natalie Raanan, who had been brought to the

Idan home at 13:20, to Gaza on foot.[281] The American hostages were freed just weeks after 7 October.[282] Miran and Idan remain hostages.

In a nearby house, Yaniv Zohar, a news cameraman, and his family had all gone into their safe room at 06:30.[283] At 10:30 his wife Yasmin Zohar, 49, a PhD student, sent a WhatsApp message to security squad leader Ilan Fiorentino saying that the house was being attacked. There was no reply. Fiorentino had already been killed. Yasmin Zohar then messaged his deputy Nissan de Kallo "We have terrorists inside the house." He and the remnants of the security squad could not come. They were caught up in the fighting on the *Kibbutz*.[284] Around 12:30, the infiltrators broke into the Zohars' safe room. All 4 of those inside: Yaniv, 54, Yasmin, 49, and their girls Keshet, 20, and Tchelet ,18, were shot and killed.[285]

Yasmin Zohar's father, Haim Livne, was also shot dead in his nearby house. The only survivor of the family was the Zohars' 13-year-old son who had gone jogging earlier in the morning. The security squad director, Ilan Fiorentino, found him and took him to his house and left him in the safe room with his own family while he went to join the battle.[286] According to General Tibon, Fiorentino engaged in a "hopeless battle" at the rear gate of the *Kibbutz* that pitted one man "against dozens of terrorists but every moment that he succeeded in delaying the terrorists gave another family a chance to save themselves from the horror."[287]

Fiorentino's deputy, Nissan de Kalo and another squad member had combined forces with the YAMAS border police unit at 09:30. They spent the rest of the day engaged in a battle with terrorists across the *Kibbutz* in de Kalo's *Kibbutz* Land Rover and the officers 2 Ze'ev armoured trucks. They drove them around the village in an effort to prevent the attackers from establishing control of new areas of the community. "Everywhere we drove, they shot at us," De Kalo recalled. "Part of the time we dismounted from the vehicle, part of the time we shot from inside the vehicle."[288] One of the YAMAS officers, Yaakov Krasniansky, was killed in the fighting, and 5 others were wounded and evacuated to Soroka hospital.[289]

Shortly after noon, a five-man squad of soldiers from the IDF Maglan Commando unit had almost arrived at the *Kibbutz*, having been called by one of the security squad members. They were ambushed on the road from the Sa'ad junction to the *Kibbutz*. Their commander and 2 other soldiers were killed and the remaining 2 soldiers were evacuated by General Tibon when he arrived at the *Kibbutz*, having driven down from Tel Aviv to rescue his son Amir's family.[290]

After hearing about the attack on the *Kibbutz* from their son Amir around 07:00, General Tibon and his wife, armed only with a pistol, drove down to the Gaza Envelope from Tel Aviv, trying to call their military contacts all the way. Before reaching the area, the pair picked up 2 escapees from the Nova Festival, one of whom kept saying "'They shot everyone. Everyone's dead." The General and Mrs Tibon "dropped the traumatised young couple off" in the city of Ashkelon before continuing to Nahal Oz. When they turned onto Route 232 they encountered "a road…strewn with corpses."[291]

General Tibon left his wife at a shelter outside *Kibbutz* Mefalsim and then drove by himself to Nahal Oz. He arrived at a side gate to the *Kibbutz* around 13:00, about the same time as another small unit of Maglan soldiers. The retired general took the rifle and helmet of one of the soldiers killed just outside the *Kibbutz* and joined forces with the Maglan soldiers and security squad. They fought for the next 4 hours to clear the *Kibbutz* of infiltrators.[292] At 16:00 General Tibon and the Maglan soldiers reached Amir Tibon's house and rescued the family.

At 13:30 an IDF Givati Reconnaissance Unit arrived at the *Kibbutz*, immediately engaging in exchanges of fire with the terrorists.[293] They went house to house evacuating residents to safe zones on the *Kibbutz*. Initially many residents were hesitant to open the doors of their safe rooms to the soldiers, fearing that they were terrorists attempting to trick them.[294] During this period the Givati soldiers accidentally killed Ran Polushni in a friendly fire incident. Poslushni, had gone with his young family into the safe room of his house when the alarms went off. A little later, he took a weapon, his son, a soldier, had left in the house and went up to the second floor. Around noon he saw looters and fired at them. He then saw 2 Thai workers, both bloodied, who were fleeing the attackers. Poslushni and his wife quickly took them into the safe room. Poslushni continued to fire on gunmen from his high point. At about 15:00 he was mistaken for one of the infiltrators, due to his position inside his home and lack of identifying clothing, and was shot dead.[295] The house had previously been cleared by the Maglan Commando soldiers who had given Ran another gun magazine.[296]

Other victims of the attack include Joshua Luitu Mollel, an agricultural intern from Tanzania, who had

been working in the *Kibbutz* dairy when rocket alarms sounded. He went into a shelter and was last heard from at 09:00. His fate was unknown until video footage of his attack came to light. One showed the 21-year-old with a bloody face, being shoved and beaten by half a dozen of the gunmen who had infiltrated the *Kibbutz*. Another showed his body on the ground, with 2 large wounds in his abdomen and gunmen firing their rifles into his corpse 8 times. At the end of the footage, a member of Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades can be seen standing on Mollel's partially stripped corpse and then his body is seen in the back of a truck without trousers.[297] Mollel's body was kidnapped to Gaza. Some of the attackers can be identified as members of the National Resistance Brigades (DFLP).

Somkuan Pansard, 39, was also at work on the *Kibbutz* farm when the rocket alarm sounded. He telephoned his family in Thailand. According to his father, "he told us there were explosions near the banana plantation where he worked, and then it went silent."[298] Pansard was killed during the attack on the *Kibbutz* and in a self-recorded video later uploaded to Telegram an individual in civilian clothing repeatedly attacks his body with a garden hoe.[299] In the video the individual states "Let history bear witness to this being the first person I have ever killed" as the camera pans to show Pansard's deceased blood-covered body lying on the floor. The individual then begins to kick and punch Pansard's body before taking a garden hoe and repeatedly striking it against Pansard's neck to decapitate him. Moran Freibach, the *Kibbutz*'s agricultural director who oversaw the work of the 23 Thai workers who resided on the *Kibbutz*, testified to the USC Shoah foundation that one of his workers informed him of the attack on Pansard after all residents had been evacuated. He stated that the Thai workers had been attacked by a group of approximately 40 unarmed individuals, and in front of the other Thais, when Pansard was too injured to defend himself, "they just chopped off his head with a shovel."[300] He also stated that the Thai worker who informed him of this attack was covered in scratches.

The *Kibbutz* began to evacuate at 22:30 with the Givati Brigade and Maglan Units taking up defensive positions across the *Kibbutz*, where they repelled further infiltration attempts over the following 2 days. They were joined by remaining soldiers from the 13th Battalion of the Golani Brigade (they had been stationed at Nahal Oz base and suffered huge casualties).[301] The 2 Thai workers who were initially reported as kidnapped or missing were found hiding in the fields after 6 days.[302]

The material damage to the *Kibbutz* was also significant as 9 tractors were stolen and the $1.4 million dairy barn was severely damaged, with several cattle dying in the attack as well.[303] In total, a quarter of the cows were affected. Some were killed or injured but many others were traumatised which caused them to stop yielding milk, and the 8-day halt in milking operations caused a loss of over $400,000.[304] The computers which regulated the irrigation system for the fields were also destroyed and the water pipes broken on purpose.[305]

Hamas' operational plans were found on the bodies of terrorists who had infiltrated *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz and the neighbouring base. According to these documents, the Hamas attack on *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz was given the official code name "Operation 402." Hamas commanders estimated it would take their motorcycle-borne operatives 2 minutes and 8 seconds to reach the *Kibbutz* from their starting point at Sajaiya in Gaza, if they travelled at an average speed of 40mph. The battle plans used aerial photographs to plan a direct route from a breach in the border fence, across the *Kibbutz*' potato fields and watermelon patches, to the south-east corner of the village. The operation orders included setting up a stronghold within the conquered *Kibbutz* and keeping hostages inside it.

One of the documents included the following order: "The mobilised and reduced platoon from the third company in the fourth battalion will attack Nahal Oz *Kibbutz*….it will cause as many casualties as possible, take hostages, and position itself inside the *Kibbutz* – until further instructions are received."[306] The orders mandated that "photos will be taken using head cameras and phones, in addition to the presence of a media photographer."[307] One group of attackers was to go to the western side of the *Kibbutz*, blow up its communication antennas, take over its visitors centre and then gather hostages in previously cleared kindergarten rooms. The communal dining hall was suggested as a secondary place to concentrate hostages. In practice, the attackers had no opportunity to gather large numbers of captive residents in the dining hall or elsewhere; instead, they took them directly to Gaza or killed them where they found them.

XIV. Kibbutz Alumim

Kibbutz Alumim ("youth") is a *Kibbutz* in the middle of the Gaza Envelope. It is just over 1.8 miles from the Gaza border and sits between Kfar Aza and Be'eri, 2 of the worst affected communities on 7 October 2023. The community was established in 1966 by members of the Bnei Akiva Zionist youth movement. Its founding members included immigrants from Britain who joined local religious youth groups. Alumim is a religious

(Modern Orthodox) *Kibbutz* whose collectivist tradition is giving way to a degree of privatisation. The *Kibbutz* has a primarily agricultural economy, cultivating field crops such as carrots and potatoes, as well as citrus fruits, avocados and jojoba. It also has dairy and poultry farms. According to the last recorded population census from 2022, Alumim had a resident population of 531[308], not including its numerous foreign guest workers from Thailand and agriculture students from Nepal.

The attacks on *Kibbutz* Alumim began just after dawn on 7 October 2023 and fighting continued there until late afternoon. The attack involved at least 100 attackers from Gaza and led to 22 civilian deaths, 3 individuals were taken hostage of which 1 was the dead body of a first responder. A member of *Kibbutz* Alumim, Ofek Atun, was killed at the Nova Music Festival and as per this report's methodology has been counted as a victim there. The bodies of 35 terrorists were found inside the *Kibbutz* and around the entrance in the aftermath.[309]

At 06:29 the residents and guests at Alumim were awoken by Red Alert rocket alarms and the simultaneous sounds of Iron Dome missile launches and explosions as the former intercepted a heavy rocket barrage from Gaza.[310] The village had a 10-15 seconds-to-impact rule – meaning that people on the *Kibbutz* had 10-15 seconds from the sounding of the rocket alarm to get to an underground shelter or strengthened safe room. During the initial rocket barrage, 1 rocket landed in the avocado orchard.[311] By then most of the residents of the *Kibbutz*, including its Thai guest workers and Nepalese work-study students, were in their shelters, and the Iron Dome interception firing stopped as all the available missiles in the battery had been used.[312]

Rocket attacks and fighting on the *Kibbutz* would confine Alumim's residents to underground bomb shelters and safe rooms for more than 24 hours. "We were in the bomb shelter for 26 hours, and during those 26 hours we [only] left twice to get a bottle of water and diapers for my daughter and to get her a little something to eat from the fridge; but besides that, we didn't leave. Not for the bathroom, not for anything else."[313] From at least midday on 7 October 2023 the electricity at Alumim failed, and with it the ventilation in the shelters. Sarit Kurzman recalled that "we had to, once in a while, open the bomb shelter door [to let in some oxygen], which was not really allowed".[314]

Just after 06:50, members of the 12-person *Kitat Konenut* (civilian security squad) heard gunfire and contacted each other on their WhatsApp group. (Although using machinery such as telephone is normally forbidden on the Jewish Sabbath and the *Simchat Torah* holiday, there is the "*pikuach nefesh*" exception for saving lives in an emergency). Amichai Shaham posted "there's firing of a small weapon close-by... everything all right?" Eihan Sebag replied "You do hear a lot of small-arms... sounds like a battle over the fence." The *Kibbutz Ravshatz* Eyal Rhein then received a message from the IDF's Gaza Division's Northern Brigade to prepare his security squad and close the roads surrounding the *Kibbutz*.[315]

At 07:00, a group of 10 gunmen from Gaza, riding 5 motorcycles, came through the *Kibbutz*'s back gate, which faces the Gaza border, having only 1 padlock to break through.[316] The group rode through the *Kibbutz* in the direction of the main gate. On the way there the gunmen attacked the area where foreign guest workers and students were housed. Mitchai Sarabon, a Thai fieldhand who had been doing laundry witnessed the beginning of the attack. "Suddenly, I saw one of the Nepalese guys being shot, others ran to hide in the bomb shelter and then the terrorists arrived."[317]

As they approached the bunker where the Nepalis had taken shelter, the agriculture students shouted "We are Nepali, we are Nepali". However, the attackers "just

Blood on the floor of the Thai Living Quarters.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

kept firing and threw 2 grenades into the bunker." One grenade was thrown back out by a Nepalese student; the other exploded. "After that, the bunker was completely covered in blood."[318] Two of the students in the shelter were killed and 5 wounded. According to Sarabon "others ran away, they were shot dead too."[319]

One of the Nepali students, Dhanbahadur Chaudhari, was knocked unconscious by the grenade explosions in the shelter. "When I woke up I was covered in blood and I could see my friends dead and injured around me. One friend didn't have legs, another didn't have hands. There were dead bodies of my friends in the door of the bunker."[320] Student KC Pramrod hid "for at least 4 hours" beneath a pile of bodies. "Some friends were bleeding very badly but I was helpless. At that time, I didn't even know who died and who lived." The student later told a newspaper "even after coming home to Nepal, I am haunted by memories of my bleeding friends begging me for help. It's a trauma that will stay with me for my lifetime."[321]

At 07:05, CCTV cameras filmed the attackers firing into the milking parlour and the residence building for Thai workers. The footage clearly shows one of the attackers tossing a grenade into the building.[322] Alongside the killing of workers, the terrorists also destroyed the barn and other agricultural buildings, burned down the grain silo, punctured milk tanks, and burned hay intended for cows.[323]

Maps found on the bodies of terrorists showed a thought-out plan of attack focussing on targeting the "nerve centre of the *Kibbutz*" which includes the armoury and *hamal*, an underground 2 room complex with security cameras monitoring the entire *Kibbutz*.[324] The first group of terrorists did not follow this plan and instead sought to secure the front gate of the *Kibbutz* which provided access to Route 232.

Once at the front gate, at 07:08, the gunmen fired on carloads of people who had escaped the killings at the Nova Music Festival to the south. Then they went out onto Route 232 and ambushed people fleeing in cars and attacked people hiding in the bomb shelter outside the *Kibbutz* with grenades and rifles, killing at least 14 people. Whilst attacking these civilians, the initial group of terrorists was confronted by a group of 5 Golani soldiers outside the front gate, who wounded the Hamas commander in the neck and killed another terrorist. This forced them to remount their motor bike and drive through the *Kibbutz* out of the back gate. At about 07:15 the 12 members of the security squad gathered at the armoury. Once armed they were joined by 3 volunteers from the community and went out into the *Kibbutz* to look for the infiltrators.[325]

At 07:22, 2 other escapees from the Nova Festival tried to hide in a private home just inside the *Kibbutz*. They were shot by the security squad who came to the house after the resident assumed they were the terrorists he had been warned about on WhatsApp. Ofek Atun was killed and Tamar Kam was wounded.[326]

In the following 2 hours the security squad did not know if terrorists remained on the *Kibbutz* and so conducted searches and answered calls from the members of the *Kibbutz* who were hiding in their safe rooms. They positioned themselves by the front gate, to prevent terrorists who were moving up and down route 232 from entering the *Kibbutz* and tended to the injured agricultural workers.[327]

At 09:30 a second, larger group of attackers arrived at Alumim. At least 30 gunmen broke through the fence near the jojoba plantations. They were seen by security squad member, Amichai Shaham, at the Thai workers' quarters. He opened fire on them and was seriously wounded whilst defending his own home where his wife and 3 small children were hiding in the safe room without him.[328]

Two other members of the security squad were wounded. Eran Schlissel was moderately injured and Eyal Young, a British citizen, was critically wounded. After being treated by the *Kibbutz* nurse, a midwife by training, Eyal and Amichai were evacuated by a civilian who drove his own car out of the *Kibbutz* under fire from terrorists, as no ambulance was able to get through to the *Kibbutz*. Despite losing 2 of their members through injury, the security squad managed to prevent the terrorists from crossing the road that led to the houses of members of the *Kibbutz*. Frustrated by the resistance, the terrorists doubled back and moved across to continue their attack in the commercial area of the *Kibbutz*.[329]

Fighting had continued at the front gate and the Golani soldiers had been joined by police officers and 2 residents of Beersheba, brothers Noam and Yishai Slotki. They had heard about the invasion, ignored a call up to join their army reserve units, and instead driven to the communities in the south carrying pistols.[330] From Route 232 they saw 8 bullet-ridden vehicles, some of them burning, at the front of *Kibbutz* Alumim. They left their car and fought for about 45 minutes, apparently killing a number of the intruders using rifles they took from their bodies. Eventually both were shot dead.[331]

A Yasam police officer, Ran Givli, was also killed in the battle for the front gate and his body kidnapped to Gaza.

More individual volunteers and informal military reinforcements began to arrive, including an IDF Lt Col who was driving from his home in Kiryat Gat (56 miles away) to his base at the south of the Gaza Envelope.[332]

At 10:20, according to CCTV footage, the attackers in the area of the cowsheds and the foreigners' residences, abducted Bipin Joshi, a Nepalese student (who posted a photo of himself in the shelter on Facebook moments beforehand) and Thai worker Purnaswan Pinakalo, and took them to Gaza. During the kidnapping Pinakolo was stabbed in his forearm and testified that whilst in captivity, he endured horrific beatings, solitary confinement and lost 22 kilograms before his release in a deal with the Thai Government in November.[333]

At 11:39, 2 IDF CH-53 heavy transport helicopters carrying paratroopers landed in a field east of the *Kibbutz*. One of the aircraft was hit by RPG or anti-tank guided missile fire. It was destroyed but its crew and complement survived.[334]

At 12:00, 20 members of an Israeli Air Force Shaldag special forces unit en route to *Kibbutz* Be'eri stopped at Alumim. Its troops saw infiltrators in or around the *Kibbutz* food-packing facility. In the fighting that followed, Warrant Officer Ido Rosenthal was killed.[335] At the same time, gunmen within the *Kibbutz* found Thai guest workers hiding in the kitchen of their living quarters. They threw grenades into the room and sprayed it with automatic weapons. "Several of the people were killed by the shooting; others were extracted and killed outside." [336] The building caught fire. Mithai Sarabon, who had witnessed the attack on the Nepali students 2 hours earlier was one of the Thais hit by the fusillade. "Everything was burning, the room, the people and I just decided to jump out and run."

Sarabon, who had been struck by 2 bullets, fled the burning building. He almost made it from the street to the shelter of the *Kibbutz*'s orange groves when he was shot for the third time. Still conscious "I stayed very quiet until they left, I wanted them to think I was dead too". Sarabon lay on the ground for 3-4 hours until rescued by Israeli police officers. Evacuated to a hospital, he recovered from his wounds sufficiently to return to Thailand a month later.[337]

Twelve Thais were killed at Alumim.[338] In the immediate aftermath of the attack, the large number of burned bodies found at the site made it unclear how many Thai workers had been killed as well as how many of the attackers had been killed in the fighting.

At 12:20 commandos from the Yahalom combat engineer unit came to the *Kibbutz* and joined the security squad. Forty minutes later, *Kibbutz* security cameras spotted gunmen jumping over a gate near the avocado plantation and entering a residential neighbourhood.[339] The gunmen forced their way into the house of the Meller family, first shooting into the house and wounding resident Benny Miller. The security team and Yahalom soldiers were able to rescue the family, killing 2 gunmen, but unit commander Itay Cohen, was killed in the action.

More troops from the Paratroopers' Brigade, Sayeret Matkal and the Oketz Unit, arrived at *Kibbutz* Alumim from 14:30 and conducted sweeps of the village and surrounding area. It was not deemed clear until nightfall. The Shaldag Unit stayed at Alumim until 16:00, after which they advanced into neighbouring *Kibbutz* Be'eri, clearing the nearby section of Route 232 in the process. This action enabled the first responders to access the injured and civilians to escape what had been a kill-zone for several hours.[340]

Alumim was evacuated in the afternoon of 8 October 2023. The IDF have since released an interrogation video of a terrorist arrested at *Kibbutz* Alumim, admitting that they were deliberately ordered to commit attacks against civilians and given instructions to kill, behead, cut off body parts and even rape the corpse of a girl.[341]

XV. Kibbutz Be'eri

Kibbutz Be'eri is the largest of the agricultural communities attacked in southern Israel on 7 October, 2023. It is located in the northern third of the Gaza Envelope, just under 3 miles from the Gaza border. It sits on the main highway, Route 232, between *Kibbutz* Re'im and the Nova Festival site to the south and *Kibbutz* Alumim to the north.

Be'eri was founded in 1946, 1 of 11 communities established on 6 October of that year by the *HaNoar HaOved VeHaLomed* Zionist youth movement. The new village was named after Berl "Be'eri" Katznelson, a major theoretician of the Socialist Zionist movement in the first half of the 20th century.[342] Many of its first residents were Iraqi Jews who had fled the 1941 Baghdad Farhud pogroms.

Although it continued to be a primarily agricultural commune, growing lemons, grapefruit, cotton and wheat, a printing press was set up by its founders in 1950, and it evolved into the most important printing house in the country. Among other products it makes the State of Israel's drivers' licences. The enterprise employs 40% of the *Kibbutz*' workforce and generates 90% of its revenues.[343] Be'eri's assets enabled it to provide its residents with scholarships, holiday funds, and recreational facilities such as tennis courts. Unlike most *Kibbutzim*, there was a waiting list for new members.[344]

Unlike other *Kibbutzim* in the region, Be'eri in October 2023 was still a genuine commune, holding true to its socialist roots, with members surrendering their income regardless of profession into a communal fund. Major decisions are put to a vote, and homes, cars and daily meals provided by the collective.[345] Some of Israel's most prominent peace activists lived at Be'eri, and many residents were volunteers with organisations such as "The Road to Recovery," which took cancer patients from Gaza to Israeli hospitals.[346] After the Second Intifada prompted the Israeli government to halve Palestinian work permits, *Kibbutz* Be'eri established a pool to support its Gazan former employees, one that donated "thousands of shekels per month" to Gazan families.[347]

According to the 2022 census, Be'eri had 1,110 residents about a third of whom were children.[348] On the night before the attack, the community celebrated its 77th birthday. The party brought former residents and other guests to the *Kibbutz* for the weekend.[349]

Kibbutz Be'eri had the second largest casualty count from 7 October attacks. A total of 119 people were killed at the *Kibbutz* (a further 4 people from the Nova Festival were also killed at Be'eri but have been counted as Nova victims as per the methodology.) Of the 119 deaths, 93 were civilians, 18 were soldiers and 8 were first responders.[350] Forty-five of the victims were over 65. Ten were children. The youngest victim was Mila Cohen, 9 months old; the oldest was Hannah Kritzman, 88. "Sixteen families lost 2 or more family members in the attack."[351] A total of 8 British citizens were killed at *Kibbutz* Be'eri, 7 were civilians and 1 was a British-Israeli, IDF soldier who was a part of efforts to retake the *Kibbutz*.

During the attack, 27 people were taken hostage alive to Gaza, including 10 women and 9 children. A further 6 individuals were killed and their bodies were taken hostage to Gaza.

The violence against people on the *Kibbutz* was accompanied by large-scale looting and destruction of property, much of it carried out by a third wave of mostly civilian infiltrators. CCTV footage from the *Kibbutz* captured a man driving from Be'eri to Gaza with a stolen television strapped to his back.[352]

Terrorist pictured entering the main gain of Kibbutz Be'eri. A blue civilian car is pictured, which had arrived at the Kibbutz with escapees from the Nova Music Festival. The car was shot at by attackers. Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

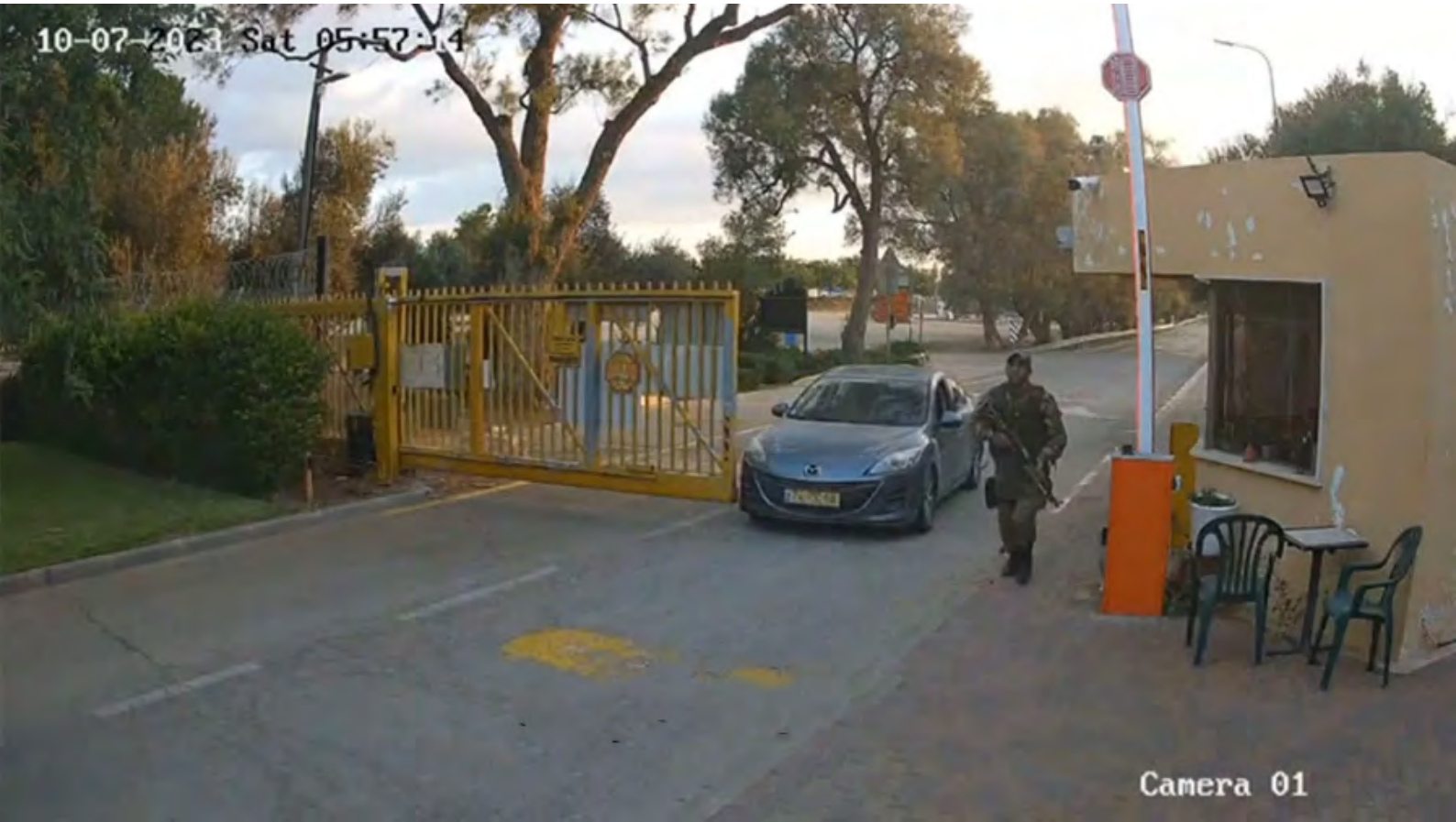
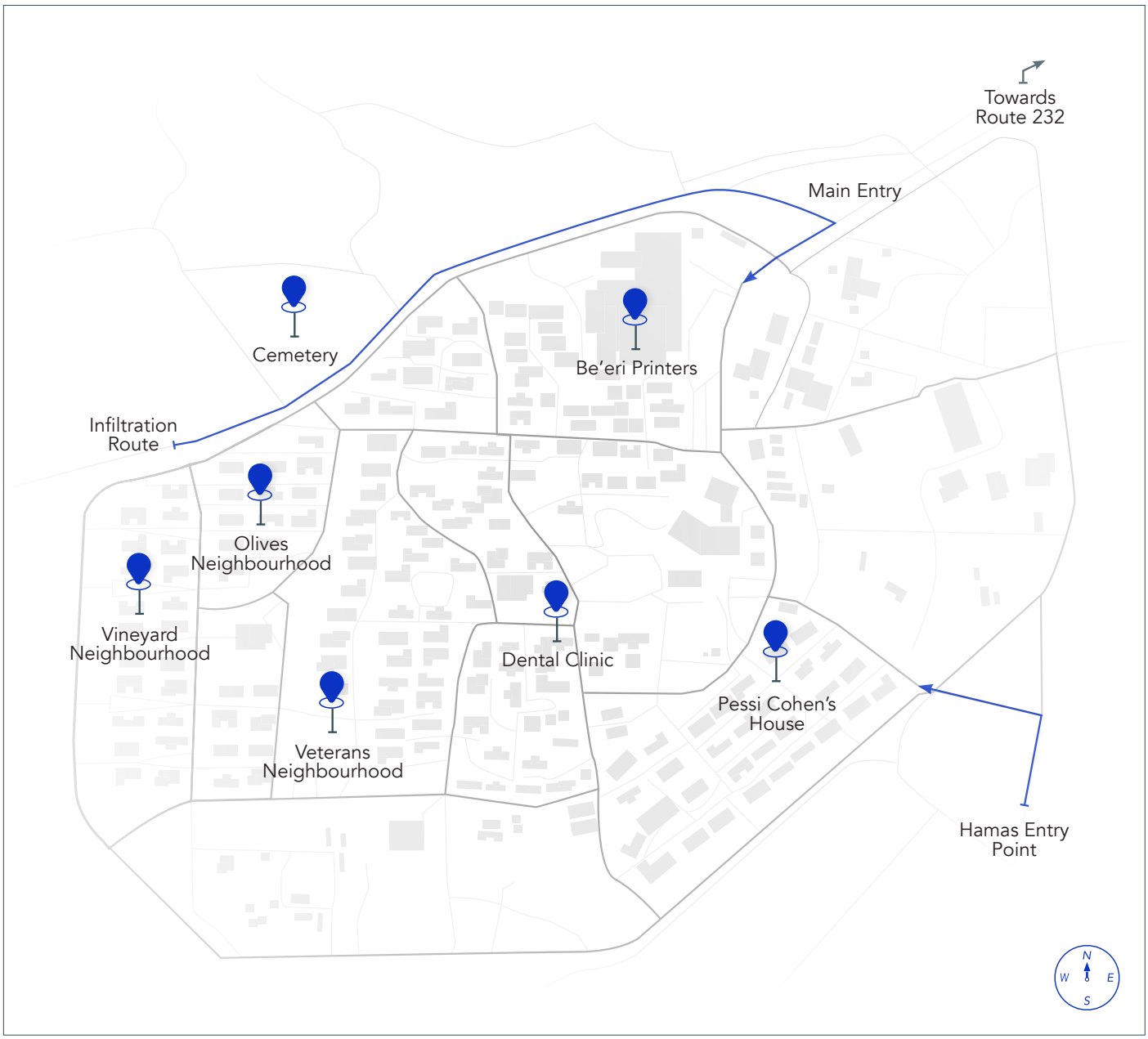


FIGURE 16 | MAP OF *KIBBUTZ* BE'ERI



The battle to retake *Kibbutz* Be'eri from its attackers – whose number included more than 300 gunmen from Hamas and other organisations, plus hundreds of civilians from Gaza – lasted for more than a day after IDF troops arrived in force in the afternoon of 7 October. Infiltrators were still being found at Be'eri throughout 9 October. It is estimated that 100 attackers from Gaza were killed, and 18 were captured by the IDF.

It is the only *Kibbutz* so far (to date as of the end of 2024) which has had an official probe into the attack on the *Kibbutz*. It was carried out under the leadership of Maj. Gen. (res.) Mickey Edelstein, a former commander of the IDF Gaza Division. A summary of the results of the probe was published in July 2024 but the main probe has not been made public.[353] This document has provided additional specifics to the detail of the attack.

There were 3 main waves of attackers. The rockets began at 06:29, followed by a first wave of attackers, breaching the border between 06:30 and 06:45 and advancing towards the *Kibbutz*. The second wave of attacks came between approximately 07:35 and 09:00. The third wave, primarily composed of civilians from Gaza, struck the *Kibbutz* initially around 10:00, and in greater numbers by 11:00.[354]

One of the hundreds of breaches along the fence (SEE Chapter 5.2 Border Breaches) occurred near Juhor ad-Dik, in Gaza, and *Kibbutz* Be'eri in Israel. Hamas commandos "first broke through a smaller breach next to the gate before using another munition to create a larger hole."[355] The Qassam Brigades (Hamas) Telegram channel uploaded footage of a drone dropping an explosive on a communications tower west of *Kibbutz* Be'eri and 500 metres away from the Gaza fence.[356] It

also uploaded a 3-minute video of the Be'eri infiltration, showing the border breach bomb detonations, to the arrival at the *Kibbutz* gates.[357]

Another of the invading units simultaneously attacked the small Paga military outpost - sometimes called "the Be'eri protector"- sited on the border opposite the *Kibbutz*. There they disabled an IDF tank using RPGs and drones dropping explosives, which killed its crew. Additionally, the nearest army base was Nahal Oz, which was also under attack (SEE Chapter 5.9 Attacked Military Facilities).

Many residents heard the impact of projectiles landing on or near the *Kibbutz*, before the *Tseva Adom* (Red Alert) automatic rocket sirens began at 06:29. Dafna Gerstler, who was visiting her family recalled "usually you have an alarm and a boom of the Iron Dome. This time, there was no alarm, and it was so loud. It's a sound we could not identify."[358] She and the rest of her family took refuge in their *mamad* (safe room). At 06:37, residents received a text message from the *Kibbutz* authorities telling them to "remain in a protected area until further notice." At 06:48, members of the *Kibbutz* received a text message saying "Dear residents, good morning and Shabbat Shalom. Heavy gunfire has targeted areas nationwide. Stay in protected areas until we update you further."[359]

Scene from inside a children's bedroom in Kibbutz Be'eri.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

The Weiss Family home after the attack, Kibbutz Be'eri.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

Resident, Aya Meydan, 39, a triathlete, had been out on a training ride since 06:15 and was heading back into the *Kibbutz* when the rocket bombardment began. After taking shelter in a *migunit* (roadside shelter) she cycled towards the main gate where she caught sight of 3 Bedouin men "who worked in the *Kibbutz* kitchen, running out and yelling." According to her testimony, one of the Bedouin workers named Hisham, told her "There are terrorists in the *Kibbutz*, and they are killing everyone in sight, including children. We have to run away."[360]

Meydan ran with Hisham to the main highway where they tried unsuccessfully to flag down passing cars and then hid in some trees. While in hiding, Meydan "heard gunmen attack the roadside concrete shelter she had hidden in." Eventually, Hisham's father was able to rescue the pair in his car. While Meydan made it to safety, her sister-in-law and 15-year-old nephew, were both killed in Be'eri later that day and her brother lost his leg.[361]

Fellow resident Gal Cohen, 58, had just begun his daily run outside the fence when the rocket alerts sounded. He would then see "two men in black camouflage on a motorcycle".[362] His wife, Natasha Cohen, heard a motorcycle but assumed it must belong to revellers returning from the Nova Music Festival. Gal recognized the bikers' green bandanas as those belonging to Hamas Al-Qassam Brigades. At approximately 06:55 he rushed to his daughter's apartment and alerted Racheli Benakot who was responsible for alerting fellow *Kibbutz* members and authorities in the event of an emergency. Cohen and his daughter ran back to his house and hid in its safe room with his wife.[363]

The first attackers to arrive at Be'eri from Gaza were approximately 120 commandos from the *Nukhba* elite force of Hamas' Qassam Brigades. This force was commanded by Adil Mismah, *Nukhba* Company Commander of the Gazan city, Deir al-Balah. Mismah commanded in the field on the attack of *Kibbutz* Kissufim, and directed Hamas terrorists to other communities including *Kibbutz* Be'eri and *Kibbutz* Nirim.[364]

Nukhba forces were joined by a second wave of terrorists composed of regular Hamas troops from the "Nuseirat Battalion" and groups of gunmen from Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the National Resistance Brigades (DFLP), The latter announcing their involvement on Telegram.[365] DFLP fighters, identifiable by their red armbands and headbands, can be seen on CCTV footage at around 08:00, removing the dead civilians from the shot-at blue civilian car at the *Kibbutz* gate. One

of the fighters was riding on the back of a motorcycle, the other was carrying a PG-7VR type rocket for an RPG launcher.[366]

Nukhba commandos took effective control of the stretch of Route 232 leading to Be'eri, ensuring that the *Kibbutz* remained under terrorist control until 13:30. An additional *Nukbah* force arrived at Be'eri on the eastern side of the *Kibbutz* at 13:00, having taken part in another attack.[367] The official probe by the IDF into the attacks on Be'eri estimated that a total of 340 militants from Hamas and the two other organisations took part in the attacks on Be'eri.[368]

The initial attackers came from 2 directions and breached the *Kibbutz* in at least 3 places: the main entrance gate, the back gate and the western side of the *Kibbutz*, near its cemetery. The first was at 06:55. CCTV camera footage from the main entrance shows a Hamas fighter in full military uniform and carrying an AK assault rifle trying to crawl under the security gate and another breaking into the apparently unoccupied gatehouse.[369]

A blue civilian vehicle then pulled up to the electronic gate which opened to let it through. It is not known whether the civilians in the car opened the gate, or whether the Hamas fighter in the gatehouse operated it. As the car started to move, the Hamas soldiers emerged from hiding in the bushes and fired into it, killing the people inside, 4 of whom had escaped from the Nova Festival. The gunmen then ran into the *Kibbutz*. At 07:00 a message went out to residents from Racheli Benakot saying "suspected infiltration."[370]

At around 07:00, when Benakot received Gal Cohen's message, she had been confident that any infiltration would be swiftly dealt with by one of the IDF army units stationed 15 minutes away.[371] Nevertheless, she telephoned her brother, Arik Kraunik, the head of the village *Kitat Konenut* civilian security team. Kraunik messaged his 12-person squad to mobilise. As they began to make their way from their homes to an assembly point near the concert hall, not far from the small concrete shed that served as an armoury, Kraunik drove to the front gate. There he was killed in an exchange of gunfire.

Kraunik was 1 of only 2 people with a key to the weapons armoury. Shortly afterwards, the only other key-holder, deputy squad commander, Ilan Weiss, 56, was also shot dead, along with the family dog, while his wife Shiri and daughter Noga were kidnapped and taken to Gaza after attackers set their house alight.[372] Ilan Weiss' brother and his sister-in-law Amir and Mati Weiss, who lived nearby, were first shot and then killed when

Damage to a home in Kibbutz Be'eri.
Source: Photo taken on Lord Roberts' visit to the Kibbutz in August 2024

Damage to a home in Kibbutz Be'eri.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

attackers threw grenades into their house.[373] The killing of Kraunik and 2 other members of the security within minutes of the first breaches, left the rest scattered and without rifles or body armour.

Two members of the team, one of whom, Yoel Avital, was armed with a pistol and 12 rounds of ammunition, ran towards an area of the *Kibbutz* from which they could hear shooting. They found Gil Boyum, 55, a fellow security team member, lying on the ground. He had been shot and clubbed in the head with a rifle butt. They lifted him up, Yoel taking his rifle, and carried him to the dental clinic at the centre of the *Kibbutz* which was being used as a first aid post.[374]

These initial attacking groups were shortly accompanied by others. CCTV footage from 07:12 shows 3 motorcycles carrying 6 gunmen, identifiable as Hamas from their green headbands, heavily armed and driving in the *Kibbutz*.[375] Around 07:25, a group of 60 or more Hamas gunmen gathered near the Be'eri Crater Reserve, approximately 1.5 miles from the *Kibbutz*, and proceeded in a convoy of motorbikes and pickup trucks towards Be'eri. The convoy was joined on Route 232 by at least one additional pickup truck full of 8-10 gunmen.

Footage uploaded to Telegram shows the attackers shouting as they advance towards the *Kibbutz*, "This is the hour for Jihad! This is the hour for Jihad!", "We must livestream it on the GoPro! It's a must!".... "Don't worry, this will be seen live so everyone [in Gaza] will follow us!"[376] These groups, arriving around 30 minutes apart, proceeded to "shoot at residents, cars, pets, and houses. From 08:30 onwards, they systematically moved from house to house."[377]

Two of their victims were British citizens. Rotem Kalderon, 66, a lifelong resident of *Kibbutz* Be'eri and dedicated educator, was home alone when the invasion began and messaged family and friends that she was trying to hold her safe room door closed. She was able to hold it for 2 hours but was ultimately killed. After being considered missing for 2 weeks, her body was eventually located and identified.[378] The other Briton was Isle of Wight-born Yonatan Rapoport, 41, who died when terrorists managed to get through his safe room door. Rapoport had told his 2 children, Yosef, 9, and Aluma, 6, to hide under the bed and as a result they were saved.[379]

Bodycam and helmet camera footage, taken by the terrorists and posted on social media, shows the attackers going from house to house throughout the morning. The videos show them kicking at doors and shooting through windows.[380] They also show handcuffed hostages being walked by their captors down *Kibbutz* streets. Upon infiltration, some terrorists hid under houses, others dressed in IDF uniforms and spoke Hebrew.

From early in the attack, the residents shared their understanding of what was happening via WhatsApp groups. One group in particular, with 200 Be'eri mothers, gave residents hiding in their safe rooms a sense of what was happening in the *Kibbutz*, and where. The women posting in the group "described the shouts and explosions they heard outside, told each other where gunmen were, shared tips on coping with smoke that filled their rooms, and repeatedly called for help."[381] Some members of this and other WhatsApp groups were able to take and post photographs of gunmen and of residents being kidnapped.[382]

Many of the people posting in the WhatsApp group asked for advice on locking the doors to their safe rooms – most of which did not have actual locks as they were designed to protect against rockets and not ground intrusions. Be'eri residents tried a variety of methods to prevent the unlockable handles on their steel safe room doors from being pushed downwards when intruders tried to force their way in. Uri Hoter and his family pushed a piano against their safe room door.[383] Those who were hiding in safe rooms that lacked materials which could be used to jerry-rig a log or stop the movement of the handle, had to rely on physical strength. This made older people, who made up a majority in one of the neighbourhoods the attackers went through, particularly vulnerable.

Resident Yasmine Raanan, 56, had recently installed a deadbolt on the door of her safe room. Her neighbours' safe rooms had no locks and all and were breached. The attackers who came into her house gave up trying to break through the steel door. When she was eventually rescued by the military and led out of her safe room that night she "found her living room floor covered in rows of grenades, gas canisters, explosives, rocket-propelled grenades and rifles."[384] The infiltrators had, it turned out, used her house as a kind of field base to distribute weapons and deploy their troops around the *Kibbutz*."[385]

Ayalet Hakim and her husband heard shooting getting closer and then realised that intruders were breaking into their house. "I just heard this terrorist like all the time in my house, walking and moving and moving things, and throwing things on the floor."[386] The intruder tried the handle of the safe room. It had no lock but Hakim's husband was able to hold it still. The intruder gave up and went to another part of the

house, before leaving. The family were left unscathed although Ayelet Hakim's sister Raz and brother-in-law Ohad who lived nearby were abducted to Gaza.[387]

As the infiltrators went from house to house "the attackers blasted and shot at doors and used hand-grenades and other means to set houses on fire, all in an attempt to force people to leave their safe rooms."[388] Resident Eyal Ben Zvi, who was in various chat groups, heard from "someone whose house was on fire, another who had been shot while in the doorway of their home." He recalled that "at about 11:00, someone said her 9-month-old baby had been killed in her arms when terrorists shot through the safe room door. The mother and her 2 sons survived, but the baby and the father were shot and killed."[389] The Cohen family members killed were Mila and Ohad, 43, and the surviving family Sandra, Liam and Dylan Cohen. Ohad's mother, Yona, 73, was also killed during the attack on *Kibbutz* Be'eri.[390]

Despite the calls for help on the groups, the survivors of the *Kibbutz* civilian security team, and the small units of police and soldiers who joined them during the morning and in the first 2 hours of the afternoon, were unable to reach residents. As they were trying to hold a defensive line in the centre of the *Kibbutz* or were in direct danger themselves.

Among the victims of the Hamas house-to house raiding was Vivian Silver, the renowned Canadian-Israeli peace activist.[391] Earlier that morning, while sheltering in her safe room, the 74-year-old executive director of the Women Wage Peace and AJEEC organisations, gave a radio interview.[392] During it, she told the interviewer that the ongoing attack "showed the urgent need for a peace deal."[393] Around 11:00, Silver sent a message to her son Yonatan in Tel Aviv telling him that terrorists were in the house. She told him she was "afraid to breathe" and he replied, "I'm with you." She responded "I feel you." Moments later he texted Silver again, "Are you safe now?", following up with "Mom?" but received no reply. Silver was not heard from again and her house was burned to the ground.[394] In the aftermath of the attack, Silver was believed to have been abducted to Gaza and declared missing. Eventually, archaeologists detected human remains in the ashes of the house, and in November 2023, DNA analysis identified them as belonging to Silver.

Dozens of the bodies of Be'eri residents were incinerated in fires that consumed their houses, often so completely that it was unclear if they were already dead when the fires were set, or if they died as a result of the fires. In many cases, it took weeks to identify the incinerated bodies. This was in large part due to the attackers' use of accelerants to set fires to smoke out or kill residents in their safe rooms, and also the attackers' use of incendiary grenades to breach safe rooms and destroy vehicles. In some cases, the temperature of the fires was so high that it destroyed DNA of human remains and archaeologists had to search for other clues to their identity.[395]

At 07:20, what was left of the civilian security team was joined by 5 police officers in a squad car which stopped by the *Kibbutz*. Hearing gunfire in another part of the village they left for the station at Netivot to get weapons.[396] Their ongoing efforts were joined by other residents, including retired Maj. Gen. Yossi Bachar, 58, (whose mother Geula and nephew Edan were killed in their homes) and Rami Gold, 70 - too old to be in the security team, but a war veteran - who picked up a rifle dropped by a squad member who had been hit by a grenade blast.[397]

Gold, had been called by his friend Hagai Avni, a security squad member, who had been shot. Gold tried to take him to the dental clinic which had been turned into a makeshift emergency triage for the injured but was under too much gunfire to move him. By the time the shooting in their direction died down, Avni had died.[398] Gold then joined forces with Bachar. The pair went to the porch of one of the houses in the older part of the *Kibbutz*, from which they sniped at the attackers roaming the village. They were there from 08:00 to 20:00 when their "ammunition was running out and both had shrapnel wounds."[399]

At 09:00 a small team of soldiers from the IAF Shaldag commando unit landed by helicopter at Be'eri and joined members of the security squad fighting in the centre of the *Kibbutz*. Heavily outnumbered, 2 of the Shaldag operatives were wounded so the team withdrew to defensive positions at the *Kibbutz* entrance.[400] *Kibbutz* members maintained constant contact with the military and media throughout the morning, yet no reinforcements arrived.

At 11:00 one resident, squad member Eilam Amor, was able to reach the Prime Minister to brief him on the situation as he understood it. The Prime Minister "pledged swift deployment of forces to the *Kibbutz*."[401] In practice, ambushes set up by Hamas commandos along the Route 232, the main highway through the Gaza Envelope significantly delayed rescue forces trying to reach Be'eri. The invaders "attacked every force heading to Be'eri at two key points: in Alumim for those approaching from the north, and in Re'im for those coming from the south.

Intense battles erupted at both locations… pulling away at least some of the forces initially designated for Be'eri."[402]

The third wave of attackers into Be'eri were largely civilians from Gaza. As was the case in other civilian locations targeted on 7 October 2023, there was widespread looting. Home security footage places 2 men in civilian clothing stealing a motorcycle parked in the driveway of a home on *Kibbutz* Be'eri at 09:55.[403] At 10:41, footage from the *Kibbutz* back gate shows a Gazan looter riding a motorcycle balancing a stolen flat screen tv on the back.[404] Camera footage also shows men dressed in civilian clothes who stole at least 2 tractors from the *Kibbutz*. Uri Ben Zvi, a resident in Be'eri, said attackers took "his television, laptop, wallet, and money."[405] At 12:15-12:16, CCTV footage shows 5 cars and a motorbike carrying 3 passengers arrive at the gate. Dressed in civilian clothing, they entered. One appeared elderly and walked with two canes. However, 2 of them were holding assault rifles, one of them is seen holding a knife.[406]

Around 12:00, 6 members of the Even family, whose house was in the Vineyard family neighbourhood, were hiding in their safe room. Infiltrators set their house alight. The parents took their 4 children and jumped out of a window on the second floor of their house. All 4 landed safely and hid in trees. Attackers found them a few hours later. They shot Rinat Segev-Even, 44, Chen Even, 46, and 2 of the children, Alon, 16, and Ido, 14. The two youngest boys, Tomer, 11, and Nir, 8, hid beneath their bodies and survived.[407]

Resident Hava Ben-Ami, 71, was born in Aleppo, Syria and fled on foot to Israel with her family during the anti-Jewish riots of early 1948. At 08:00, her daughter Noam Ben-Ami Revach called her from Tel Aviv and found that she was watching television and unaware of the attacks already taking place in the *Kibbutz*.[408] She told her mother to hide in a closet. Around noon, Hava Ben Ami messaged her daughter that Hamas gunmen were in their home. The latter replied "Don't worry, we'll be there soon to get you out." There was no more phone contact. Gunmen took Hava Ben-Ami out of her home and brought her to the house of Pessi Cohen where they had collected 13 other residents as hostages and human shields.[409] All but 2 of the civilian hostages taken to the Pessi Cohen house died.

Yoram Bar-Sinai, 75, one of the *Kibbutz*' original architects, lived in the oldest part of the village with his wife Nili.[410] Once he realised that the village was under attack, he found an old personal pistol and rushed to the house of his daughter Riti, on the opposite side of the *Kibbutz*, who had recently had a baby. There he ensured his daughter was in the safe room with children. He fought the infiltrators from a second-floor porch until he was killed.[411]

12:30 was the last time British citizen and Bristol-born dental nurse, Lianne Sharabi, 48, (whose family live in Bridgend) and her two daughters Noya, 16, and Yahel,13, (who also had British citizenship) was heard from. As the rocket alert sirens went off, Lianne sent a message in her family WhatsApp group chat that she could hear gunfire and shouting in Arabic. Lianne's house was one of the closest houses to the fence where the infiltration occurred. At approximately 11:30, she messaged her sister-in-law Nira, who also lived in Be'eri with her husband Yossi and their children, saying "Nira, I can hear them. They are here at our house. They are shooting and shouting: "Die Israel". Please call for help."[412] The last message from Lianne was sent around 12:30. Hamas terrorists broke into their home, shot the family dog, and forced the door of the safe room open, before taking the family and setting fire to the house. Lianne and her daughters were then shot. The girls' father, Eli Sharabi, 51, was abducted to Gaza.[413] It took many weeks to identify Noya and Yahel's bodies.

Eli's brother, Yossi, in a separate incident in Be'eri was also taken hostage to Gaza. On the weekend of *Simchat Torah*, Ophir Engel from *Kibbutz* Ramat Rachel was

RPG blasted home in Kibbutz Be'eri.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

visiting the home of his 17-year-old girlfriend, Yuval Sharabi. When the sirens started at 06:30, Yuval's parents, Yossi and Nira, the little sisters Ofir, 15, and Oran, 14, and their dog Shoko, along with Ophir entered the safe room on the house's second floor. At 07:15, Nira's nephew, Idan, texted her whilst escaping from the Nova Music Festival hoping to come to her house in Be'eri, but she told him the *Kibbutz* was also under attack. At 12:30, 3 terrorists infiltrated Yossi Sharabi's family home.

Nira later described that they were taken from their house with weapons aimed at them. Their phones were taken, and the attackers took pictures of themselves using the phones. The attackers also took a "flag of Israel down [which was in] the house, and they just ripped it and they started to smash it. And they start to yell in Arabic, "Down with Israel! This is Palestine! This is not Israel! Israel does not exist! Kill all the Jews!" [414]

The family was then placed with another family who had been taken hostage in the courtyard (the Shani family) and at approximately 13:00 Yossi, Ophir and Amit Shani were taken in a car to Gaza.[415] At around 13:30 Nira, her daughters and the other hostages were still being guarded by two attackers, but then under gunfire (likely from the arrival of significant IDF forces) they fled. Nira led the group into another house to escape the shooting. They were rescued by the IDF at 21:00.[416]

During the first hour of the attacks, resident Amit Man, 22, a paramedic, ran to the dental clinic after hearing shooting elsewhere in the *Kibbutz*.[417] There she met the *Kibbutz* nurse Nirit Hunwald, 38. The two of them turned the dental clinic into a medical aid post, and telephoned resident Dr Daniel Levy. He ran through the developing attack to join them. Their first patient was Gil Boyum, the squad member wounded earlier in the morning; he died soon after being brought inside. During the day's fighting, as wounded squad members and residents came or were brought to the dental clinic, Amit Man repeatedly called the Magen David Adom ambulance service. She told them "send ambulances! People are dying before my eyes."[418] As the day wore on, residents began to send her WhatsApp messages asking how to treat those wounded in their safe rooms.

Gunmen began to attack and then besiege the clinic mid-morning. It was defended by two members of the civilian security team. They were Eitan Hadad, 43, a musician who worked as a sales executive at Be'eri printing[419], and Shachar Tzemach, 39, chief financial officer of the Be'eri printing house who was also "a prominent left-wing activist."[420] The pair had limited ammunition and therefore chose to engage attackers only at close range from ambush positions near the clinic.

At 13:55, Amit Man sent a voice recording to her sister Mary as the two squad members ran out of ammunition and attackers converged on the building, throwing grenades. In the recording "you can hear shooting and Amit shouting "Shachar! No! Shachar! God, please make it stop, please make it stop." It was at that point that Shachar was killed. Man, then messaged her sister "That's it, they're here. There's a lot of them, they're here. I won't make it out."[421]

The gunmen threw several grenades into the clinic building and sprayed it with gunfire before entering it. Shortly afterwards, Man's mother was able to reach her by telephone where she learnt that her daughter had been shot in the leg. The paramedic was able to tie a tourniquet around her leg, but the intruders came back into the clinic. According to 1 of the 2 survivors, Man raised her hands in surrender, but the Hamas gunman shot the paramedic several times, killing her.[422]

Yair Avital, a wounded squad member, played dead in the debris of the clinic kitchenette which had been wrecked by grenade blasts. After the gunmen left, he saw that his fellow squad member Eitan had been shot dead, as had the doctor Daniel Levy. Unknown to him, Nirit Hunwald was also still alive. She was lying on the floor of the locked clinic bathroom. She remained there motionless for 2 hours until IDF commandos came to the clinic around 16:00. The soldiers extricated her and Yair Avital through a window and rushed them to safety amid the ongoing fighting.[423]

Hostage-taking at Be'eri began in the first hour of the Hamas attack and continued until about 13:00. Most of the kidnappings took place in the western edge of the *Kibbutz*, though there were also abductions in the centre, near the clinic. Four Be'eri residents were killed during their abduction from the *Kibbutz*, their bodies were recovered near the perimeter fence.[424]

Of the 33 hostages (27 taken alive, and 6 deceased bodies), 7 members of Gilad Korngold's family were taken hostage by Hamas, including his son Tal, daughter-in-law Adi, his grandson, Naveh, 8, and his granddaughter, Yahel, 3.[425] Alongside Naveh and Yahel, Emily Hand, 8, was one of the youngest hostages taken from *Kibbutz* Be'eri. On the eve of the attack, Thomas Hand, had allowed his daughter Emily to sleep over at a friend's house. In the morning when the rocket alarm sounded Hand went into his safe room. He assumed that his daughter had gone into the safe room of her

friend's mother, Raaya Rotem. He was not worried for her until he started to "hear gunfire of an automatic weapon and the booms of an RPG." Hand telephoned his friend Narkis and asked her to call Emily's hosts, the Rotems and tell them to hide in the safe room and hold on to the door handle. Hand then armed himself with a pistol and a knife and prepared to run out and get his daughter. He opened the window of his safe room but was immediately faced with two shots at the wall of his house.

At 10:30 Emily sent him a message asking him if he was in his safe room. He answered yes but his phone then died and the electricity in the neighbourhood went out. A little later, Hand left the safe room to get water from his kitchen. He heard scratching at the front door and opened it to see the dog of his friend Narkis. He realised that "something terrible must have happened to her."[426] At 23:00 the IDF found Narkis dead and the Rotem house empty. Hand was then trapped in his safe room for next 16 hours.[427] Emily Hand was initially classified as missing, but then it was confirmed that Raaya Rotem had been abducted with two young girls after an Indian carer working at Be'eri provided witness. Emily was released after 50 days in November 2023 – after initially refusing to leave without her friend and her friend's mother.

At some point during the attack, the terrorists destroyed the *Kibbutz* Be'eri gallery building, its equipment, library and archives. Orit Svirsky, 70, the founder of the gallery, and a noted peace activist, was shot dead in her home, as was her ex-husband Rafi, 71. Her Israeli-German son Itay, 38, who had come down from Tel Aviv to stay with Orit Svirsky for the holiday, was kidnapped to Gaza and killed in captivity.[428]

For the most part, the taking of dead bodies as hostages was carried out after the first wave of *Nukhba* attackers had been supplemented by gunmen from other militant groups and civilian looters. These corpse-kidnappings included the abduction by two Gazans in civilian clothes, of Yonatan Samarno, one of the men shot dead in a blue car at the *Kibbutz* entrance, just before 07:00.[429] One of the attackers seen on CCTV footage, picked up and abducted a civilian corpse. He was later identified as an UNRWA employee - social worker Faisal Ali Mussalem al-Naami.[430]

The IDF's probe into the attack on *Kibbutz* Be'eri confirmed that by around 13:00, all the hostages who were taken to Gaza, had been taken. It was around this time that the more significant response from the IDF began to arrive. At approximately 13:00, an IAF attack helicopter fired on a group of invaders who were blockading the entrance of the *Kibbutz*. This action cleared the way for outside forces to enter. The first to arrive was a five-man squad of Sayeret Matkal elite commandos. They were followed soon afterwards by other units, including two vehicles of the MATPA commando unit of the Israel Police, which had been notified that terrorists had taken over and fortified a house in Be'eri and were holding hostages inside.[431]

The MATPA police, who had been in the city of Sderot during the morning drove westward alongside the *Kibbutz* perimeter in a pair of armoured jeeps. After a few hundred metres they saw gunmen running out of the village through a breach in the fence. One of the jeeps was able to strike and kill 2 of the gunmen. The jeeps then entered the *Kibbutz*. They were immediately hit from all sides by small arms and rocket -propelled grenades. One jeep was immediately destroyed by RPG fire. The officers in the other vehicle returned fire. They killed up to 22 of the attackers, but only 1 out of the 8 police officers who entered Be'eri survived. The dead included CI. Dan Ganot, Supt. Vadim Blich, Sgt. 1st Class Uriel Shalom Elon, Staff Sgt. Gadif Mologota, First Sgt. Boris Danilov, Mast. Sgt. Eliran Abergil, and Staff Sgt. Dor Mengadi.[432] Intense fires ignited by the RPGs burned the vehicles and bodies inside and beside them, preventing identification of the officers until 10 days after the attacks.[433]

Yadin Gellman, an actor, and reservist with the elite Sayeret Matkal unit, had been called up early in the morning of 7 October. Gellman and his 4 team members took a Chevy Savannah and immediately drove down to the Gaza Envelope. According to Gellman's testimony, the regular "on-call" special forces teams had already been sent south, but no one at that stage knew which of the local communities or army bases needed assistance the most. "We know people are being attacked, we know that there are terrorists, we don't know how many. What we imagined was what we prepared for, which is a terrorist squad, let's say somewhere in between 4 to10 or maybe 15 terrorists."[434]

En route to Kfar Aza and Be'eri, Gellman's vehicle had to stop to fight ambushes and was nearly hit by rocket and mortar fire. After joining the fighting at Kfar Aza, Gellman's team was ordered to Be'eri. There they joined with the unit's overall commander and went into Be'eri in a "David" armoured car. They evacuated a group of Thai workers, and a wounded soldier and then went to the *Kibbutz* kindergarten.

The Be'eri kindergarten had been overtaken by Hamas gunmen, who were using it as a command centre.[435] The retaking of it by the IDF saw one of the several intense battles that took place in various areas of the *Kibbutz*, involving small numbers of IDF troops and police, before the influx of significant army forces in the late afternoon. "Casings consistent with the calibre of the AK style firearms used by many Palestinian fighters, and damage consistent with small arms and rocket fire" were found at the scene later.[436] The kindergarten was secured at the same time as another Sayeret Matkal team eliminated the gunmen who had taken over the dental clinic.

Gellman and his small team of elite soldiers went from house to house to rescue residents. Many of the houses were on fire. In one "everything was just on fire with one body on the stairs of the house, one body under the stairs, all civilians."[437] Whenever Gellman's team found someone alive, they called their commander, "who was driving around the *Kibbutz* in an armoured vehicle, and he'd pick up whole families in the car and bring them out. It went on for hours until it grew dark."[438]

It was only after these small battles involving small units such as Gellman's that the sizeable military forces that had gathered outside Be'eri, including a battalion of paratroopers, began to enter Be'eri in force under the command of Brig Gen Barak Hiram. The campaign to retake the *Kibbutz* lasted from 16:00 on 7 October to 08:00 on 8 October.

At various times, individual volunteers and ad hoc groups from elsewhere in Israel came to the *Kibbutz* to rescue or defend its residents. They included British-Israeli Benjamin Trakeniski, 32, an off-duty major in the IDF armoured corps who drove down from Tel Aviv and was killed rescuing wounded residents. Trakeniski and his team were the first force to go in and rescue the wounded in *Kibbutz* Be'eri and rescued close to 50 people.[439] Lt. Col. Salman Habaka, a Druze officer from Galilee, led two tanks from his base in West Bank to Be'eri, and later told an interviewer "What we saw when we entered [Be'eri] was the stuff of nightmares, houses on fire, overturned cars, dead terrorists."[440]

The brothers Menachem and Elhanan Kalmanson, (the former a serving soldier, the latter a former member of the security services) decided to go to Be'eri at 16:00 after hearing about the attacks. They took arms and drove from the West Bank village of Otniel to Be'eri in a family SUV. When they arrived at the *Kibbutz* at 18:15, residents gathered near the gatehouse "showed the brothers on Google Maps how to reach their homes and the family members trapped there." The Kalmansons then borrowed a small armoured vehicle from one of several units of soldiers waiting at the gate and drove it inside.

For the next 16 hours they went from house-to-house rescuing residents hiding in their safe rooms and taking them out of the village. Many residents feared that they were terrorists trying to trick their way into the safe rooms. To prove that they were in fact Israelis they sang Hebrew songs and prayers. The brothers extracted people from burning homes under gunfire, taking as many as 15 people in a jeep meant for 4 as they raced to get them out of the *Kibbutz*.

The pair faced difficult decisions over who to save and who to leave behind – some of the people who called for rescue were trapped on the second floor of buildings that were already engulfed in flames to the extent that "it would have been suicide to try to get them out." In many dwellings the brothers found only corpses, some of them incinerated. They also found terrified residents who had been hiding for hours in bushes, under terraces and in the foliage of the eucalyptus and carob trees that abound on *Kibbutz*. One victim found by Menachem Kalmanson was an elderly man sitting in a chair on his porch, a cup of coffee next to him, who had been shot. At approximately 10:15 on 9 October, both brothers were shot by an intruder hiding in a house on the *Kibbutz*. Elhanan Kalmanson, 41, was killed; his brother survived.[441]

Another volunteer, retired IDF Gen. Israel Ziv was bicycling in the hills around Tel Aviv when he received a phone call about the attacks.[442] He went home, put on his old uniform, took a pistol and drove down to Route 232 in the Gaza Envelope. After getting through an ambush by Hamas gunmen Ziv reached the Nova Festival site. There he found only corpses. He "touched like 40 or maybe 50 dead bodies, but couldn't find anybody alive" so he decided to "go back to Be'eri."[443] On the way he rescued various Nova escapees who were hiding near the roadsides. Ziv arrived at Be'eri in late afternoon to find a large group of soldiers outside the gate. The official IDF probe confirmed reports that large numbers of troops gathered outside of Be'eri but did not enter it, despite the intense fighting inside between special forces and infiltrators, and the ongoing killings and kidnappings. Some units entered but then withdrew. While the local security team had apparently been able to provide considerable information to the military about the attack early in the morning; it did not reach the commanders of units that arrived at the *Kibbutz* in early afternoon. As a result, "for the first 7

hours of the attack, only 13 troops and 13 members of the *Kibbutz*' local security team and other armed civilians were fighting off the invasion."[444] Gunmen continued to be active in Be'eri until at least 18:00 on 8 October.[445]

At 19:00 on 7 October, Yadin Gellman and his team were told to make their way to the house of resident Pessi Cohen, in the Asholim neighbourhood near the centre of the *Kibbutz*, to help with an ongoing issue. Hamas infiltrators had encircled and taken over the neighbourhood after 12:00, and by 12:53, Pessi Cohen's house had been entered. In the house was Pessi, her sister Hanna Siton, her husband Yitzhak Siton, and their son Tal.

The attackers immediately killed Yitzhak, and wounded Tal, following which Pessi and Hana were made to sit at the long dining table on the balcony. For about 2 hours, 40 terrorists, equipped with Kalashnikovs and ammunition vests, led more and more abducted residents from nearby houses to Pessi's house.

In addition to her and the 3 members of the Siton family, the terrorists gathered 11 more hostages. These included Ayala 'Ayalos' Hetzroni along with her British-Israeli great-niece and nephew, twins Liel and Yannai Hetzroni, 12; Zeev and Zehava Hacker; and Hava Ben Ami. Also gatherered were Adi and Hadas Dagan who hosted at their house, from the morning, a couple who fled the Nova Music Festival, Yasmin Porat and Tal Katz; and Suheib Abu Amar ElRazam, an Arab-Israeli shuttle driver from East Jerusalem, who was abducted from the Nova site and brought to Be'eri to serve as an interpreter for the attackers. Approximately 10 gunmen were assigned to guard the hostages.[446]

At 15:08, one of the commanders of the terrorist force at the house, Hassan Hamduna, got Porat to use her phone to call police. He told the police, in Arabic, "I'm from Al-Qassam Brigades... if you give us trouble, I'll kill one of the hostages. There are 50 people here." The policeman replied: "What's the problem?" Hamduna replies: "The problem is that I want to take everyone to Gaza. If you don't tell the army to guarantee us safe passage, all 50 will be killed." Porat confirmed to the police, that there was 1 dead person (Yitzhak) and an injured person (Tal) in the house.[447]

The attackers then removed Adi and Hadas Dagan, the wounded Tal Siton, Tal Katz, Zeev Hacker and Pessi herself from the house, placing them in the yard outside. The rest of the hostages remained inside the house. By 16:00 Israeli security forces began to arrive at the courtyard of the house, and the attackers all went inside the house, leaving the 6 hostages in the yard, but who were reportedly not visible to the IDF forces in the field. At 15:59, one of the terrorists holding hostages in Cohen's home contacted his superiors in Gaza to report the arrival of the IDF. The military intercepted this communication. However, due to a miscommunication, the initial conversation with the police was forwarded to troops as a hostage situation at Be'eri's dining hall, and not at Cohen's home. Accordingly, when machine gun and RPG fire came from the house, a police elite YAMAM unit fired a shoulder-launched missile toward Cohen's home.[448]

At around 17:00 Hamduna decided to surrender, and stripping to his underwear exited the house, using Porat as a human shield. At the same time, Col. Nissam Hazan arrived with a tank under his command to Be'eri and was sent to the Cohen house. Once outside, Porat tried to explain to the police the location of all the hostages - including in the yard, the terrace and the living room. She confirmed "there were more terrorists in the house than hostages. The terrorists were in the safe room, in the bathroom, spread out under the entire terrace, under the window in the living room that protected them."[449] Hamduna would also then speak directly to his fellow attackers on a loudspeaker and told them to surrender.[450]

Approval was given to the IDF to fire light tank shells near and at the building to pressure the attackers to surrender; warning shots were fired at 17:33. Further intercepted communications from the terrorists in the house to others in the Strip reveal that their commanders in Gaza told them to run away at 18:26, but at 18:32, the attackers barricaded in the house informed their commanders that they would fight to the death. It was around this time that shrapnel from one of the IDF's shells killed hostage Avi Dagan who was in the yard.

Fighting continued around the surrounding homes in efforts to reach the hostages, but, according to the IDF probe into *Kibbutz* Be'eri, at 19:57 "a long burst of gunfire was heard by the forces, and then silence with no sound of the hostages." It was after this that special forces directly entered the home, exchanging in a gun battle. The only survivor, apart from Porat, was Hadas Dagan. Among the 13 dead, killed either by their captors or by crossfire in the battle to take the house was British-Israeli twins Liel and Yannai Hetzroni, 12 and their great-aunt. Their grandfather, Ayiya Hertzoni was also killed earlier that day at the *Kibbutz*.

There was controversy among Be'eri survivors and in Israel generally about whether the tank shelling contributed to the deaths of the hostages being held

in the house. The IDF Probe "determined that most of the hostages were likely murdered by the terrorists, and further inquiries and reviews of additional findings are necessary."[451]

Yadin Gellman and a member of Sayeret Matkal had earlier been hit by machine gunfire as they approached Pessi Cohen's house. They went into a crawl space underneath it. Other gunmen were firing at them from another house nearby. They were trapped there for 45 minutes, with Anat Meir, a fellow soldier, who was unconscious from blood loss. They were rescued by the arrival of the tank, commanded by Lt. Col. Salman Habaka, which fired at the building. Both soldiers were evacuated by helicopter but Meir, 31, died of his wounds en route to the hospital.[452]

By 22:00 Israeli forces began restoring operational control of Be'eri and the main evacuation of residents took place. By 05:00 on 8 October, the IDF confirmed total operational control. From this point, until 15:00, security forces moved from house-to-house to check for remaining terrorists. During this sweep, combat continued in select locations.[453]

The attacks on families and individuals at Be'eri often featured deliberate cruelty, including torture and mutilation, both pre and post-mortem. "In *Kibbutz* Be'eri, 80-year-old Albert Miles told his daughter in a phone call during the attack that militants had severed the fingers on his left hand." Miles was then shot and killed. The COI Report, confirmed "evidence that body parts were severed by militants."[454]

ZAKA, the body collection charity authorised by the Israeli government to assist at scenes of natural disasters and terrorist attacks, was given permission to come to Be'eri on 9 October. The ZAKA volunteers went from building to building as each was declared free of explosives by IDF combat engineers. By then, even intact bodies were entering a state of decomposition.[455] The ZAKA volunteers testified to finding many naked and half-naked bodies especially of female residents, and to finding bodies that had been mutilated in a number of ways. Footage recorded by first responders shows a victim who was bound at the wrists with metal wire. The body was recovered from rubble and was found to be attached by metal wire to a mattress.[456] Yadlin Gellman testified that in one house, "there's a family with 4 people - parents and kids. I don't know their ages but they were all dead, and all tortured. We could see from their bodies that they went through something that was no bullet to the head. They were beaten, their bodies completely beaten."[457]

As well as the deliberate killing and kidnapping of civilians, and the destruction or defilement of dead bodies, evidence also suggests strongly that during the 6 hours when Hamas-led attackers had free rein of much of *Kibbutz* Be'eri, some attackers committed acts of sexual violence and rape against civilians in the village.

In February 2024 the Association of Rape Crisis Centres of Israel (ARCCI) published a report on sexual violence that it then submitted to various UN bodies.[458] The ARCCI report states that "several testimonies were collected regarding the bodies of women and girls who were raped [at Be'eri] mostly in their bedrooms." The report cited "ZAKA volunteers and rescue forces who described a row of houses where bodies with signs of sexual assault were found, including women and girls who were stripped of their underwear, signs of semen, and insertion of a knife into the genital area."[459]

A UN mission headed by Pramila Patten, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict visited Be'eri in early February 2024. The report stated that "the mission team received credible information about bodies found naked and/or tied, and in one case gagged, in some of the *Kibbutz*' destroyed houses and their surroundings…the pattern of female victims found undressed and bound – may be indicative of some forms of sexual violence."[460] (SEE Chapter 6 Atrocities and Impact)

Bodies – of both residents and attackers - were still being found in surrounding fields in mid-December.[461] Natasha Cohen, one of a handful residents to return to Be'eri in early 2024, reported that her dog brought her a bone that turned out to be a human femur.[462]

Six months after the attack, a journalist visited the *Kibbutz*, and recounted the bullet holes, shrapnel and fire damage across the buildings. "In one safe room I entered, everything was black, even a children's white teddy bear covered in soot. Walls and floors were still thickly smeared with blood in some homes."[463] The COI Report analysed satellite imagery of Be'eri and reported "26 structures completely destroyed, 4 severely damaged and 27 moderately damaged. This corresponds to around 34% of the total structures in the *Kibbutz*. The Vineyard and Olives neighbourhoods experienced the most significant damage, with 16 destroyed and damaged structures in the Vineyard neighbourhood and 12 destroyed and damaged structures in the Olives neighbourhood."[464] As a result of the extensive physical destruction at Be'eri, the *Kibbutz* is expected to take 2-3 years to rebuild.

XVI. Kibbutz Re'im

Kibbutz Re'im ("Friends") is a small *Kibbutz* in the south of the Gaza Envelope, 3.42 miles from the Gaza border, situated at the Re'im junction where Route 232 and Route 234 intersect. It was founded in 1949, near the Canaanite archaeological site of Tel Jemmeh by former Palmach members and members of the Israel Boy and Girl Scouts Federation.[465] Among its founders was the prominent Israeli architect Hanin Havron, who designed its first buildings.

A secular community, which farms avocados and other orchard crops, its non-agricultural enterprises include the Isralaser metal processing plant[466] and a factory belonging to the Israbig machine tool company.[467] As of the last population census conducted in 2022, the residential population of the *Kibbutz* was 422, however, this does not account for the numerous Thai workers who resided at the *Kibbutz*.[468]

The Re'im military base, which serves as the headquarters for the IDF's Gaza Division, is located just south of the Gamma Junction, where Route 232 meets Route 242, and is located just over 1.86 miles southwest of the *Kibbutz*. *Kibbutz* Re'im is also the closest community to the Nova Music Festival that was attacked early on the morning of 7 October 2023. The fields around the festival ground belong to the *Kibbutz*.

It is believed that approximately 100 gunmen from Hamas infiltrated the village during the attack.[469] In total 17 individuals were killed constituting 9 civilians (including 1 Nova escapee), 4 first responders and 4 military personnel. Five hostages were also taken, including 4 Thai nationals.

On 7 October 2023 residents heard a series of loud bangs in the moments before rocket alarms sounded at 06:30 and they ran to their rocket shelters and safe rooms.[470] Around 07:00, the 7-person *Kitat Konenut* (civilian security squad) came together at a location in the western part of the *Kibbutz* that overlooks the Re'im junction. From there they were able to see the rocket and mortar shelling of Re'im base and heard gunfire from nearby *Kibbutzim*.[471 472] The squad members also saw the beginning of the occupation of Route 232 and other surrounding highways by Hamas gunmen who were gathering on Route 242 between 2 bus stops 120 metres apart, each with a concrete bomb shelter.[473] The Hamas operatives set up ambush sites by the road after throwing grenades into the bomb shelters in which civilians had taken refuge (SEE Chapter 5.8 Highway Route 232). The security squad volunteers split into pairs and went to various parts of the *Kibbutz* to prepare its defence.

At 07:15, a group of 30 people who had escaped the attack on the Nova Festival arrived at the *Kibbutz* and hid in various safe rooms and shelters. Shortly after, at 07:55, Hamas troops arrived at the unguarded

Damage to a house in Kibbutz Re'im. Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

front gate of the *Kibbutz* in a convoy of white pickup trucks where they fired on the vehicle of Border police officer Stas Sheinkman, killing him. This was captured on the *Kibbutz*' CCTV which then also showed the attackers breaking into the village. There were near-simultaneous infiltrations through the back gate of the *Kibbutz*, where 15 terrorists entered on foot along with vans full of more gunmen and weaponry, and a breach in its western fence of approximately 12 more terrorists, whilst another group remained on Route 232 to control the intersection.[474]

Mussa Abu Sabila, a *Kibbutz* security guard, was shot and wounded by Hamas infiltrators within moments of the initial attack. Despite his wounds, the Bedouin IDF veteran was able to get to his car and drive to neighbouring *Kibbutz* Urim, where his young nephew was working.[475] The father of 8 did not survive the journey; he was shot again by Hamas gunmen while en route.[476]

Attacks on civilian dwellings began immediately after the initial infiltrations. 81-year-old Varda Harmati was discovered by her partner of 50 years at 08:00, lying in her bed having been shot in the head. He had gone to her house to check on her after he became aware that terrorists had infiltrated the village and stayed with her body for 30 hours before he was evacuated by the IDF.[477]

At 06:30, Noam and Adi Gabay had gone into their safe room following the rocket alarms, with 2 of their children. Their third child, 17-year-old Amit Gabay, who had moved into the *Kibbutz*' youth neighbourhood went into his own shelter. Noam, who was a member of the security team, joined the rest of his squad around 07:00, first warning his family that there was a terrorist infiltration in the *Kibbutz*. Around 08:00, gunmen went to the youth neighbourhood. At 08:10 Adi Gabay asked her son by text "How's it going?" He replied "Mum, what do we do?" His mother told him "There's not much we can do other than be quiet and wait." She texted him again at 08:20 "Amit, what's up with you?". There was no answer. Gunmen had broken into his room and killed him around 08:18 (he was last seen on WhatsApp at 08:17).[478] Outside a nearby house, they also shot dead Asaf Faber, 23, who had tried to defend himself with an axe.[479] From the youth neighbourhood the gunmen also kidnapped Liam Or, 18, after shooting him in the stomach.[480] Or was later released during the November Ceasefire.

At 08:15, a group of Hamas gunmen went to the residence of the *Kibbutz*' Thai farmworkers and abducted 6 of them. Hostage Manee Jirachat , testified that when there was not enough room in their vehicle to take all 6 into Gaza, the infiltrators shot 2 of them, Pongsathorn Khunsri, 25, and Kiattisak Pattee, 35, in the head. Jirachat also detailed the abuse he faced during the kidnapping, stating that one of the kidnappers jammed a rifle into his neck whilst driving them to the border.[481] Another Thai hostage Anucha Angkaew, 28, testified that whilst he was held hostage in Gaza him and his fellow Thai hostages were beaten for 2 days and that an Israeli hostage who had been placed with them was then whipped with electrical wires for a further 2 days.[482]

Dvir Karp, 46, and his girlfriend Stav Kimhi, 35, were in their safe room, together with his children, when the gunmen broke into the house at 08:20. Karp, a chocolatier and the manager of the *Kibbutz* gym, attempted to defend the family with an axe but the infiltrators shot him and then Kimhi.[483] The children were not shot and one of the infiltrators took Ms Kimhi's lipstick and wrote on the wall in Arabic "Al Qassam does not kill children."[484] Despite the claim left by Al Qassam Brigade in the Karp household, members of Hamas' Al Qassam Brigade did kill multiple children at multiple other locations including, but not limited to, *Kibbutz* Nir Oz, *Kibbutz* Be'eri, and in an ambush at the Sha'ar HaNegev junction.

At 08:24, after the killers left the house, the older child, Daria Karp, 10, picked up her father's phone and messaged her mother in northern Israel: "Mom it's Daria. Dad's been murdered. Stav too. Help."[485] The children remained in the safe room alone for 3 hours, until fellow *Kibbutz* resident Golan Septon was able to get to the house. He stayed with them until 19:30, after which he evacuated them to his own home, through the window so that the 2 children would not see their father's body.[486]

Small numbers of soldiers and police began arriving at *Kibbutz* Re'im at approximately 09:00. This included police officers from the Yasam-Negev Special Patrol Unit, of whom 2 died. Others were individuals who had heard about the attacks and driven from various parts of the country. Among them was career army officer Maj. Mordechai Shamir, 29, who joined soldiers from the 51st Golani Brigade soldiers near Ofakim, fought at the highway junction there, and then went on to Re'im where he was killed by a Hamas sniper.[487]

At 09:35 Hamas gunmen infiltrated the Marom family home and set fire to it. Seven members of the family, 2 of whom were paralysed and wheelchair bound, were trapped in the safe room suffocating on the fumes.[488]

They were rescued by policemen and a member of the civil guard at 11:30, however, their dog perished in the fire and the specialised equipment of their disabled daughter Liki was destroyed.[489]

Among the Nova escapees who took refuge at *Kibbutz* Re'im were Shaked and Geva Aharon, the 20 and 23-year-old sons of a senior police officer. They had phoned their father, Supt. Eyal Aharon, at his home in the far south of the Negev, who immediately set out for Re'im.[490] In the meantime, the 2 young men were ushered into a crowded safe room by Guy Simhi, a fellow Nova attendee and off-duty paratrooper. When gunmen came to the house, Simhi left the safe room to defend it. He and another resident who had a pistol were able to kill 2 of the attackers before the latter threw in a grenade.

Simhi was wounded by the explosion, staggered outside the house and was then shot dead. The infiltrators entered the house.[491] They tried to force their way through the safe room door, firing several rounds through it, 2 of which hit Shaked Aharon in the leg, but eventually left the house after failing to break in.[492] Their father, Supt. Aharon was still on his way to *Kibbutz* Re'im, having stopped en route in Ofakim at about 8:30, where fighting was ongoing. As he continued to the *Kibbutz* the police commander received a series of texts from his son Geva: "Shaked is bleeding." Then "Are you coming?" Then "Dad???". And finally "They're at the door. They're outside."[493]

As Aharon arrived at the *Kibbutz* his vehicle was fired on and disabled. He ran into the village, met up with some Border Police troops and as he went deeper into the *Kibbutz* came upon several men dressed in blue Israeli Police uniforms. They turned out to be Hamas gunmen, wearing green headbands under their helmets, which Aharon realised after they failed to answer a series of basic security questions.[494] A firefight ensued, after which Supt. Aharon was eventually able to make his way to the area in which his sons were hiding. Once he got there, he saw as many as 20 gunmen in and around the house.[495]

Unable to rescue his sons and the other 12 people hiding in the safe room, Aharon watched the house from a hiding place. At 12:40, when a small unit of police arrived at Re'im, Aharon joined them in the ongoing fighting elsewhere in the village. While he was doing so another security force unit, was able to rescue his sons and their companions. When Shaked Aharon was taken out of the house on a stretcher, by a medic and his brother, infiltrators threw grenades that tore off his tourniquet but failed to kill them.[496]

At 12.40 the first IDF forces arrived at the *Kibbutz*. These soldiers were from Unit 888 otherwise known as the "Multidimensional Unit" or "Ghost" Unit. Its leader, Col. Roi Levy, 44, was killed in the fighting along with Cpt. Yotam Ben Bassatt, 24.[497] The IDF have since released footage of this unit fighting at the *Kibbutz*, in which you can see Hamas fighters attempting to shoot down the unit's drone.[498]

At 22:00 the local council messaged Re'im residents that they were allowed to leave their safe rooms.[499] However, there were still infiltrators inside the village and fighting continued for some hours, with security forces using a tank and bulldozer to retake a home in which terrorists had barricaded themselves.[500] Maj. Ariel Ben Moshe, 27, of the elite Sayeret Makeral unit was set to blow up the last house believed to contain one of the infiltrators when he was informed that there was a child inside. Electing to storm the house, he was shot during the breach and died soon afterwards.[501] Two infiltrators who had hidden on the *Kibbutz* grounds were killed on 10 October 2023 .

The *Kibbutz*, which was severely damaged in the attacks, with many houses burned, was evacuated to Eilat over the course of 8 October 2023.[502] A Hamas Arabic-Hebrew transliteration phrase book document was found near *Kibbutz* Re'im in the aftermath.[503]

The United Nations Report on Sexual Violence found that there were reasonable grounds to believe that "sexual violence occurred in *Kibbutz* Re'im, including rape." The rape of women happened on Route 232, "outside of a bomb shelter at the entrance of *Kibbutz* Re'im, which was corroborated by witness testimonies and digital material."[504]

XVII. Kibbutz Kissufim

Kissufim (Hebrew for "yearning") is a *Kibbutz* in the centre of the Gaza Envelope, located 1.4 miles from the Gaza border. It was founded in 1951 by Zionist youth movement members from the US and South America and is a 'privatised' *Kibbutz*, meaning its members no longer share resources and income communally.[505] Along with the usual mix of arable cultivation, citrus groves and a dairy farm, the *Kibbutz* owns a factory that produces frames for eyeglasses and an archaeological museum[506] that showcases ancient artefacts discovered in the surrounding area.[507] In addition, the *Kibbutz* rents out some of its land to the IDF, which has a base on the edge of the property. A small *Kibbutz* by the standard of the region, Kissufim had a population of 294 residents at the last recorded census in 2022.[508]

On 7 October 2023 (and over the next 2 days) attackers from Gaza killed 17 civilians, 6 of which were Thai nationals, and 11 military personnel. One *Kibbutz* member was taken hostage. The battle to retake the *Kibbutz* and secure the surrounding area was not complete until 11 October, during which 11 Israeli soldiers from 4 different military units were killed. The IDF outpost located next to the *Kibbutz* also came under attack and 18 soldiers were killed there. (SEE Chapter 5.9 Attacked Military Facilities).

As well as the Hamas military, several Palestinian armed organisations with branches in Gaza confirmed that they took part in the October attack on Kissufim. These included the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) Quds Brigade, the Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, and the National Resistance Brigades of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP).[509] The assault was led by Mismah, commander of the Deir al-Balah battalion, an elite unit within the Izz Al-Din Qassam Brigades.[510] Some of the attackers wore stolen IDF uniforms.[511]

At 06:30 on 7 October 2023, Red Alert sirens sounded all around the community, preceding an intense barrage from Gaza. Less than 10 minutes later, the first attackers penetrated the *Kibbutz* itself in multiple places.[512] At the start of the rocket attack that morning, 5 Golani soldiers patrolling near to the outpost immediately engaged with multiple groups of terrorists before they were overwhelmed. This resulted in the deaths of 2 soldiers but bought precious time for both the *Kibbutz* Kissufim and the nearby base.[513] The infiltrators simultaneously breached the IDF outpost on the east side of the *Kibbutz* (SEE Chapter 5.9 Attacked Military Facilities), preventing reinforcements to the *Kibbutz*, and destroying the communications tower.

The attackers had detailed information about the *Kibbutz* and its security team. The first gunmen to arrive headed immediately for the house of the community's head of security, Roni Sfedj. He was not killed in the resulting encounter but retreated to a reinforced safe room with his family and remained there during the battle for the *Kibbutz*. The infiltrators took over the rest of the house and used it as a headquarters and ammunition store. As a result of the hit on the communications tower, Shai Asher, 40, a member of the community's *Kitat Konenut* (civilian security team) said that "the phone network [did not] work, WhatsApp [did not] work, everything is broken down, our radio doesn't work, all the channels of command are missing."[514] The terrorists also systematically attempted to isolate the *Kibbutz* and hinder any response by shooting electrical transformers and the water mains.[515]

At 08:00, Asher and another *Kitat Konenut* member Saar Margolis, armed themselves and met outside. Unable to reach the security team leader, they went to find him at his home. They saw Hamas gunmen standing outside the house and presumed that he was dead.[516] The civilian security team was small and had little time to put together an organised resistance against a large number of infiltrators. To protect his family while he fought the intruders, Shai Asher wrecked his living room and smeared ketchup on walls and floors to make it look as if a massacre had already taken place in the house.[517]

Within the first hour of the attack, gunmen forced their way into the home of the Mantsour family. Shlomo Mantzour, 85, managed the *Kibbutz* chicken coop.[518] He was a refugee from Iraq, having survived the "Farhud" massacre in Baghdad in 1941.[519] He had lived in Kissufim for most of his life with his wife Mazal, who escaped capture on 7 October 2023. The terrorists handcuffed Shlomo, took him out of his house and slapped him before driving him to Gaza in his own car.[520] At 85, Shlomo Mantzour was the oldest person to be kidnapped on 7 October, 2023 and held hostage in Gaza. Mansour's kidnapping was witnessed by his neighbour Rafi Samet.[521] Samet was at his home with his grandson, a soldier on Shabbat, when the attack began. His grandson took his service weapon and went to join the civilian security team effort. He received bullet wounds to the hand and foot after approaching a group of gunmen, who he believed to be soldiers because they were wearing stolen IDF uniforms.[522] Samet was also shot when attempting to retrieve supplies from his Magen David Adom ambulance which was also destroyed in the attack.[523]

Gina Smiatich, 90, was a Chilean-born retiree who had run the *Kibbutz* community store for many years.[524] Gunmen dragged her out of her safe room and into her living room, where they shot her in the head.[525] The attackers raided her kitchen after killing her.[526] Further down the street, the attackers broke into the house of Itai and Eti Zak. When they and their 15-year-old son, Sagi, refused to leave their locked safe room, the intruders set the house on fire. All 3 members of the family died of asphyxiation, huddled together in the safe room along with their dog Soka.[527] Retired schoolteacher Menuha Chulati, 75, was also burned to death in her house.[528] Two other residents, Spanish-Israeli dual national Iván Illarramendi Saizar, 46, and his Chilean wife Dafna Garcovich, were also burnt alive in their home. They were initially believed to have been taken hostage as it took a month for their bodies to be identified.[529]

Retired schoolteacher Menuha Chulati, 75, was burned to death in her house in Kibbutz Kissufim. Her house is pictured.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

One member of the security team, Saar Margolis, was killed in the fighting in the afternoon after joining up with IDF troops from the 450th Battalion. They had arrived at 13:00 and were trying to retake the base and *Kibbutz*. Due to Saar's familiarity with the *Kibbutz*, he assumed a commanding position and was the breacher in a team that attempted to clear Roni Sfedji's house that had been barricaded by the attackers. He was killed along with Staff Sgt. Adam Agmon from the 450th Battalion when the attempt failed.[530]

Evacuation of residents began in the mid-afternoon under the watch of soldiers from the units already on the *Kibbutz* and further troops from 101st Paratroopers Battalion. Whilst evacuating residents the soldiers came under grenade fire, with 4 killed and 2 wounded.[531]

Killings of civilians by the infiltrators from Gaza continued over the following 2 days. Tom Godo, 52, a software engineer was killed at 08:00 on Sunday 8 October 2023. He was shot dead through the door of his safe room as he tried to hold the handle closed. The rest of his family managed to escape through the window.[532] The day before, at 16:00, IDF soldiers had come to the house and knocked on the door. When Godo, his wife and 3 daughters let them in, the troops told them to remain in their safe room while they cleared a different area of the *Kibbutz* from terrorists.[533]

Thai worker Anucha Bungsan, who survived the attack, testified to the experience of the Thai workers to the USC Shoah Foundation. He stated that the workers were staying across 2 buildings and that for the first 3 hours of the attack they hid in their safety rooms and attempted to call for help but by 09:00 all cellular communication across the *Kibbutz* began to fail. At approximately 11:00, the Hamas gunmen approached the other building and killed the workers who were in hiding, killing 4 by shooting through the door of the

Godo Family home in Kibbutz Kissufim. Tom Godo was shot through his safe room door on 8 October 2023.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

safety room and then killing 2 others who were in the building. Bungsan and the 2 other Thai workers who were in the other building were without food and water in the safety room until they were evacuated by the IDF at 21:00.[534]

By the early hours of Sunday 9 October 2023, the IDF managed to retake the army base at Kissufim, but there were still many infiltrators in and around the *Kibbutz*.

At dawn on 9 October 2023 Kissufim's dairy manager Reuven Heinik, went to feed the village's 380 cows, which had been left unfed and unmilked during the attacks on 7 October 2023.[535] Given permission by the IDF to feed and milk the cows on the *Kibbutz*, Reuven was ambushed and killed by terrorists who were hiding inside the barn.[536] The gunmen then barricaded themselves in the milking parlour. In the battle to dislodge them, IDF forces had to blow up the entire parlour.[537] During this exchange, a soldier from the Egoz unit was killed.[538]

Michael Starr, a reservist who arrived at Kissufim with his IDF unit on Tuesday, 10 October 2023 described the evacuated village as resembling "a scene straight out of a zombie horror film: a town that should have been bustling and full of life but was all but devoid of it. We

weaved through burned husks that were once homes. Cars and windows were riddled with bullet holes. We found homes riddled with bullets, bloody smears across closet doors, and kitchen knives abandoned in safe rooms." He also testified that they were unable to move many of the terrorists' bodies as they had been booby-trapped.[539]

One of the 7 October 2023 attackers were found only on 12 October, having hidden in the house of *Kibbutz* residents Haggai and Katrin Grosswirt.[540] The terrorist wounded 3 troops before he was killed. The *Kibbutz* was not declared to be free from infiltration until 13 October 2023. In total 34 *Kibbutz* buildings, including the dairy barn, were damaged in the attack and at least 17 required demolition.[541]

XVIII. Kibbutz Ein HaShlosha

Ein HaShlosha ("Spring of the Three") is a *Kibbutz* located halfway down the Gaza Envelope, opposite the city of Khan Younis. Its perimeter is just 1.5-2 miles from the Gaza border. The community was founded in 1950 by a Nahal (military service combined with social welfare projects) made up of immigrants from Argentina and Uruguay and members of the *HaNoar HaTzioni* youth movement.

After the Hamas takeover of Gaza in 2007, the village became a frequent target of attacks from the territory. In January 2008, an Ecuadorian volunteer at Ein HaShlosha, Carlos Chavez, was shot and killed by a Hamas sniper. In October 2013, authorities discovered a 0.6 mile long, 20m deep attack tunnel that led from Gaza to the edge of the *Kibbutz*.[542] During the 2012 and 2014 Israel-Gaza conflicts the village was subjected to more rocket attacks than any other community in the region. It is so close to the border that when its *Tseva Adom* "Red Colour" rocket launch warnings sound, residents have 5 seconds rather than the standard 15 to get to a shelter.[543]

While most of the community's income comes from agriculture, its other enterprises include a microbrewery and a factory making office equipment. With its large Spanish-speaking population, the *Kibbutz* was a well-known destination for visitors from Latin America. At the last recorded census in 2022, the population of the *Kibbutz* was 353 people.[544]

On 7 October 2023, 4 civilians died in *Kibbutz* Ein HaShlosha. The village rocket alarm sounded at 06:30. Then, according to civilian security team member Gal Hammer "for 30 minutes, we heard explosions. The communication between us was problematic, the internet was down, we couldn't communicate on WhatsApp."[545]

The attackers from Gaza shot out the cameras on the *Kibbutz* security fence before breaking through it.[546] During the initial wave, an estimated 50 terrorists belonging to a Hamas *Nukhba* unit arrived at Ein HaShlosha at approximately 06:45 and broke through the fence.[547] Some were dressed in olive green uniforms resembling those of the IDF; others wore black. Many had green headbands representative of Hamas' military wing.[548] Over the course of the day across the multiple waves, up to 90 individuals were estimated to have infiltrated the *Kibbutz*, made up of those in full military attire and those wearing ordinary civilian clothing like sweatpants and flip-flops who took advantage of the situation to loot and participate in the destruction.[549]

Just before 07:00 the *Ravschatz* Ram Negbi messaged the other members of the security team that they should gather with their weapons and then left his house.[550] Almost immediately afterwards he sent a message saying he had seen a group of terrorists. He was killed in the resulting firefight.

The 13-person *Kitat Konenut* village security squad had only 4 rifles. The rest had been removed from the armoury by the IDF for fear of theft. As elsewhere, the working assumption of the *Kitat Konenut* was that the civilian squad would only need to hold off a small number of terrorist infiltrators for a maximum of 15 minutes before the army would arrive.[551]

Testimony given by members of the civilian security squad to the NGO, Human Rights Watch, describes a chaotic response, due to the disparity in the respective firepower of the terrorists and security squad. According to the testimony the terrorists were equipped with RPGs, grenades, other explosive devices and AK-style assault rifles, in comparison to the squad who only had small handguns. One member of the security team described being trapped inside his own home as terrorists threw grenades inside, and in the aftermath finding "unexploded grenades…[with] no pins and their spools undone" across the entire *Kibbutz*.[552]

Marcelle Talia, 63, was a visitor who had come to the *Kibbutz* to look after her daughter, resident Lior Ben Tsur, who had given birth on 6 October 2023.[553] She was staying in the *Kibbutz* guest house. On hearing the rocket alarm and explosions, she picked up candy to bring to her daughter and grandchildren in their nearby home. As she went out onto the pavement at 06:50 she was shot multiple times by terrorists who had already

entered the *Kibbutz*.[554] Later that morning Talia's 2 sons were alerted by Ben Tsur that their mother was not answering her phone. They drove to the *Kibbutz* from Mount Hebron, arriving around 12:50 and found her body in the street. They then joined the *Kibbutz* security team.[555]

The attackers went from house to house in the *Kibbutz* residential area. Noa Glazberg, 43, was killed in her safe room, shot 8 times.[556] The infiltrators who tried to enter Gal Hammer's safe room while he and his family were hiding inside were frustrated by a lock he had installed on the door, in contravention of usual practice. Resident Matan Malachi, who had a pistol, put his wife and children in the family's safe room and hid himself elsewhere in his house. Five infiltrators came into the house and "spent 20 minutes in his living room, snacking on his food" before one made his way to the safe room. Malachi fired on the terrorist and killed him.[557]

Guido Cohen, 24, and his parents who were visiting from Argentina, stayed completely silent in their safe room when attackers went into his house. He held its door shut, and the intruders eventually left after "completely wreck[ing] the house." The family stayed inside the safe room for 15 hours, leaving it only when IDF troops came and convinced the family that they were genuine Israelis.[558]

The infiltrators "made 4 piles of large propane tanks" at the southern end of the *Kibbutz* and used them as incendiary devices. According to a witness, "they tried to put them in the houses. We found [the tanks] set next to the houses. They shot at propane tanks, some didn't explode. Sometimes they threw a grenade in to explode the tank."[559]

The infiltrators set fire to several houses on the south side of the *Kibbutz*, adjacent to the breach they had made in the fence. Holocaust survivor, Jacqueline Glicksman, 81 was found in her safe room by one of the attackers. The man signalled her to be quiet, looked around for money and electronic devices, stole them and left. Later 3 more men broke in but left as well when they realised she had nothing of value. Shortly afterwards, a group of attackers poured petrol on the floor outside the safe room and set it alight. "I could smell petrol. They were pouring petrol over the house. I opened the metal window, which is extremely heavy, jumped through it in my pyjamas and started running barefoot."[560] Glicksman "ran 1.5 kilometres" to the *Kibbutz* central office, hoping to find members of the security team there. "Instead, she found a destroyed security vehicle, with the head of the security team lying dead on the ground beside it."[561] She ran on through the *Kibbutz* knocking on doors until she was taken in by some neighbours.

Sylvie Mirensky, 80, was unable to get out of her house after it was set on fire. A widow and longtime member of the *Kibbutz*, Mirensky had emigrated from Buenos Aires with husband and children in 1973 and worked for many years at Ein HaShlosha's 'Cartonia' office supplies factory.[562] Early in the morning after the rocket alarm, her son Moshe telephoned her to ask how she was. "She replied that she was in the protected area and that everything was fine."[563] An hour later Mirensky reported that she saw terrorists near the window. Soon afterwards, one of the attackers "threw an explosive" into the house setting it alight. The flames blocked her from the door. Mirensky told her son on the phone "Arieli, they are burning me. I'm choking."[564] A resident ran to Mirensky's house in an attempt to rescue her from the flames but "came under fire and had to return to his house."[565] Her body was found the next day.

According to surviving members of the security team, the attackers threw grenades into every underground rocket shelter, though some did not explode. They also threw grenades "into at least 3 houses."[566]

One group of 30 residents of the *Kibbutz*, including 14 Thai workers, hid from the attackers in a roadside shelter.[567] After phone communication was lost with them, they were deemed to be missing. They were found and rescued by the IDF 2 days later on 9 October.[568] The *Kibbutz* was evacuated on 8 October.

XIX. Kibbutz Nirim

Kibbutz Nirim ("Ploughed Fields") was set up in 1946 by members of the *Hashomer Hatzair* Labour-Zionist youth movement and Jewish refugees from Europe, including a number of Holocaust survivors.[569]

The village is known in Israel for its role in the country's War of Independence. In May 1948, 42 *Kibbutz*niks held off an attack by an Egyptian army battalion backed up by artillery and tanks. Although the Egyptian force withdrew with heavy losses, the *Kibbutz* was destroyed. It was moved 12.4 miles north to its current location next to the Maon archaeological site, famous today for the Byzantine mosaics[570] in its sixth century synagogue.[571]

The *Kibbutz* cultivates 20,000 dunams/5000 acres of farmland, producing peanuts, root vegetables, wheat, barley, lychees, and avocados. It has one of the largest

organic farms in the country and its fields goes all the way to the security strip that traces the Gaza border. As of the most recent census conducted in 2022, Nirim had a population of 416.[572]

Since the 2005 disengagement from Gaza the *Kibbutz* has been a frequent target of mortar and rocket fire from Gaza. In 2014, 2 residents were killed by a rocket attack and another severely injured.[573]

On the 7 October 2023, 5 civilians and 3 military personnel were killed, whilst 6 hostages were taken alive, including 1 soldier and a further 3 bodies of soldiers were taken to Gaza. One of the hostages was British, as was one of the dead. The *Kibbutz*' Red Alert bombardment alarms sounded at 06:30. Residents entered their rocket shelters and safe rooms. At 06:40, attackers from Gaza cut through the fence next to the community's basketball court. Residents who heard them speaking Arabic alerted the *Kibbutz Ravshatz* or security coordinator, Daniel Meir. He summoned the civilian security squad and attempted to contact the army for support. The small 4-man response squad led by Meir, made up of Amit Levy (who was Chief of Police in Ashdod but lived in Nirim), Dr Michael Bass and Stanislav Treletsky, first went to the western part of the *Kibbutz*. They quickly realised the extent of the infiltration when they saw "dozens of terrorists" inside the *Kibbutz*, as well as Hamas *Nukbah* forces arriving on motorcycles and pickup trucks.[574]

At 06:47, Col. Asaf Hamami, commander of the Gaza Division's Southern Brigade and 2 other soldiers Sgt. Tomer Ahimas and Sgt. Kiril Brodsky, arrived at the main gate, having driven from the Gaza Division HQ at Re'im. Residents hiding in a nearby shelter were able to open the gate for their jeep. By then there were already "dozens" of infiltrators within the *Kibbutz*.[575] Once inside, the 3 soldiers opened fire on terrorists attacking the *Kibbutz* and the colonel was wounded in the resulting firefight. His men carried him to a shelter on the *Kibbutz* soccer field and continued to fight. All 3 were killed, with their last sign of life recorded at 07:05 on a radio transmission calling for further support. At some point in the morning their bodies were taken to Gaza, with footage published at 10:00 of Hamami's jeep in Gaza.[576]

Three other soldiers had already been killed in the area surrounding *Kibbutz* Nirim. At 05:30 a 4-man unit of the 51st Golani Brigade began a routine patrol of the border in a "David" armoured vehicle. It was these forces that first engaged the Hamas infiltrating forces at 06:30 when the border was breached. They battled across 5 different locations to delay the entrance into *Kibbutz* Nirim. According to soldier Itay Zarbib, the lone survivor of this unit, the terrorists first fired on the soldiers with an RPG before following up with gunfire.[577] Another soldier, Edan Alexander, from a separate Golani was also taken hostage to Gaza.[578]

At 07:30, realising that no other military help was coming, *Ravshatz* Meir ordered the civilian security team to take positions on their roofs. The infiltrators within the *Kibbutz* began to enter residents' houses. One group went into the house of the Meyer family and shot Doron Meyer, 58 and his daughter Mor, 18. Meyer's wife and other daughter, hiding in the safe room, survived. Their houseguests Gideon Bavani, a cab driver from the town of Yehud was also shot dead, and his Filipina wife Noralin Agojo Babadila was kidnapped and taken to Gaza. Following her release as part of the November ceasefire agreements Noralin described hearing her husband being shot twice as he went outside to see what was happening and their car exploding.

She also testified to her own attempt to escape stating "I jumped from the window straight into the hands of the terrorists, who stood there with their guns drawn… There were 6 terrorists there who started arguing about what to do with me. I understood from their hand gestures that one wanted to kill me, and the other wanted to kidnap me.[579] She was then loaded into a truck, alongside several deceased bodies of other residents and taken hostage to Gaza.[580]

After 08:00, the intruders, their numbers enlarged by a second wave from Gaza, engaged in large-scale looting of *Kibbutz* housing, predominantly taking computers and jewellery, but also raiding kitchens. Many of the looted houses were set on fire. One of these houses was the Lavan family home, which terrorists set on fire after failing to force entry into their safe room. Those trapped inside the safe room included Aimee and Uriel Lavan, their 10-day old baby Kai and Aimee's mother Deborah, who is originally from Romford, Essex. Upon the instructions of the fire brigade service, the family placed the baby on the windowsill and opened the window to prevent Kai from suffocating, despite the continued risk of terrorists moving throughout the *Kibbutz* and possibly being able to shoot into the safe room through the open window. They remained in their safe room for 6 hours without access to water before they were rescued through the window of the safe room by the IDF.[581] Twenty-seven houses were burned down in just one neighbourhood of the *Kibbutz*.

At the same time, the raiders took their first hostages. Couple Rimon Kirsht, 36, and Yagev Buchshtav, 35,

were abducted to Gaza from their home along with Channa Peri, 79, and her British son Nadav Popplewell, 51. Nadav's brother Roi was killed. Holocaust survivor Dr Zvi Henry Solow, 89, witnessed terrorists near the homes of Channa Peri and Nadav Popplewell shortly before they were kidnapped. He testified that "We heard shooting. We saw the terrorists running around between our house, through a small window in the house, and one of the houses next door. We found out they kidnapped a woman who was our age… Channa Peri…and one of her sons who lived next door, adult son Nadav, and they murdered her other son, Roi."[582]

The Hamas terrorists who seized Peri and Popplewell used Peri's mobile phone to take photos of the pair in their sleepwear with a Hamas gunman standing next to them. They then sent the pictures to all her contacts with the "Hamas" and uploaded them to her Facebook page. Nadav Popplewell, a computer expert, was killed while a hostage in Gaza. Peri was released in November 2023 during a ceasefire. Nadav and Roi were both British citizens.

At 10:00, the security squad had a 40-minute firefight with infiltrators near the western fence of the village. More terrorists arrived on the scene and drove the squad members back deeper into the *Kibbutz*. To draw the attackers away from the residents, the security squad climbed a seed tower to gain a height advantage, with "dozens of terrorists surrounding them" below. At approximately 11:30 the tide of the battle turned with the arrival of an IDF attack helicopter. Its Air Force controller and crew were able to contact the *Ravshatz* by phone. He directed the helicopter to its targets. It killed or dispersed the terrorists at and outside the fence, but there were still infiltrators within the community.[583]

At 13:35, a relief force of 30 IDF soldiers from the Maglan commando unit arrived at Nirim and joined forces with the security squad.

Throughout the day, multiple groups of terrorists entered the home of 95-year-old Nitza Hefetz, who suffers from dementia, while she hid in her safe room with her Filipina live-in carer, Camille Jesalva. They heard them opening cabinets and destroying things. Jesalva testified that due to Nitza's condition she did not comprehend the situation and so continued to speak loudly and request Jesalva to get her food and medical devices.[584] When a third group entered the house, they opened the door of the safe room and demanded money. Camille described that the individual was in civilian clothing and had no visible weapon and left after she begged and gave them all the money she had in her wallet, a sum of 1500 NIS.[585]

There is evidence that during the hours in which Hamas enjoyed effective control of parts of the *Kibbutz*, its fighters and their followers in the second and third waves abused the dead bodies of soldiers and civilians. The evidence includes a video verified by the NGO Human Rights Watch "showing a group of people in civilian clothes taking turns standing on the body of an Israeli soldier lying on the ground next to a vehicle."[586]

At 17:00 the military gathered the residents at the *Kibbutz* youth club building for their protection while they combed the community for hidden Hamas fighters, They also brought in escapees from the Nova Festival. The residents stayed the night in the youth centre and were due to be evacuated at noon on 8 October but were delayed as another group of attackers were identified on the border fence, and the IDF engaged once more. At 17:00 the evacuation was completed. *Kibbutz* resident Shai Levi said the roads were filled with "destroyed cars, some burned and some with the bodies of civilians who have not yet been rescued from them."[587]

XX. Kibbutz Nir Oz

Nir Oz ("meadow of strength") is a *Kibbutz* located in the bottom third of the Gaza Envelope, 1.7 miles from the Gaza border. It was founded in 1955 as a Nahal settlement but was taken over by youth movement *Hashomer Hatzair* in 1957.[588] *Kibbutz* Nir Oz was a pioneer of cutting-edge irrigation and desert farming techniques. The *Kibbutz* farms grow peanuts, potatoes, wheat, and avocados on its 5,000 acres, and spearheaded asparagus cultivation in Israel.[589] As a result, until October 2023, Nir Oz was one of Israel's major agritourism destinations, and its attractions including a celebrated Botanical Garden that specialised in exhibiting 900 species of water-saving plants.[590] The *Kibbutz*' industrial enterprises include Nirlat, Israel's largest paint producer.[591] The factory was burned down during the attacks.[592]

Over the years, *Kibbutz* Nir Oz was a frequent target of attacks from Gaza. In 2013, a large infiltration tunnel leading from inside Gaza to the edge of the *Kibbutz* was discovered by security forces.[593] In recent years, sniper fire from Gaza was so frequent that *Kibbutz* farmers resorted to harvesting crops at night.[594] A small IDF military outpost named after Nir Oz sits between

the *Kibbutz* and neighbouring *Kibbutz* Nirim and was also attacked early on 7 October. Two tank units from the 77th Battalion of the IDF's Armoured Corps had left the outpost in opposite directions following the early morning rocket sirens. The tank which had headed south towards Nir Oz was hit with an RPG and caught fire and at the same time two explosives were placed on the tank forcing the 4 soldiers from it.[595]

Three of the soldiers were killed in this initial onslaught and their bodies were kidnapped to Gaza alongside soldier Nimrod Cohen, who was taken alive. Video footage of this incident was uploaded onto the Qassam Brigades Telegram Channel. It shows the dragging away of soldier Nimrod Cohen, while another soldier, Omer Neutra, lies motionless on the ground.[596] Other footage shows a group dressed in civilian clothing dragging what appears to be an already deceased soldier from the tank and then a large mob repeatedly kicking the body.[597] Other media captured shows Hamas operatives pulling a soldier out of the tank which is on fire as individuals in both civilian and military attire climb on top of it.[598] The soldiers were identified by their families in an interview to Israel's Channel 12.[599]

Kibbutz Nir Oz was home to a number of prominent peace activists, including the parents of dual-British citizen Sharon Lifschitz, Oded and Yocheved Lifshitz, who were both kidnapped to Gaza with the former a human rights journalist and volunteer in an organisation that drives Gazans to medical treatment in Israel. The *Kibbutz* also employed more than 100 Gazans.[600] On the eve of 7 October 2023 , 415 people were resident in the *Kibbutz*, including 19 Thai farmhands, several agricultural interns and a number of guests who were visiting for the *Simchat Torah* festival.[601]

On 7 October 2023, a total of 41 civilians were killed and 82 civilians were taken hostage, 7 of which were dead bodies. Nir Oz had the third highest number of civilian deaths of any community attacked on 7 October 2023, and the highest number of people kidnapped to Gaza – including 15 children and 21 people aged over 70. People from Nir Oz made up a third of the 251 hostages taken on 7 October 2023. The 41 civilians killed included 14 foreign nationals, of whom one, Danny Darlington, was British. In all, 123 people were killed or kidnapped at Nir Oz. According to *Kibbutz* spokeswoman Irit Lahav, this accounts not for 1 in 4 of the people resident there as had initially been stated, but 1 in 3, because up to 10% of the community was away for the holidays.[602]

The *Kibbutz* was unique among the attacked communities in that the IDF did not arrive at Nir Oz until all of the terrorists had left. The attackers from Gaza therefore had almost complete freedom of action for half a day. Footage taken by the infiltrators shows extensive looting, as well as arson and kidnapping by both Hamas troops and large numbers of Gazan civilians.

Although the Hamas-led attackers were undisturbed by Israeli security forces during their raid on *Kibbutz* Nir Oz and took back to Gaza all but one of their dead, they left behind a cache of planning material. This included maps, several aerial photographs – some from satellites and some taken by drone - and operational orders for the capture of *Kibbutz*. The latter specified various types of target including "population concentrations, shelters, the security secretariat" and listed ten specific locations within the *Kibbutz*.[603] These included the Red Alert radar station, the home of the *Kibbutz* head of security, and also a playground and a bus stop, both of which would have been "population concentrations" if the attack had been on a working day rather than on a Saturday and religious holiday. The presence of maps targeting the *Kibbutz*'s *Ravshatz* Shachar Butler was also confirmed in testimony from his father Larry Butler to the USC Shoah Foundation.[604] The operational orders include details about which assault units were assigned to particular parts of the community "Group 1 will move via Route 133 as far as Route 299 and will cross over via the fence that is southwest of the *Kibbutz*, where it will split into two teams for a raid on the population from the southwest."[605]

Rocket alarms sounded in the *Kibbutz* at 06:29, prompting most residents to go into their *mamadim* (home shelters). It was followed by a heavy bombardment, some of it caught on video by residents who were outside.[606] At 06:49, Hamas gunmen arrived at the *Kibbutz*. CCTV footage in the unguarded gatehouse in the front entrance captured them firing through its windows and coming through the front gate.[607] Simultaneously, at least 3 other Hamas squads broke into the village through a vineyard gate closest to the border, the southern back gate, and a breach in the fence near the house of the security squad leader.[608]

The attackers numbered at least 150 according to estimates by the Israeli military and *Kibbutz* residents and were primarily composed of Hamas *Nukbah* commandos from the Khan Younis Southern Battalion.[609] Members of Palestinian Islamic Jihad's military wing, the Quds Brigade, also took part in the raid; their insignia on yellow headbands is visible in videos of

hostage taking.[610] Also present was the Mujahideen Brigades, who filmed members driving around Nir Oz in a pink quadbike.[611]

The first residents to be attacked were Gadi Haggai, 75, a retired musician and chef and his wife Judith Weinstein-Haggai, 70. They had gone out on their morning walk at 06:00 and took cover in a field when the rocket alarm sounded. Gunmen driving on motorcycles shot and wounded them both. Although hit in the hand and face, Weinstein-Haggai, an English teacher, was able to telephone for an ambulance – she said she was not sure if her husband was still alive.[612] The ambulance was dispatched but due to other events it was unable to get to the *Kibbutz*. The couple either died of their wounds or were shot again by a group of infiltrators who then loaded their bodies in the back of a pickup truck and kidnapped them to Gaza.[613]

At 06:48 Bracha Levinson, 74, a retired teacher, messaged her daughters that she was hearing non-stop gunfire. At 06:57 Hamas gunmen uploaded a video to Levinson's own Facebook account that showed her dying or dead on a blood-covered floor.[614] The family saw it a few minutes later and tried to call an ambulance and alerted the *Kibbutz* security team and tried to contact the police. The attackers set the house alight, burning it and Levinson's body. Her body was not formally identified and released to her family for burial until 6 November 2023. The Levinson family have since removed the footage from the internet and do not wish for it to remain public.

At 07:15, the Nir Oz WhatsApp group reported that "terrorists dressed as soldiers are near the *Kibbutz* clinic.[615] By then, the community's *Kitat Konenut* (civilian security squad) was aware that the village was under attack. It had 9 members, several of whom had weapons at home. However, the squad's leader, Shachar Butler, a tattoo artist, was unable to join with or organise his fellow volunteers. Immediately after breaking into the *Kibbutz*, Hamas gunmen had gone to his house. Butler went outside to see "30 or 40 guys in my backyard, armed to the teeth… luckily they didn't see me, so I managed to sneak back inside." He waited for them to try to breach the house, which they did. "Every time someone touched the window I shot him."[616] The infiltrators threw grenades which wounded him and forced him to retreat into his home's *mamad* with his family, where he remained for the rest of the attack due to his wounds.[617]

Over the next few hours, 3 of the 9-person civilian security squad were killed and had their bodies kidnapped to Gaza, and Sagui Dekel Chen, 35, owner of a mobile grocery store, was kidnapped alive.[618] One exception was Eran Smilansky, 28, a potato farmer. He had a weapon at home and when 8 infiltrators dressed in IDF uniforms came into his house, he was able to fight them off.[619] While outside his house and engaging the infiltrators he witnessed several abductions, and was surprised to see Gazan boys - "young kids" - accompanying the raiders "laughing with their friends and looking very calm."[620] Smilansky retreated to his safe room and stayed with his family. He finally exited his house around 13:30, after the attackers had left the *Kibbutz*. He and unarmed squad member Benny Avital then "started rescuing families from the burning safe rooms."[621]

Another member of the security squad, Shay Yohanan, went out of his house with his rifle early in the attack when he heard gunfire from outside. He was caught in a firefight for about 40 minutes before retreating to the safe room in his house, where he had already hidden his family. Infiltrators came into the house and spent several hours there but did not break into the safe room.[622]

Amitai Ben-Zvi, 80, a retired driver, went into his safe room together with his Filipino carer, Gelienor "Jimmy" Pacheco (Ben-Zvi had Parkinson's Disease), when the rocket alarms sounded. After they stopped sounding, Pacheco heard the shouting of infiltrators outside the house and locked the front door. At 07:39 Pacheco was messaged by Ben-Zvi's daughter, Hagar, in Atlanta, who had apparently heard early reports of the invasion. At 08:35 Hamas gunmen broke into the house. Pacheco messaged Hagar "The bomber walked into the house I'm scared now."[623] She urged him to lock the door of the safe room. The gunmen left but returned a few minutes later. They were able to force open the door to the safe room. They saw Ben-Zvi lying on his bed in the safe room and shot him 3 times, killing him. Two of the bullets also struck Pacheco who was hiding

The burning home of Amitai Ben-Zvi, self-documented by Hamas in Kibbutz Nir Oz. Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

under the bed.[624] The gunmen found the wounded Filipino and pulled him out of his hiding place. He was able to send a message to a friend relating the killing of Ben-Zvi before his captors took his phone. Pacheco was then kidnapped to Gaza.[625] Hamas videos later posted to the internet showed him handcuffed in a car in Gaza and then surrounded by a shouting crowd.[626] After abducting the Filipino, the gunmen set the house alight. Footage taken by a Hamas body-camera showed it burning down shortly afterwards.

At 08:50, the Engel family saw gunmen gather in the driveway of their house. Ronen Engel left his wife and daughters in the safe room, went into the living room with a pistol and engaged them. Eventually they threw a grenade into the house and he was killed. Karina Engel rushed out with a knife but was subdued and then kidnapped to Gaza. The 2 children remained hidden and silent in the safe room. However, 30 minutes later, a group of gunmen searched the house, found 10-year-old Yuval and 18-year-old Mika and kidnapped them to Gaza as well. The terrorists who killed Ronen Engel took his mobile phone and uploaded video stories of the breach of the fence adjacent to Nir Oz and the destruction of an IDF tank onto his Facebook page.[627] The videos show Gazans pulling IDF soldiers out of the tank, beating one of them, and also groups of men moving towards Nir Oz.[628]

At 09:00, a large wave of looters began to arrive at *Kibbutz* Nir Oz. It was mostly composed of civilians from Gaza but also included gunmen from Palestinian Islamic Jihad.[629] It was about that time that the IDF Gaza Division's war room reported for the first time "an invasion of Nir Oz."[630] The attackers set many houses alight. Both Hamas body camera footage and CCTV video show much of the village on fire by 09:30.[631]

Setting houses on fire was part of a wider tactic to force civilians to leave their safe room. The Cunio family home was set on fire at 10:30 but the family remained in their safe room until 11:15 based on texts sent to other family members.[632] However, they were eventually forced out due to the risk of suffocation. Sharon and David Cunio and their 3-year-old twin daughters were all taken hostage, along with Sharon's sister Danielle and her 5-year-old niece Emilia who was also in the safe room.[633] David's brother, Ariel, was also taken hostage through similar methods in the *Kibbutz*. The women and children were released in November 2023.

The pace of abductions, arson attacks, and killings increased with the arrival of several hundred more infiltrators. Security squad member Yaron Maor, who fought infiltrators for 90 minutes before retreating to his safe room, recalled messages from residents "pouring in, pleading for help as the terrorists reached their homes Some were injured, desperate for assistance, and there was no one to send."[634]

It is around this time that it is estimated that British citizen, Danny Darlington was killed. The Manchester-born photographer, 34, was staying with his friend, German model Carolin Bohl, 22, at a friend's house elsewhere in the *Kibbutz*. Both had had tattoos done by the *Kibbutz Ravshatz* Shachar Butler, and they were due to fly out of the country later that day.[635] The pair hid in a safe room which did not have a door that locked and were shot dead around 09:00.[636]

At about 09:15, civilian looters entered the house of emergency room nurse Nili Margalit, and set it on fire to drive her out of her safe room.[637] After capturing her they took her to Gaza in a looted golf-cart and then transferred her into a car which took the "jubilant" captors and their hostage to the city of Khan Younis. There Margalit's captors sold her to Hamas operatives who took her into a tunnel where she was held with other Israeli hostages.[638] She was kept hostage until the ceasefire of 30 November 2023. Margalit's father, Eliyahu "Churchill" Margalit, 75, a retired cattle-breeder, who lived in another neighbourhood, was kidnapped while feeding his horses in the *Kibbutz* stables. He was killed in captivity.

At about the same time, Gazan civilians also abducted and sold Arabic-teacher and peace activist Ada Sagi, 75; in her case the buyers were Palestinian Islamic Jihad.[639] She was released in November 2023.[640]

At 09:45, Yarden Bibas, 34, who had been messaging his sister and parents about the attacks from his family's safe room, and was worried about keeping his infant children quiet as infiltrators went by the house, texted "They're in."[641]

At 09:50 a passing IDF tank fired a single shell at a group of Gazans who were looting agricultural equipment near the main gate. It then retreated the way it had come.[642]

At about 10:00, a group of Gazan terrorists entered the home of Gadi Moses and Efrat Katz. The family, including Katz's daughter Doron and her two infant daughters, 2 and 4, were in the safe room. Gadi went out to confront the intruders. They demanded money and his car keys, and ransacked the house, but allowed him to go back into to the safe room. At 10:40 the

infiltrators came back to the house and abducted Gadi to Gaza. Twenty minutes later another group arrived and took the rest of the family. They were ushered out of the *Kibbutz* and onto a cart pulled by a tractor. The arrival near the Gaza fence of the 2 women and the little girls to the cheers of a crowd chanting "God is great," was filmed and posted on Tiktok by their abductors.[643] At approximately 15:00 an IDF attack helicopter fired on the vehicle taking the family into Gaza in an attempt to stop the kidnapping, fatally wounding Efrat Katz.[644]

At the same time as the kidnapping of the Katz family, a different group of terrorists shot and wounded Ohad Yahalomi before kidnapping him. They then broke into his house and kidnapped his wife Batsheva and their son and 2 daughters, one of whom was an 8-month-old baby, and placed them on two motorcycles which were driving towards the border.[645] At 10:40 an IDF tank appeared near the border causing the two motorcycles to scatter and, in this chaos, Batsheva and her 2 daughters fell off the motorcycle and were able to escape back to the *Kibbutz*, arriving shortly after 13:30.[646] The motorcycle carrying their son, Ethan, continued onto Gaza but he was kept separate from his father in captivity and only Ethan was released during the November ceasefire agreement.[647]

The abductions of civilians at Nir Oz began immediately and continued until 13:00. Many of the kidnappings were videoed and photographed by Hamas operatives, by journalists accompanying them on the raid, and by Gazan civilians.[648] Some were recorded on a home-made traffic-camera that resident Eyal Barad, an engineer, had installed outside his house and which he controlled by phone from his safe room. At the high point of the abductions, looting ,and arson, Barad noted that three visibly different groups were involved: Hamas commandos who had come at the beginning, heavily armed and wearing full military uniforms, armed men in civilian clothing "it seemed like they were plain soldiers", and "many, many, many citizens."[649] Barad's camera stopped working at 10:30 when electricity to the *Kibbutz* was cut off.

The abundance of imagery shot in Nir Oz during the raid included footage of the abduction of Shiri Bibas, 32, together with her four-year old Ariel and her 9-month-old baby Kfir. Photographs of Shiri BIbas looking visibly distressed and her 2 redheaded infants went around the world in the aftermath of the attacks.[650] The Bibas baby is the youngest hostage taken on 7 October. Footage taken from a security camera in Southern Gaza shows Shiri and her two children being transferred to another group when they arrived in Gaza on 7 October, it has been speculated that this group was the Palestinian Mujahadeen.[651] Yarden Bibas, 37, Shiri Bibas' husband was shot and wounded earlier in the day and kidnapped separately. A video taken by one of his abductors was posted on the internet which showed him bleeding from the head and being beaten while on the back of a motorcycle, somewhere between the *Kibbutz* and the Gaza fence.[652] Shiri Bibas' parents, José-Luis Silberman, 67, and Margit Shneider Silberman, 63, were both killed in another part of the *Kibbutz*.

The Bibas family were just one of several families where every member of the immediate family was victim to the attack. Five members of the Siman-Tov Family were killed in their house: Yonatan, 35, a farm manager, his wife Tamar Siman-Tov, 36, a peace activist,[653] their five-year-old twins Shahar and Arbel, and their two-year-old son Omer. When the terrorists were unable to force their way into the safe room of the Siman-Tov house, they set it alight. When the safe room filled with smoke, Yonatan texted his sister "they're here. They're burning us. We're suffocating."[654] He then opened the metal screen on the safe room window. The gunmen immediately fired into the room, hitting both parents but the children died from being burnt alive and asphyxiating. Yonatan mother Carol Siman-Tov, 70, a retired nurse, was shot dead together with her dog Boxer in another house on the *Kibbutz*.[655]

The Munder family was also affected across multiple generations. Avraham Munder, his wife Ruti, daughter Keren, and grandson Ohad were all taken hostage, but their son Roee was killed on 7 October.[656] As his entire family had been taken hostage there was nobody available to observe shiva, the customary Jewish memorial period after burial.[657]

Most of the safe rooms in the residents' houses could not be locked, making it hard for residents to keep out even unarmed infiltrators. Irit Lahav, a jewellery designer, rigged together an oar, a vacuum cleaner hose, and a long leather cord to prevent the door handle of her safe room from being forced open.[658] The infiltrators who broke into her home gave up trying to get into the room, looting the other rooms ("For some reason, they took all our shoes"), and left without setting the house alight.[659]

Brothers Yagil Yaacov,12, and Or Yaacov,16, were alone in the safe room of their mother's house when infiltrators broke in. The younger boy called his mother Renana Gome Yaacov – who was away - as his brother tried to hold the safe room door shut. Gome was still on the phone when the door was forced open and she heard the 12-year-old plead with the intruders

"Don't take me, I'm too young." Both were abducted to Gaza.[660] They were released during the November ceasefire agreement. The boys' father, auto-shop worker Yair Yaacov, 59, who lived in another house on the *Kibbutz*, was shot dead by terrorists and his body was kidnapped to Gaza along with his partner Meirav Tal, 54. The incident was filmed by the perpetrators, members of the Quds Brigade of PIJ and posted on PIJ's Telegram Channel. As well as appearing in PIJ footage, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs brigade also published footage of Yaacov. Timestamped 10:23, one video shows him still alive, meaning that he was killed and handed from PIJ to AAMB between 10:23 and 12:35.[661]

Chaim Peri , a retired metalworker, peace activist and founder of the local White House gallery had taken refuge in his family safe room early in the morning, together with his wife Osnat Peri, the chairwoman of the *Kibbutz*.[662] As the couple heard the sound of gunfire and shouting from outside, the Peris, both in their late 70s, were determined to stay as quiet as possible. "We turned off the TV, completely darkened the safe room and, hardest of all, of course, we decided to turn off the phones, because of our children. We understood that they were going to go through hell right then, but we realised that our lives were in danger."[663]

The strategy worked at first. The Peris heard infiltrators come into the house three times, ransacking it each time. "They broke things and dumped everything on the floor. At some point, the floor was so littered with broken pieces we could hear every step they took – that's how we realised that one of the terrorists was approaching the safe room door." Chaim Peri stood behind the door which could not be locked from the inside. "The terrorist opened it. Chaim grabbed him with two hands and shoved him away. The terrorist was hurt and ran away." The intruder returned with reinforcements. Chaim Peri met him at the front door, while his wife hid in the safe room, ducking down between a laundry basket and the door. Mrs Peri heard them speak in English.

According to her account, one of the intruders told Chaim Peri "You have to come with us now. We don't want to kill you. If you come quietly everything will be okay. I saw Chaim glance in my direction and understood from that that they didn't see that I was there."[664] Chaim Peri was abducted to Gaza. His death in captivity was confirmed in June 2024.[665]

Osnat Peri stayed in the safe room until after 15:00 when a police unit arrived at Nir Oz and came to her house. As chairwoman of the *Kibbutz* she was taken to the command centre where she and the head of security, whose parents had been kidnapped, prepared lists of the survivors and the missing.

During the attack on the *Kibbutz*, terrorists also targeted the dormitory building that housed the *Kibbutz*' Thai guest workers. They killed 11 of the men they found there and abducted 11 to Gaza. The slain included two brothers, Pongthep and Apichart Kusaram. Pongthep, 26, had gone to Israel first, and then persuaded his married, older brother Apichart to join him on the *Kibbutz*. Shortly before the killings began Apichart Kusaram messaged his wife in Thailand that there was fighting in the area. She did not hear from him again. Kurat Kha-Fluan survived the attack. He later told a newspaper "I'll never forget the terrifying and horrible moments when the Hamas came to our shelter and starting shooting in every direction — I mostly remember chaos and confusion." He added that he had blocked out "the moments when I saw my friends murdered in front of my eyes."[666]

An IDF special forces squadron dispatched to Nir Oz around 11:00 encountered Hamas ambushes en route, lost an officer in the ensuing battle and could not continue on to the *Kibbutz*.[667] A second unit that was due to go to Nir Oz and Kissufim around 11:30 also encountered Hamas forces on the highway and was unable to arrive.

It was at that time Itzik Elgarat, 69, hiding in the safe room of his house, was wounded when attackers shot through its door. He called his brother for help putting on a tourniquet, but the conversation was cut off when the infiltrators broke through into the safe room and abducted him to Gaza.

Gideon Pauker, 79, who set up and ran the *Kibbutz*' winemaking, was also wounded when attackers shot through the safe room door of his house. His wife Orna was unable to staunch his wounds and he died from blood loss in the safe room over the following hours.[668]

Clemence Felix Matenga, 22, an agricultural student from Tanzania was initially thought to have been kidnapped to Gaza.[669] He was in fact killed during the attack, his body was badly burned, and his remains could not be identified until his family sent DNA samples to Israel.

The hundreds of Gazan civilians who participated in the attack on Nir Oz included women and children. Resident Natali Yohanan, 38, a schoolteacher, told interviewers that while she and her family were hiding in

their safe room, a group of Gazans, including a woman, made themselves at home after looting the house and killing the family dog.[670] "I heard the cheerful voice of a young woman, there were two men with her, and she asked them if they were hungry. Then I heard the fridge opening and closing and she started heating up food that I had cooked."[671] The intruders watched television "switching Netflix to Arabic" intermittently trying to get the family to leave the safe room by shooting at its door, rapping on its external window and then turning off the electricity to it to deprive those in the safe room of light and ventilation. Yohanan recalled that the Gazan woman gave cold drinks to gunmen who came into the house for a break. Before they left they "took Yohanan's jewellery, makeup, underwear, shoes, sunglasses, and passports, as well as her children's clothing and toys".[672] Yohanan and the family members hiding with her survived; her father, was shot and killed in his house on the other side of the *Kibbutz*.

A Hamas-aligned TV journalist recorded a news story outside the house of resident Ada Sagi.[673] He told his viewers "After an hour or more of walking, we were able to enter a *Kibbutz*; the most important *Kibbutz* of the occupation… Here is a scene from the heart of the settlement."[674] The footage was widely streamed on Palestinian news sites.[675]

At approximately 12:30, attackers broke into the house of Camela Dan, who was looking after her autistic granddaughter Noya Dan, 12. Both were shot dead in their safe room and the house set on fire. The bodies of the pair were found hugging the following morning.[676] Their cousins' Sahar, 16, Erez, 12, and their father Ofer Calderon, were all abducted to Gaza from another house on the *Kibbutz*.[677]

One resident, Aryeh Itzik, 70, the *Kibbutz* ambulance driver, survived by tricking the attackers into thinking

The remains of Carmela and Noya Dan's home where they were shot and the house set on fire in Kibbutz Nir Oz.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

his house was empty. He left his front door unlocked and then hid under a blanket. Hamas troops not only entered the house but "used his home as a base of operations, apparently never noticing the elderly man… even as they looted a television from right above his head."[678] Almost all the other residents in his section of Nir Oz were killed or kidnapped.

At 13:30, after 7 hours of violence, the last terrorists walked out of the *Kibbutz* and returned to Gaza, carrying various kinds of loot. At 14:15, two border police vehicles arrived at Nir Oz, followed soon after by a force of IDF naval commandos.[679] By then 75 people had been abducted alive from Nir Oz, along with 7 dead bodies. Among those abducted alive were 12 foreign workers and 27 dual-nationals. The *Kibbutz* was ordered to evacuate on the evening of 8 October.

The destruction in Nir Oz was so widespread - only 6 homes were undamaged.[680] 60% of all houses in Nir Oz were burnt during the attack and up to 80% were severely damaged.[681] The Israeli government estimates that it will take at least 2 years to rebuild.[682]

XXI. Kibbutz Magen

Magen ("shield") is a *Kibbutz* in the south of the Gaza Envelope, located 2.8 miles from the Gaza border between *Kibbutz* Nir Oz and *Kibbutz* EinBesor on Route 232. The *Kibbutz* was set up in 1949 by a group combining Jewish refugees from Romania with Mandate Palestine born Jewish "Sabras".[683]

The community is a "privatised" *Kibbutz*. It farms an area of 8,500 dunams/2100 acres. It also owns and runs on site an automobile repair shop and Magen Eco-Energy, a company that manufactures solar panels for swimming pools.[684] It is home to a well-known archaeological site that includes the ruins of a Byzantine era church complex.[685] As of the most recent population census conducted in 2022, the *Kibbutz* had a population of 540.[686]

On 7 October 2023, 2 civilians were killed and 1 individual, Qaid Farhan Al-Qadi, was taken hostage. At 06:34 the *Kibbutz* Red Alert system sounded around the village indicating a barrage of rockets and mortar shells from Gaza. Most residents went to their shelters and safe rooms.

Shortly afterwards, resident Eran Tzoref climbed a hill near his house to watch the rockets and Iron Dome interceptions overhead, as was his custom.[687] He brought a rifle – he had been issued with one as a

member of the civilian security squad - because his wife was convinced, she had heard shooting in the distance. From the top of the hill, he saw the headlights of a convoy of motorcycles and vans approaching the *Kibbutz* from Gaza. The convoy was soon close enough for him to hear shouting in Arabic, and then gunfire. Tzoref, called his wife and brother and then opened fire with his service weapon from behind a concrete block.

At the same time the *Ravshatz* Baruch Cohen sent out a message mobilising the community's 12-person civilian security squad and ordering residents in their safe rooms to lock the doors and windows of their homes.[688] The squad assembled at a situation room adjacent to the armoury where most kept their weapons. Some then took positions near the *Kibbutz* fence. Seeing uniformed armed men dismounting from vans and motorbikes, squad member "Nadav" assumed they must be members of the Israeli security forces and called out to them. "Instead of replying with words, they answered with bullets."[689] Other squad members joined Tzoref on the hill. His rifle fire had driven the attackers back from the fence.

At 07:10, attackers on motorcycles placed explosives at the fence, blowing up a section large enough for vehicles to drive through. Two cars immediately did so and between 30 and 40 gunmen infiltrated the village. The security squad fought the invaders for an hour.[690] During the battle, *Ravshatz* Baruch Cohen and another member drove towards the infiltration point in a pickup truck which received a direct hit from a rocket-propelled anti-tank grenade. Cohen was badly injured and subsequently lost his leg.[691] Fighting inside the *Kibbutz* continued, with more vehicles entering. Security Squad member, Avi Fleischer was shot in the stomach dragging Baruch Cohen from the fighting zone and was evacuated alongside Cohen by 3 residents of the *Kibbutz* at 10:00. They drove them to a helipad in Revivim alongside another wounded member of the security squad, Nadav Roth.[692] Cohen and Fleischer were evacuated in a helicopter, but Fleischer died en route to the hospital.[693]

Elsewhere in the *Kibbutz*, Michael Ostrovsky, 71, a guard at the *Kibbutz* main gate was shot and killed there early in the morning. Farhan al Qadi, another of the community's unarmed security guards and a member of the Bedouin community, was wounded in the attack and then kidnapped and taken to Gaza. He was rescued by the IDF after 10.5 months in captivity.[694] The surviving attackers withdrew by 14:00 when IDF forces arrived at Magen and joined the security squad to sweep the community.[695]

One member of the civilian security force, Ofir Yaron, had been away visiting family on the morning of 7 October 2023. He was driving back to the *Kibbutz*

The truck of the ravshatz after being hit in Kibbutz Magen. Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

to join its defence when he was ambushed about a mile away from the village on Route 232. His car was discovered later that day with its seat belt cut and blood on the seats and his body was found 6 days later and several miles away at Nir Oz.[696] Several civilians were killed on the highways such as Route 232, adjacent to the *Kibbutz* in incidents caught by CCTV camera. (SEE Chapter 5.8 Highways). Fourteen terrorists shot up and looted the Magen petrol station, but its staff survived by hiding in a fridge, an incident also caught by CCTV cameras.[697] The *Kibbutz* was evacuated on 8 October 2023.

XXII. Moshav Ein HaBesor

Ein HaBesor ("Spring of the Besor") is a *Moshav* in the southern third of the Gaza Envelope. It was founded in 1982 by farmers evacuated from the Sinai Peninsula, following the signing of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. The village is 4.5 miles from the Gaza border, adjacent to *Kibbutz* Magen, and close to *Moshav* Yesha and *Moshav* Mivtahim. Route 232 runs along the western side of its fence. The *Moshav*'s name refers to the Besor stream, which features in a story about King David in the Old Testament Book of Samuel. The village is a popular destination for tourists, thanks to the proximity of the Besor nature reserve and the red anemones that cover the land in Spring.[698] The population as of the last recorded census was 1,109.[699]

Although 2 civilian squad members were seriously injured, there were no casualties in Ein HaBesor on 7 October. Residents of Ein Habesor were awoken by alarms and explosions from nearby communities before the village's own rocket alert sounded at 06:38. Yoav Sheffer, the village security coordinator "heard reports of a terror cell on motorcycles at Holit". He told his team "that we should all go out armed."[700] A spate of car and property thefts from the village had prompted the *Moshav* to create an additional neighbourhood watch patrol force of nearly 70 people, on top of the 12-person armed *Kitat Konenut* (civilian security squad) creating a total force of 78 people. At 07:30 Sheffer sent all 78 to go out in pairs and guard the perimeter fence, though the vast majority had no firearms.[701] The security team had only 4 M16 rifles, as the army had removed the rest (after the armoury was broken into by thieves a few months earlier), and a few pistols. Squad member, Yariv Levin went out of the *Moshav* to look at the highway. He saw a pickup truck "with 6, or 8, terrorists, armed with RPGs".[702]

At 07:44, a cyclist arrived at the main gate and told the 3 guards there that he had seen terrorists on the highway. The guards tried without success to shut the gate – it may have been electronically jammed by infiltrators like others in the area.[703] One of them parked his pickup as a barrier across the entrance, and a guard says that he can see a "van of terrorists."[704] At 07:50, infiltrators from Gaza attacked the petrol station at the Magen junction 600 metres from the gate.[705]

At 07:54 infiltrators reached the main gate. Footage from CCTV cameras there shows intense fighting, as members of the residents fired their handguns at attackers. Squad member, Raz Shapira recalled "They started shooting at us with RPGs and Kalashnikovs, there was a unit of maybe 50 armed men – and we shot back at them from 100 metres away, with pistols. Only at 22:00, after a day of fighting, 6 more weapons arrived to help us. And it was still just a drop in the ocean."[706]

Squad member Elad Gefner, a theatre manager,[707] fought at the front gate of the *Moshav* until shot in the shoulder. His brother, Tel Aviv University medical professor, Dr Yftach Gefner, also on the squad, tried to take him to a hospital. He put Elad Gefner in the back of his Tesla and drove out of the *Moshav*'s back gate and along a dirt road. When the car reached the main Route 232, Dr Gefner "saw 2 pickup trucks with about 10 terrorists in each one and about 5 motorbikes each with 2 men." The gunmen opened fire on the vehicle. The doctor reversed at speed down the dirt track as bullets hit the car, wounding Elan Gaftner another 2 times. The car made it back onto the *Moshav*, where the wounded man was moved to an ambulance that managed to get to a hospital by a different route[708] and in an armed convoy 2 hours later.[709]

North of the main gate, Yariv Levin saw another squad of attackers moving along the fence. He fired at them and was wounded in the shoulder. Other squad members dragged him to safety and fired at the attackers. After an intense firefight the attackers gathered their wounded and retreated up the highway. "Probably because of the initial blow we gave, they decided to leave Ein HaBesor and moved on."[710] By the end of the fighting at 08:26, 2 civilian squad members had been seriously wounded but no residents were killed.[711] At 10:44, a small group of IDF soldiers from the Golani Brigade arrived at a small private farm just south of the *Moshav*. They mistakenly fired upon a resident and damaged his vehicle, but were stopped from pursuing further by *Ravshatz* Yoav Sheffer, who recognised the resident. At 11:42, the security squad caught four infiltrators from Gaza approaching the *Moshav*, having taken advantage of the breaches in the fence to cross into Israel and loot. One member

admitted to having received 100 shekels to drive a *Nukhba* terrorist on a motorcycle.[712] The village was ordered to be evacuated on 8 October 2023.

XXIII. Moshav Yesha and Mivtahim

Moshav Yesha ("Salvation") and *Moshav* Mivtahim ("safe havens") are cooperative agricultural communities located in the south of the Gaza Envelope, 3.4 miles from the Gaza border. *Moshav* Mivtahim abuts *Moshav* Yesha, with less than 0.62 miles between them on road 2310, which comes off Route 232. They both are close to 5 other small *Moshavim*.

Moshav Yesha was established in 1957 by refugees from Egypt, after the Jewish community there was expelled by President Nasser, following the 1956 Suez Crisis and "Operation Kadesh".[713] According to the last census, conducted in 2022, the population was 426.[714] *Moshav* Mivtahim was originally founded as a *Kibbutz* in January 1947 by the 'Zionist Worker' *HaOved Hatzioni* movement, but was evacuated during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Two years later, the abandoned village was revived as a *Moshav* by refugees from the Jewish communities of Kurdistan and Morocco.[715] As of the most recent census conducted in 2022, it had a population of 455. The community farms an area of 4,000 dunams (988 acres). On 7 October 2023, 9 civilians were killed across both communities.

Residents of both *Moshavim* were alerted to threat of rocket at 06:31 after "*Tseva Adom*" Rocket alarms sounded and residents went to their safe rooms. At 07:00, the Mivtahim's *Ravschatz* Dan Assulin, summoned the 12 other members of his civilian security squad. They had only 3 rifles between them. The IDF had removed its other weapons a few months earlier, apparently because of thefts. Squad member Sagiv Beeri brought a private handgun.[716]

The squad went to the main junction between Route 232 and the approach road to Mivtahim and Yesha. There they met with the security team from the nearby Zohar settlement, which had just shot 2 infiltrators.[717] They also saw that the infiltrators had killed 2 residents of *Moshav* Mivtahim, Dor Nahum and Chen Ben-Avi, both of whom had escaped the Hamas attack on the Nova Music Festival and were returning home.[718] Lior ben Yaakov, the deputy head of Yesha's security squad (the security coordinator was abroad)[719] joined the Mivtahim squad at the junction alongside two other Yesha members.

At 07:45, 4 more infiltrators arrived at the junction on motorbikes. One fired a rocket-propelled grenade at the security team. As the team returned fire from behind a concrete barricade, they received a message that there were infiltrators inside *Moshav* Mivtahim itself. The squad returned to the *Moshav* together. As they returned, they saw the bullet-riddled pickup truck of one of Mivtahim's Bedouin farm workers, Osamah Abu-Madiam. He had been killed as had his wife Dalia Abu-Madiam. Ossamah's brother survived along with Osamah's 5-year-old son Atallah, who had been severely wounded in the stomach, so the squad members took him into a house to be treated.[720] They called the Magen David Adom ambulance service without success – due to the unknown to them mass casualty events taking place throughout the envelope. There was then a second rocket barrage, during which the combined squad went into a shelter.

The squad was then alerted of infiltrators near the home of Assullin's parents. The infiltrators entered the house and took their wounded inside, while the Assullin family hid in their safe room.

About 08:25, fighting resumed in the centre of the village near the synagogue and the squad were ambushed there by 20 attackers, some firing from rooftops.[721] Five members of the combined Yesha-Mivtahim civilian security team, including all 3 volunteers from Yesha, were killed in the firefight. The *Moshav* members from Mivtahim were Tal Maman, 38, a farmer and father of 3, and *Ravschatz* Dan Assulin, 38, a father of 2 whose son was born shortly after his death.[722] The *Moshav*niks from Yesha were Lior Ben-Yaakov, Gil Avital and Itay Nachimas, an off-duty soldier currently enrolled in his national service.

That force of infiltrators then withdrew from Mivtahim. "The terrorists broke into [*Ravschatz* Assulin's home], stole the keys to his truck, threw all their dead and wounded into it, and sped back into Gaza."[723] Some of the attackers retreated through a fruit packing factory, where they killed 2 Thai workers and took another 5 hostage.[724]

At about 10:30 according to CCTV footage another squad of 3 gunmen from Gaza broke into the residence of the *Moshav*'s Thai guest-workers.[725] The gunmen took the workers' phones and then their clothes to use as a disguise.[726] At 11:00, IDF troops arrived.[727] Its members captured three infiltrators disguised as Thai labourers. Then, at 11:30 a Magen Border Police vehicle arrived to take the severely wounded Atalla Abu-Madigam to the Soroka hospital; it had to fight gunmen on the way out of the *Kibbutz*.[728] A secondary IDF unit arrived in 14:00

to relieve the *Moshav* and the army outpost adjacent to it.[729] In the evening, the Hamas attackers returned and attacked a *Moshav* Yesha building housing Thai workers, "throwing grenades and setting the rooms where they were hiding alight".[730] Weerapon "Golf" Lapchan and 11 other Thais ran out of the building and fled into an orchard "We jumped over the wall, and they shot at us from behind. Bang, bang, bang, bang."[731] The Thais hid all night in the orchard and were rescued the following morning.

The *Moshavim* were ordered evacuated between 8 October and 9 October. Three other Yesha residents, Yuval and Noa Rabia, 33 and 30, and Shachar Kadman, 34, were killed at the Psyduck Music Festival. More than three quarters of its farmlands ceased to be cultivated after the attacks.[732]

XXIV. Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak

Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak ("Yitzhak's Meadow") is a *Kibbutz* in the southern third of the Gaza Envelope. It is 2.3 miles from the Gaza border and abuts the region's main North-South highway, Route 232. The *Kibbutz* was founded in 1949 and is a secular community affiliated with the *Hashomer Hatzair* Zionist youth movement.[733]

As well as producing the field crops that account for most its economy, Nir Yitzhak owns a plastic packaging factory and a solar energy storage facility, and hosts a chemical plant. It is well-known in Israel for the flowers it cultivates and exports.[734] As of the most recent population census conducted in 2022, Nir Yitzhak had a population of 633.[735]

On 7 October, 3 civilians were killed and 8 were taken hostage, including 3 dead bodies. At 06:30, residents of the *Kibbutz* heard mortar fire and explosions as red alerts sounded throughout the *Kibbutz*. Fifteen minutes later, Yaron Shahar, the *Kibbutz* security coordinator sent out messages to the residents to stay in their homes and for members of the 7-person *Kitat Konenut* civilian security squad to get their weapons and begin a sweep of the *Kibbutz*.[736]

At 07:15, terrorists started a fire near the entrance of the *Kibbutz* by setting alight plastic cylinders from the "Polysack" plastic packaging factory. At about the same time, infiltrators broke into the Chemada bromide-producing chemical plant located in the *Kibbutz*. The workers present (it operates 24 hours a day) saw the attackers arrive on the plant's security cameras and were able to barricade themselves safely in a secure operations room.[737] At 07:30, civilian security squad member Oren Golden went to investigate the fire. Either on his way or at the gate he was killed by sniper fire. When Golden did not reply to messages from the security staff, another squad member, Boaz Abraham was dispatched to the gate. He too was killed.[738]

CCTV footage from *Kibbutz* security cameras, time-stamped 07:34, captured a group of 9 gunmen, many in camouflage uniform, walking through the *Kibbutz* gate, having apparently arrived there by motorcycle.[739] One of the gunmen tried to enter the guardhouse next to the gate by repeatedly kicking the door. (It is unclear if there was anyone at the gate at the time.)

Members of the security squad were by then already patrolling the *Kibbutz* investigating the fires created by the factories being set alight. Testimony provided by Doron Stamker to the USC Shoah Foundation indicates that at 07:45 there was an increase in the amount of smoke and scale of the fire, as well as shooting near the factory. However, the security squad was still unaware as to the scale of the attack at the time stating that "We heard Arabic, we heard gunshots [but] really until 08:30 we still did not understand what was going on."[740]

Stamker then heard from one of the 2 squad members who had walked to the front entrance that "there are a lot of terrorists in the area of the gate." It became clear to Stamker from walkie-talkie communications that one of his fellow squad members there, Oren Golden, had been hit, and another, Boaz Avraham, was out of contact. "We did not know what was going on" Stamker recalled, "then one of the *Nukhbas*, one of the Arabs, came on the walkie-talkie and said in Arabic, 'there is no more Yaron; there is no more Yaron'" – referring to Yaron Shahar, the security team leader. Stamker and his fellow squad members realise that not only was Shahar likely dead, but that the attackers were now listening to their walkie-talkie

Image showing the destruction of buildings on the Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

communications. They switched to telephones, but the cellular system went in and out. At one point when it came back on again, Stamker was contacted by his brother and fellow squad member, Lior Rudaeff, who told him "goodbye."[741] Rudaeff, an ambulance driver and paramedic by profession, was killed and his body kidnapped to Gaza.[742]

Between 09:00 and 09:10, another group of Hamas terrorists, many of them armed with rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) returned to the *Kibbutz* and began firing at members of the security squad defending the *Kibbutz* main gate.[743] Intense fighting continued there for 30 minutes, some of which was captured by CCTV security camera.[744] Some of the infiltrators then left the *Kibbutz*, while others moved deeper inside it.[745]

At 09:45, there was another wave of attackers, as civilians from Gaza entered the *Kibbutz* and began to loot houses and steal cars.[746]

At 11:00 members of the *Kitat Konenut* security squad barricaded themselves in a house and created a makeshift situation room. They called for help from security forces and were informed that troops from Southern Brigade of the Gaza Division were en route but had been delayed by ambushes on the region's access roads and Route 232.[747]

At about the same time, infiltrators kidnapped 5 members of the Israeli-Argentinian Marman/Leimberg family.[748] Clara Marman, 63, her partner Louis Har, her brother Fernando, her sister Gabriela Leimberg, 59 and the latter's daughter Mia, 17, were hiding in the safe room of their house. The infiltrators broke into the house through its windows and forced their way into the safe room, which had no lock. Clara Marman recalled "They started screaming for us to come with them. I don't speak Hebrew well, but neither do they. They shouted at us in English 'go, go, go!' We went out and saw a lot of glass in the house … We were taken out of the door. When I left, I saw that all the windows and doors in the neighbourhood were broken."[749] The abducted family were taken by van, together with Mia's dog, to Gaza and then through tunnels to Rafah.[750]

At 11:30, gunmen broke into the house of Moshe and Diana Rosen and forced their way into their safe room. "They shot the lock and the door opened".[751] Both the Rosens were wounded as the infiltrators fired into the room. The elderly couple, 72 and 75 respectively, were taken captive. After ransacking their fridge and looting the house, their abductors took them by foot 3.1 miles into the Gaza border.[752] Once at the breached fence, the couple refused to cross over into Gaza, insisting that they could not continue because of their injuries. Their captors eventually let them go[753], possibly intimidated by the proximity of an Israeli helicopter.

At noon, another group of attackers from Gaza infiltrated the back of the *Kibbutz* and entered its (empty) residences for "volunteer teens". Members of the security squad found them and fired on them, causing them to leave.

At 13:20, Israeli troops including specialist counter-terrorism forces arrived at the *Kibbutz* and went house to house looking for infiltrators. They were accompanied by resident Dor Sabag and his brother, who directed the soldiers to houses where there had been infiltrations based on requests for help in the *Kibbutz* WhatsApp Group.[754] Sabag testified to the USC Shoah Foundation that in one of the houses they entered, there was excrement and urine all over the kitchen, reportedly left in frustration after the homeowner managed to shoot a terrorist through their *mamad* door.[755] At 16:00 the IDF troops arrived at the Marman home, saw evidence of gunfire and looting, and determined that the family were missing. Residents of the *Kibbutz* were allowed to leave their safe rooms at 20:30 and told to gather in a fortified kindergarten. They were evacuated the following morning.[756]

On the morning of 8 October, 3 members of the security squad were missing, believed to be abducted. However, the remains of squad member Boaz Abraham, a 61 year old farmer, were not identified until "a few days after the massacre" having initially been misidentified as a terrorist's body.[757] Oren Golden, 33 a mechanic, turned out to have been killed on 7 October and his body taken to Gaza. However, his body was recovered from Gaza in a military operation in July 2024.[758] Tal Chaimi, 41, a dairy-farmer and a third-generation member of the *Kibbutz*, was also killed at the *Kibbutz* on 7 October 2023 and his corpse taken hostage to Gaza.

XXV. Kibbutz Sufa

Kibbutz Sufa was founded in 1977 in the north of the Sinai Desert (Sufa means "storm" and refers to the area's frequent sandstorms). In the wake of Israel's 1979 peace treaty with Egypt and the resulting withdrawal from Sinai, the community relocated in 1982 to its current home in the south of the Gaza Envelope, 1.7 miles from the Gaza border.[759]

Sufa is a small, secular community made up of 50 families. Its agricultural activity includes various field

crops, banana groves and mango orchards as well as a dairy farm and hatchery. For many years there was a border crossing at Sufa, used primarily by Palestinians working in Israel. It was permanently closed in 2008 following a mortar attack on it in the May of that year. The population at the last recorded census in 2022 was 233.[760]

On 7 October 2023, 3 civilians were killed, including British-Israeli Bernard Cowan.

The Red Alert rocket alarm sounded at 06:30, but the ground assault from Gaza was just before 07:00. Many episodes of the attack on *Kibbutz* Sufa were captured on video, some by the community's CCTV security cameras, more by body-cameras worn by the attackers.[761] They clearly show the deliberate killing of civilians. The security team was able to hold off the attackers for 6 hours until the arrival of IDF units.

To get to the *Kibbutz*, the gunmen, who came from the city of Khan Yunis, drove past the small adjacent IDF outpost, which was already being attacked and was overrun shortly afterwards. Some fired randomly into the *Kibbutz* from Route 232 as they drove to its main gate.[762] The attacks on *Kibbutz* Sufa and Sufa base were coordinated by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, with command on the day under the authority of senior PIJ operative, Aiman Zaarab.[763] After the battle the bodies of 15 Hamas fighters were recovered inside the *Kibbutz*, several of which had maps of the *Kibbutz* amongst their belongings.[764]

In the minutes after 06:30, the community emergency coordinator Yuval Balacasan, a civil engineer, noticed that the rocket barrage was more intense and longer-lasting than usual, describing it as "non-stop, and very, very focused on Sufa."[765] After taking his wife and son to the safe room in his parents' nearby home, where they would remain for the next 30 hours[766], he met up with other members of the *Kitat Konenut* (civilian security team.) Only 4 of them had rifles, and they had never trained together as a unit. Balacasan himself had never fired his weapon even for practice.[767]

The *Kibbutz Ravshatz* Elia Lilintal received a message from someone monitoring the *Kibbutz* security cameras in the *Kibbutz hamal* saying that "Israel has been penetrated". He made contact with an Israeli military commander who told him no forces would be arriving to back up his team.[768] An official at the Eshkol regional council told him to stay inside because of the rocket attacks.

Lilental heard shooting and went outside his house with his rifle to see what was happening. He caught sight of four intruders and ran back inside. "They were better armed than me…. I had no protective gear; it was left in the car."[769] Lilental looked out of his bathroom window and saw 2 gunmen approaching his house. "I shot them both. I had not been under fire before; It was my first time. We were not trained for this type of incident."[770] Lilental then joined the security team.

CCTV footage from the main gate shows 4 Hamas gunmen arriving at 06:50.[771] Some are wearing green headbands that are the uniform of the Hamas al

Image taken from Hamas go-pro footage showing the moment a terrorist shoots and kills British Israeli Bernard Cowan in Kibbutz Sufa.
Source: Hamas Telegram

Qassam Brigades. On Hamas bodycam footage of the same infiltration, one of them asks "what shall I do about the guard booth?" As it appears to be empty, his comrade tells him to open the gate, which he then scales. Gunfire can be heard in the background. Moments later *Kibbutz* resident Ofir Erez, 57, a tour guide, was leaving in his car and was fired upon by gunmen, killing him.[772]

The infiltrators split into teams of 2.[773] Helmet camera footage from one of them, recovered after the battle, shows the Hamas operative walking through the *Kibbutz*, shooting out the tyres of an ambulance, shooting to death a black labrador, and then shooting into houses.[774] The Hamas gunmen broke into a house and took food and drink from a refrigerator. They also attempted to set a house on fire.[775]

At 07:20, the attacker took aim through the window of a house at a man sitting at a kitchen table. He fired twice in quick succession. There was an audible groan and the man collapsed. The victim was later identified as Bernard Cowan, a British-born immigrant from Glasgow, who worked in the *Kibbutz* factory. His wife Margaret was in the safe room with their dog and discovered his body in the afternoon, though it had already been found and identified by Balacasan and the security team at around 09:00.[776]

Another helmet camera video shows two attackers from the main gate enter a house at 07:50. One fired into a stairwell. Another called out "Mother" in Hebrew in an apparent attempt to draw out any residents.[777] The house belonged to Hilik Weinstein, who heard the intruders enter but was hiding in silence in the safe room with his partner.

Soon after meeting up, at about 10:00, Balacasan and 3 other team members came upon about 30 Hamas infiltrators and fired at them from behind a concrete wall. Some were scaling the perimeter fence on ladders (their motorbikes, ATVs and trucks were lined up outside), some were gathered in the adjacent orchard. Others were already inside the *Kibbutz*.[778]

Around 10:00 Lilental and other members of the emergency squad "heard Arabic from an orchard outside the *Kibbutz*." When they went to investigate, they saw 15 gunmen.[779] During the ensuing firefight, one of the squad members, software developer Ido Hubara, 36, was shot in the head. Ido, a father of 3 , was taken to a nearby house and treated by a medic – his own father Zohar Hubara - but died within hours.[780] Zohar had intended to evacuate his son via his ambulance but testified that he was unable to do so as terrorists purposefully sabotaged the ambulance by shooting out the wheels, making it undrivable.[781] The disabling of the ambulance was captured on the bodycam footage that the terrorists recorded themselves.[782]

Six IDF soldiers from the LOTAR counter-terrorism unit from the Eilat Division arrived at the *Kibbutz* in the afternoon at 13:00 and reinforced the security team. The were joined 30 minutes later by another 12 soldiers.[783] At 14:00 an IDF attack helicopter reached the *Kibbutz*. According to Lilental it "took down 40 terrorists" in the orchard.[784] Eventually at 16:50 a female-crewed tank from the Caracal Brigade arrived to secure the entrance of the village and then moved to secure the Sufa military outpost.[785] With the arrival of the military, fighting gradually reduced as they went house to house and searched for further terrorists and checked on the status of residents.[786] By the end, the members of the civil security team had fought for 12 hours straight.[787]

The *Kibbutz* was evacuated the following day, with some residents having stayed in their safe rooms for nearly 30 hours. Yuval Balacasan testified that in the aftermath of the attack they found bags filled with explosive charges and more weapons.[788] An ISIS flag was also found on the body of one of the neutralised terrorists, with Israeli authorities believing that they had planned to raise the flag before they were prevented in doing so by the arrival of the counter-terrorism unit.[789]

XXVI. Moshav Pri Gan and Moshav Shlomit

Moshav Pri Gan ('Fruit Garden") and Shlomit are situated in the far south of the Gaza Envelope. Shlomit is a small religious community founded in 2011 as part of a public-private initiative to develop the Negev desert region. It is 4.3 miles from the Gaza border and roughly 1 mile to the Egyptian one.[790] The farming collective of Pri Gan, from Shlomit, was set up in 1981 by members of *Moshav* Pri'el and was in the Northen Sinai but had to relocate after the Israel-Egypt peace treaty. It is 3 miles from the Gaza border fence.[791] Shlomit had a population of 469 residents while Pri Gan had 249 at the last recorded census in 2022.[792] On 7 October 2023, 3 members of the civilian security team of Shlomit were killed while defending *Moshav* Pri Gan.

Residents at Shlomit heard heavy rocket fire at 06:30 then a period of silence. Twenty minutes after the barrage, Shlomit resident Yonatan Werner left the safe room in his house and went outside. Immediately he

"smelled gunpowder and heard shooting all around, so I realised this was something bigger, some kind of infiltration."[793] Another resident, Akiva Shabbat, a member of the MADA volunteer ambulance service, opened his door "to see that everything is covered in dust." Although he heard "lots of noise of interceptions and booms," he thought the Iron Dome was not working properly. He then received a call from MADA about a direct hit on a dorm of foreign workers from Thailand to the south, next to *Moshav* Naveh."[794] The rockets also wrought "massive damage" within the *Moshav* itself.[795]

At about the same time, the *Moshav*'s security coordinator, Benny Meshulem, heard on his walkie-talkie that neighbouring Pri Gan had been attacked. He called his 8-person security team together, which was responsible not just for Shlomit but 2 other nearby *Moshavim* - Bnei Netzarim and Naveh. Meshulem took 3 members of the team and drove to Pri Gan. On arrival, the Shlomit squad members saw infiltrators at a house close to the village gate. "We realised there were at least 12 terrorists, and not 1 or 2 as we originally thought."[796] They opened fire and very quickly all 3 squad members were wounded. Meshulam WhatsApped the squad back at Shlomit for back up: "Come, come quickly, we have 2 here in critical condition, if you do not come we will lose them."[797] A second team arrived and came under heavy fire.[798] Eventually all 9 members of the Shlomit squad came to the Pri Gan.

At Pri Gan, the *Tseva Adom* rocket warnings had sounded at 06:31. The first infiltrators had arrived about 20 minutes later. The *Moshav* had only a 4 person *Kitat Konenut*, of whom 2 members were away that morning. At 06:55 the 2 who were present, Eliran Kadosh and Nathan Ezri, heard gunshots and armed themselves. Kadosh got into his car to investigate. As he drove around the community fence he came under fire and saw infiltrators placing explosives at the main gate.[799] At 07:10 Nathan Ezri used his own house and garden as a fighting position to prevent infiltrators from moving deeper into the *Moshav*.

At 07:20, 3 security squad members from the neighbouring village of Hevel Shalom arrived at Pri Gan together with 2 police officers. They were immediately fired on. One police officer, Avi Zidon, was killed. At 07:31, a *Moshav* resident posted in the women's WhatsApp group "We are in silence in the safe room they are on the roof and inside the house shooting." A fellow member advised "keep the phone on silent so they don't know where you are."[800]

At 07:36, Rina Ben Naim posted to the same group "They are inside my house – inside."[801] The Ben Naim Family had been in the safe room of their house when infiltrators broke in and shouted in Arabic: "Hands up, police." The son of the family locked the door of the safe room, but "failed to completely close the window, leaving a slot between the steel panels and the tempered glass window". The intruders searched the house and found the safe room but failed to breach it. One of the attackers tried to push the barrel of his rifle through the partly open window. Yoni Ben Naim fired at the attacker with his pistol. The attacker then threw a grenade which bounced off the glass. The infiltrators gave up on the safe room and turned the Ben Naim house into a command post. As they did so the Shlomit security squad arrived at Pri Gan. The resulting battle was fought outside the Ben Naim house and in its courtyard. It lasted for an hour, after which the attackers withdrew.

During the firefight 2 Shlomit security squad members were killed: builder Reuven Shishportish, 36, a native of France and Aviad Cohen, 44, a father of 6 . One other was killed on his way to the *Moshav*: Security team member Bechor Sueid, 32, a landscape gardener, was away for the *Simchat Torah* holiday in another village, 30 minutes' drive away. When he saw news of the invasion, he tried to contact the Shlomit security coordinator. His messages unanswered, Sueid set out for the *Moshav*. His car was ambushed by Hamas infiltrators on Route 232 near the Magen junction and he was killed in a gun battle there.[802]

A squad member subsequently observed "in Shlomit, we have 4 widows and 15 orphans, all in one street." (the fourth death was that of Maj. Uriel Bibi, a paratrooper killed elsewhere that day).[803]

At 09:40, the surviving infiltrators left the *Moshav* on motorcycles, taking their wounded and dead with them which was captured on the *Moshav*'s CCTV. Ten minutes later a unit of the IDF's Caracal Brigade arrived. The soldiers split into 2 squads and together with the combined security teams swept the village for intruders. They rescued the Ben Naim family from their safe room window after finding that the house and safe room door had been booby-trapped with grenades by the retreating attackers.[804]

At 15:30 more troops arrived from an IDF officer training centre in the Negev and helped secure the village and surrounding area. According to security squad member, Yehuda Rabinowitz "In the investigation afterwards, they found explosives, RPGs, they found

tools to break in, to open the windows of the safe rooms, like they did in other communities, and we prevented that."[805]

The surviving members of the Shlomit security team returned to their then unprotected *Moshav* once Pri Gan had been secured. There they stood guard until the IDF arrived at 17:00. Both were evacuated on 8 October 2023.

XXVII. Kibbutz Holit

Holit ("Dune") is a small *Kibbutz* in the bottom third of the Gaza Envelope, not far from the frontier with Egypt. It was originally established in Sinai in 1978 and relocated to the western Negev in 1982, after the Israel-Egypt peace treaty. It is located 1.6 miles from the Gaza border fence, on Route 232, with *Kibbutz* Sufa to its east and *Kibbutz* Kerem Shalom to the west. A "privatised" *Kibbutz*, whose members do not pool their income, it is primarily an agricultural community which grows oranges, lemons, potatoes, mangoes, and carrots and it has a factory producing juicers.[806] At the last recorded census in 2022, Holit had a population of 210.[807] On 7 October 2023, 15 civilians, including a Moldovan carer, a Cambodian agricultural student and a Thai guestworker and 1 soldier died. The attackers also took 6 civilians hostage.

By 06:30, the *Tseva Adom* rocket warnings sounded at the *Kibbutz*. Most residents went to their safe rooms and people already at work on the farm went to their shelters, including 4 members of the al-Ziadana family who were milking cows in the barn. One Hamas rocket hit the apartment of a Cambodian veterinary student, killing him. Chan Oudom, 24, had only arrived in Israel 2 weeks before and was doing an internship in the *Kibbutz* dairy.[808]

At around 06:35 Kukushkin heard the sound of machine gun fire close to his home. Concerned, he contacted the regional council's dispatch centre to report the incident but was informed that they were already aware of the situation and to lock himself in his safe room. Shortly afterward, the gunfire grew louder.[809] By 06:40 gunmen from Gaza were already inside the *Kibbutz*. After a few minutes the infiltrators began to go from house to house, forcing their way into safe rooms and attacking the people inside with gunfire and grenades. Some houses were set on fire.

Holit had a 3-person *Kitat Konenut* civilian security squad, one of whose members was away on the morning of 7 October 2023 .[810] The leader of the squad, Avi Korin, was an Argentine-Israeli dual national and was killed almost immediately by the attackers.[811]

Soon after the rocket alert sounded, resident Shir Azouli, 23, went out of her house to photograph the rocket launches and interceptions.[812] Soon afterwards she heard gunfire and saw armed men in military uniforms. Realising that they were not IDF soldiers, she went back to her house and hid in her safe room with her dog. When the shooting outside the house briefly subsided, she ran out to the kitchen to grab a kitchen knife and brought it back in the safe room with her. "I knew it wouldn't help me, but it strengthened my self-confidence." [813]

At 07:08, gunmen broke into the house of the Sherman family, sprayed bullets around it, looted it and tried without success to force the door of the safe room. As they left the house one of them detonated a grenade, but did not realise that it had broken the safe room door.[814] Libi Sherman posted about the attack – one of the first in the village - on WhatsApp. "When I reported that a grenade had exploded in the house, people on the *Kibbutz* thought I was imagining things."[815]

At 07:10, gunmen attacked the Kakon family house, throwing in grenades. One of the intruders was shot dead by Moti Kakon. Others attached an explosive device to the window of the safe room causing it to shatter, and wounding the eldest daughter Lihi.[816]

At 07:38, gunmen entered the *Kibbutz* barn. There they kidnapped Pattanayut Tonsakree and Owat Suriyasri, both guest workers from Thailand, and 4 members of the Bedouin al-Ziadana family. Youssef al-Ziadna and his sons Hamza and Bilal, Israeli Arab residents of the Bedouin village of Ziadna, were long-time employees of Holit (Youssef had worked in its fields for 17 years).[817] On 7 October 2023 Yousef al-Ziadna's 17-year-old daughter Aisha had joined them to take part in the olive harvest. By mid-morning, the rest of the family realised that something had happened to the family of 4. They had not been answering their phones for some time, and then a cousin saw online a Hamas post that showed all 4 members of the family on the ground in Holit being guarded by Hamas gunmen.[818]

At 07:45, Deborah Shachar Troem-Matias, an American-Israeli and her husband Shlomi, both musicians and peace activists[819], were hiding in the safe room of their house with their 16 year old son Rotem when gunmen broke in.[820] Deborah Matias told her son to get on the floor under a blanket and then covered it with her own body. Immediately afterwards, the gunmen blew open

the safe room door.[821] They then sprayed the room with gunfire and threw in a grenade. Deborah Matias was killed instantly and Rotem was hit in the stomach by a bullet that had passed through her body.[822] The grenade blew Shlomi Matia's hand off. He bled out as the gunmen watched and laughed. Rotem Matias heard his father's screams but stayed hidden under his mother's corpse. Unaware of his presence and survival the gunmen left once they were sure the father was dead. At 08:01 Rotem Matia messaged his older sister in another part of the *Kibbutz* "Mum and Dad are dead. Sorry. Call help." The gunmen returned to the house at 10:45 but did not see the teenager hiding under his blooded blanket.[823] Rotem Matias was rescued by IDF forces after 15:00.

At 08:00, infiltrators set fire to the Thai workers' living quarters and the hay barn and looted the farm of equipment. At 08:30 they marched the abducted Thai guest workers and the al-Ziadna family out of the *Kibbutz* and then took them to Gaza.[824] The 2 Thai workers were forced onto a motorcycle at gunpoint. On the way there to Gaza there was a crash during which their captors' gun went off, wounding Owat Suriyasri in the stomach.[825]

The infiltrators continued to go from house to house, killing residents they found, sometimes setting fires to force them of their safe rooms.

Around 09:00, Shir Azouli saw a message on the *Kibbutz* WhatsApp group from her neighbour Miriam. The latter said her house was on fire and that she was trapped in her safe room as it filled with smoke. Azouli's electricity went out and she received a message saying that her house too was being set alight by the attackers. Azouli ran out of the house barefoot. She tried to rescue her neighbour Miriam but could not get past the flames at her front door. Azouli went to the back of the house and broke the window of the safe room. Another resident, Anat Dymshitz, helped her remove the metal shutters and she climbed in to find Miriam unconscious.[826] Azouli and other residents were able to get Miriam out of the house just before gunmen returned to the neighbourhood and opened fire.[827]

At about 12:30, Hamas gunmen from the *Nukbah* force of the Qassam Brigades[828], identified by the green headbands they were seen wearing in multiple videos from across the *Kibbutz*, broke into the house of Adi Vital-Kaploun, a cybersecurity expert. Her husband Anani, a farmer in the *Kibbutz*' citrus groves and member of the security team was away. Adi Kaploun was looking after their 4-year-old son and 3.5 month-old baby. Hearing the approach of the infiltrators she called her husband to ask him how to use his rifle. She was able to shoot one of the attackers before she was killed.[829] The gunmen filmed themselves putting shoes on the infant boy and rocking the baby in its crib in

Hamas terrorists holding the children of Adi Vital-Kaploun after they killed her in Kibbutz Holit. They uploaded the footage to social media as 'proof' that the Qassam Brigades do not kill children (the events of the attack disprove this claim). Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

footage that was later posted online by Hamas.[830] They then took the children hostage and booby-trapped Adi Vital-Kaploun's body.[831]

Moshe Ridler, 92, a retired police detective, was killed in his home together with Petro Boscov, his Moldovan carer.[832] Ridler was a Holocaust survivor who as a 10-year-old in Romania had escaped deportation and confinement in a ghetto. The invaders fired a rocket-propelled grenade at the door of his safe room, before storming the house with grenades and shooting Boscov" multiple times."[833] He is the oldest victim of 7 October.

Tehila Katabi's boyfriend was out of the house when Hamas gunmen broke in. Her parents "were on a video call with her when it happened and suddenly she just disappeared." She was found shot to death not long afterwards by Haim Katzman, from next door, who had gone out of his house to check on his neighbours after the rocket alarms ceased.[834] Katzman, a doctor of sociology, was the *Kibbutz* gardener and car mechanic. He was "also a DJ specializing in Arabic electronic music and a peace activist."[835]

Katzman ran to his house of his other neighbour, pilates and yoga instructor Avital Aladjem. The 2 hid from approaching intruders in a closet. At 13:30, 6-8 terrorists moved from Adi Kaploun-Vital's house to Avital Aladiem's home.[836] When they broke into the house they fired into the closet. Katzman shielded Aladjem with his body and was killed.[837] The attackers took Aladjem out of the closet, made her put on more conservative clothing and cover her hair before forcing her to film videos saying "Netanyahu and Ben-Gvir, we don't kill girls and children." They then asked her where the police and *Kibbutz* clinic were, pointing at a Hebrew to Arabic vocabulary list.[838] She was taken together with the kidnapped children of the Kaploun family through the *Kibbutz* and made to enter the destroyed houses of several residents and ask residents hiding in safe rooms to come out under the promise that they would not kill women and children.[839] Naturally, Aladjem knew this to be untrue yet she had no option to refuse the terrorists' orders, as she was now responsible for the children of the Kaploun family.

Aladjem and the 2 children were then taken by 10 terrorists to other houses in the *Kibbutz*. Aladjem witnessed the destruction testifying that "everything was destroyed and full of blood; they took us from house to house with shooting all around, as they burned the houses and the cars."[840]

At approximately 15:00 Aladjem and the Kaploun children were taken out of the *Kibbutz* and told to run towards the border fence and cross into Gaza. After passing the open perimeter fence and when they are 1.2 miles from Rafah, the terrorists signalled that the hostages could return to Israeli territory. One of the children was wounded in the foot from gunfire and the other was struggling to breathe after inhaling gunpowder. Hamas later released footage of this, with it initially broadcast on Al Jazera as evidence of their ethics in relation to women and children.[841] Although almost the entirety of their other posts on social media, including on Telegram would show the hollowness of this claim (SEE Chapter 6.11 Use of Social Media to Terrorise), the video quickly went viral on social media and misinformation about 7 October 2023 began to take hold online.[842] Aladjem testified to hiding in sand dunes with the 2 children to avoid other gunmen returning to Gaza. Due to the gunshot wound in the foot of one of the Adi Kaploun-Vital's children it took them nearly 3 hours to get back to the *Kibbutz*, re-entering the *Kibbutz* through a hole in the fence at 18:50.[843]

Roland Sultan, 68, originally from Tunisia, and his wife, Ronit Tal Sultan, 55, from Argentina, were longtime residents of the *Kibbutz*: he was the former manager, while she was a professor at nearby Sapir College. They had gone into their safe room when the rocket alarm sounded. At 08:06 Roni Sultan texted a friend that "terrorists are at the front of the house, trying to get in." Their bodies were found that evening, "Ronit inside the house and Roland on the balcony."[844]

Alla Rozhansky, 57, was visiting her mother Anat Dymshitz together with other members of their Russian immigrant family. The group of 8, including 4 infants, locked themselves in their reinforced safe room after Anat Dymshitz helped rescue a neighbour from a burning house. Infiltrators knocked on the door of their house. The family kept silent but one of the grandchildren, a 4-year-old, "has developmental problems, he couldn't understand that he had to be quiet… he screamed. The terrorists realised that there were children inside and started breaking in." The intruders used grenades to try to get into the safe room. "There was an explosion. I managed to push my mother to the floor, one of our granddaughters was on the bed and everyone else was injured." The grenade was powerful and shrapnel went through the door. Anat's husband's leg was broken, and her leg muscles and right buttock were "torn to the bone." Anat stated that that 6-year-old Ofik was the worst hit, with a badly damaged leg." The door to the safe room held, and the terrorists continued to try and lure the family. In the end, the family refused to leave. The entire family survived though Rozhansky's son-in-law had his leg amputated.[845]

The only survivor of the Elharar household was a 7-year-old girl, Adi Elharar. Her parents Meir and Liz Elharar were shot dead by infiltrators who broke into the house.[846] The girl had hidden in a closet, while her mother stood outside it. When the gunmen "completely sprayed" the house with bullets, Liz Elharar's body shielded her daughter's behind the closet door.[847] Adi was rescued by her neighbours Naama and Gideon Kovani, who received a message from Liz asking someone to rescue her daughter which she sent before she died.[848]

Withawat Kunwong, a Thai farmworker, had been in the *Kibbutz* turkey farm when the community was attacked. He hid for several hours but was discovered by one of the infiltrators who tried to abduct him. When Kunwong refused to surrender, the intruder – dressed in civilian clothing - slashed his throat and face with a large knife, then left him for dead.[849] He was rescued and treated by other workers.

At 15:30 IDF troops from the Shaldag Unit began to arrive at the *Kibbutz* and started to clear the houses of intruders. At about the same time, Gazan civilian looters discovered Salem al-Ziadna, cousin of abducted Youssef al-Ziadna, hiding in the barn with his children. They threatened to kidnap them also but left after stealing his car and wallet. Salem al-Ziadna was able to contact the IDF forces arriving at the *Kibbutz* who then came to rescue and evacuate his family.[850]

At 17:00, 3 tanks from the Caracal Brigade arrived at the *Kibbutz*, having already neutralised an additional infiltration gathering on the highway.[851] One of the tanks broke through the main gate to engage with attackers still inside the perimeter. Soon afterwards, the surviving gunmen withdrew. At 00:00 the Israeli military declared that it was in full control of the *Kibbutz*. They found at least 25 bodies of the attackers.[852] As well as inflicting mass casualties, the intensity of the attack wrought enormous destruction.[853] Every house was damaged, and many were destroyed along with all the public buildings and farm infrastructure.[854] The *Kibbutz* was evacuated on 8 October 2023.

XXVIII. Moshav Yated

Moshav Yated ("stake" in Hebrew) is a small cooperative community in the Eshkol region in the far south of the Gaza Envelope. It is just under 3.11 miles from the border fence to the west and the same distance from the border with Egypt to the south.

Yated was founded in 1982 by a core group of *B'Nei HaMoshavim* members, a Labour Zionist group.[855] For a while it hosted families that previously lived in Israeli settlements in Gaza that were relocated after Israel's unilateral withdrawal in 2005.[856] At the most recent census conducted in 2022, the *Moshav* has a population of 570.[857]

On 7 October 2023, no residents were killed or wounded in the attack on the *Moshav*. However, residents Noi Maudi, 29, and Motti Alkavetz, 40, were killed at the Psyduck Music Festival.

Yated was hit by rockets before dawn, after which it was infiltrated by gunmen from Gaza. Most of the attackers were captured. At 06:29, automatic rocket sirens sounded, signifying incoming missiles. Residents went to their shelters and safe rooms. Soon afterwards, power to the village was cut off, leaving residents in the dark.

Ravschatz Maor Chavivian assembled the security squad around 07:00 after receiving reports of infiltrations in nearby *Kibbutzim* over radio communication systems and from messages in WhatsApp groups filled with fellow *Kibbutzniks*.[858]

At about 08:00 the security squad detected a man approaching through the *Moshav*'s field from the west and, due to the reports of infiltrations in neighbouring *Kibbutzim*, this was viewed with immense suspicion and the individual was arrested. Four other individuals were arrested moving through a neighbourhood in the *Moshav* around 09:15 following multiple sightings by residents, who also reported that terrorists had clearly been inside their homes due to evidence of food being consumed whilst they remained in safe rooms.[859] At 09:15 there were multiple sightings of armed intruders in the village. One resident reported a terrorist trying to force the door of her house.

Resident Igor Pivinev, a police sergeant, was at work when he received a message from his wife that she could hear nearby gunfire. He immediately started to drive home. En route he was stopped by police, as the road to Ofakim was closed due the unfolding events of the day. He asked his fellow policemen to let him through to get to his family. He was able to continue to Urim Junction, where he saw ambushed cars and dead bodies on the Route 232. He was able to flank and kill 2 pairs of terrorists that had fired on the vehicles. As he continued to Yated, he was able to neutralise a further 11 attackers.[860] Upon arriving at the *Moshav* he joined the civilian security squad[861] in its battle with infiltrators.

During the fighting in the village, *Moshav* resident Nasreen Yousef, a member of Israel's Druze minority, who are Arabic speakers, was able to persuade a captured terrorist to reveal that they had broken through the perimeter fence near the greenhouse and that 3 groups of terrorists were hiding and infiltrating through this gap.[862] She also spoke to a Hamas commander who called the phone of another captured terrorist and was therefore able to supply information about terrorist numbers and whereabouts to the IDF.[863] The terrorist signed off the call saying "Inshallah, tonight we will conquer Israel." Mrs Yousef found out shortly afterwards that 3 of her closest friends had been killed at *Kibbutz* Sufa and *Kibbutz* Kerem Shalom. Her husband Sgt. Maj. Eyad Youssef, fought with the security team during the battle inside the *Moshav*.[864]

At 19:00, a 10-person team of soldiers from an officer training school in the Negev arrived at the *Moshav* along with some reserve soldiers. At 04:00 on 8 October the security team and soldiers on the *Moshav* received a report of a further terrorist infiltration threat.

On Sunday morning a unit of the IDF's mixed-sex Caracal Battalion arrived at *Moshav* Yated and caught 15 attackers hiding in an orchard.[865] They were accompanied by Col. Shemer Raviv, who is charge of the entire Paran Brigade, which oversees 4 battalions including the Caracal Battalion. Another terrorist cell was spotted from the air by an army helicopter and destroyed.[866]

Around 16:00 on 8 October "people began an organised exodus from Yated. No one put out an official evacuation order."[867] However, the security squad and IDF units remained around the *Moshav* until 9 October 2023 due to further alerts of incursions in the area.

By 11 October, 10 attackers had been captured in the area of the *Moshav* and were moved to a military detention centre 4 days later.[868]

XXIX. Kibbutz Kerem Shalom

Kibbutz Kerem Shalom ("vineyard of peace") is a *Kibbutz* located at the far south of the Gaza Envelope next to the Kerem Shalom crossing. It was founded by members of the Socialist-Zionist movement *Hashomer Hatzair* in 1967 and members of the Religious Scouts movement, B'Nei Akiva; and is a mix of religious and secular Jews.[869] Its wall is 100 metres from the Gaza border. According to the most recent census conducted in 2022, the *Kibbutz* had a population of 220.[870] On 7 October 2023, 2 members of the security squad were killed and 1 *Kibbutz* member seriously injured.

The community's rocket sirens sounded at 06:30. Residents were told by WhatsApp message to "stay in your safe room, lock your houses; close your windows." At 06:40, the village security coordinator Eliya Ben-Shimol, assembled the community's 8-member civilian emergency squad and deployed them at various points around the perimeter.[871] Twelve minutes later, the military base at the Kerem Shalom Crossing (SEE Chapter 5.9 Attacked Military Facilities) contacted Ben Shimol to say that the border fortifications had been broken through. Based on footage uploaded to Telegram, at least 24 attackers passed through the crossing on foot and on motorcycles.[872] At about the same time, a unit of IDF Nahal Brigade troops was ordered to the *Kibbutz*.

The first attackers came from Gaza on motorcycles. Bodycam and Go-Pro video footage found on bodies later that day shows 23 of them driving through Gaza at dawn, then breaching 3 layers of border fence. Some of the attackers targeted the Kerem Shalom crossing, entering the area by 06:52, and the others went to attack the *Kibbutz* directly. Those that entered the military base at Kerem Shalom crossing were immediately engaged by the IDF battalion stationed there, which resulted in the death of Sayeret HaNahal combat soldier, Yaron Shay. This fighting spread to the main entrance of the *Kibbutz*. Members of the *Kibbutz* would continue to engage the ensuing waves of attackers for the next 6 hours.[873]

At 07:18, 7 attackers, dressed in a combination of military fatigues and civilian dress, then breached the high concrete wall of the *Kibbutz* with explosives.[874] Three soldiers in an armoured personnel carrier initially tried to engage them but the terrorists shot multiple RPGs at the vehicle, critically injuring the driver and shooting the vehicle's radio operator in the neck with a sniper bullet. With only 1 soldier remaining alive, the vehicle was forced to retreat to reorganise.[875]

Once inside, the intruders opened fire in all directions.[876] Footage of this assault was posted on the Hamas Qassam Telegram channel that day at 10:30. One of these attackers then broke into the Teitelbaum Family home and searched it but entered only 1 of 2 safe rooms; the family was hiding silently in the second. He exited and was killed by the security squad. The rest of the attacking group were killed by the security squad shortly after.[877]

At 09:15, a group of 10 attackers attempted to infiltrate the solar farm east of the *Kibbutz* but was seen and destroyed by the civilian guard squad.[878] They were equipped with guns, RPGs and other explosive devices. Ben-Shimol, realising that the intruders were part of the second wave, contacted the Kerem Shalom army base for help but was informed that the base had been attacked, and its soldiers were themselves battling against infiltrators.[879]

At 10:20 a combat helicopter arrived in the area, and in coordination with the *Ravshatz*, launched a missile towards an open area which forced another group of a reported 50 attackers to emerge from their hideouts. The helicopter then fired on this group of attackers.[880]

At 10:30, *Kibbutz* resident Amichai Schindler, 33, a social worker, was hiding with his wife Avital and their 6 children in a safe room when infiltrators entered their house. Mr Schindler held the safe room door closed while Mrs Schindler phoned the *Kibbutz* emergency situation room. The intruders claimed to be from the IDF and told the family in Hebrew to open the door of the safe room. When they refused, the attackers used an explosive device. The resulting blast resulted in Amichai losing a hand and suffering severe burns and shrapnel wounds over his entire body. Although the door was shattered, the intruders withdrew from the house.[881] Two members of the emergency squad, Moshe Yedidia Raziel, and Amichai Yisrael Witzen, arrived at the house and gave Schindler first aid. As they were doing so, armed attackers came in and shot them dead. The terrorists were themselves shot by other members of the security squad. During the battles near the Schindler house another member of the security squad was seriously injured when he was hit with an RPG.[882]

An IDF unit from the 450th Battalion of the Bismalach Brigade arrived at the *Kibbutz* at 14:00.[883] They

Image from a bedroom, showing blood stains on the bed and the impact of a grenade on the wall in Amichai Schindler's home in Kibbutz Kerem Shalom. Source:KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

conducted scans of the local area to rule out the presence of other attackers in the perimeter. It was only in the evening that full control of the *Kibbutz* was achieved.[884]

At 15:00 the *Kibbutz* was hit by a second heavy rocket barrage. Over the following 24 hours there were several more attempts to infiltrate the *Kibbutz*, all of which were thwarted.[885] At 20:00 on 8 October 2023, the residents of *Kibbutz* Kerem Shalom were evacuated to Eilat.

XXX. Kibbutz Urim

Kibbutz Urim ("lights") is a small desert community founded in 1946 by refugees from Bulgaria and members of the Habonim movement from North America. It is located in the southeast of the Gaza Envelope, 6 miles away from the Gaza Strip, and the same distance from the city of Ofakim, the furthest point reached by the 7 October attackers.

At the last recorded census in 2022, Urim had a population of 510 residents.[886] It shares a 6,700-acre cooperative desert farming project with *Kibbutz* Kissufim[887] that produces a wide range of crops. Its Noam Urim textile plant produces high-tech non-woven fabrics.[888] The *Kibbutz* is also the home of the Urim Therapeutic Center, which uses equine therapy to treat people in the Gaza Envelope region who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.[889]

In the early 1960s Urim led the shift in the *Kibbutz* movement away from raising children communally, allowing them to sleep in their parents' homes instead of a dormitory.[890]

Between 2005 and 2023 Urim was less affected by rocket-fire from Gaza than many other communities: it was too far away to be hit by mortar rounds but too close to be the frequent target of the larger, more powerful rockets fired at cities such as Ashkelon.[891] On 7 October 2023, no casualties were recorded at *Kibbutz* Urim.

The Red Alert alarms sounded at 06:30 signalling rockets from Gaza. Many *Kibbutz* members went to a communal bomb shelter, as many homes did not have their own shelters due to being older buildings. Since the 1990s all new buildings are required to be built with a bomb shelter but older buildings near the Gaza Strip only received government funding to do so if they were located within 12.43 miles of the border, which *Kibbutz* Urim is not.[892] They remained there for several hours. The rocket alarms sounded 40 more

times that morning.[893] The barrages caused substantial damage, destroying the *Kibbutz* clinic among other buildings.[894]

Urim was largely untouched, in comparison to other communities and was largely ignored by the Hamas-led gunmen, who drove past it on the way to assault a nearby Israeli army signals intelligence base.

At least 5 armed men did attempt to enter Urim on the afternoon of 8 October forcing residents back into their shelters upon the sound of gunfire, but were thwarted by an Israeli army unit , who captured 4 outside the back gate[895] and reportedly killed a number of others on the approach road.[896] There were no casualties among the security squad. *Kibbutz* residents in the shelter or hiding in their houses could hear the fighting on the perimeter of the village, and also at the nearby army installation, but none were wounded or killed. One resident, dairy farm manager Tali Medina, ran out during the fighting to milk and feed the *Kibbutz*' 600 cows.[897]

Nevertheless, a number of *Kibbutz* residents fell victim to the Hamas-led attacks elsewhere in the Gaza Envelope. Haim Medina was shot and wounded by terrorists while out on an early morning bicycle ride. The gunmen did not stop after initially shooting him and continued to the city of Ofakim. The shots were not fatal, and he was later rescued. Two members of the community were taken hostage while staying at other *Kibbutzim*. Celeste Fishbein, 18, was kidnapped at *Kibbutz* Be'eri where she was babysitting. She was killed on the way to Gaza, together with her boyfriend, Dor Reder, in whose safe room she had been hiding.[898] Argentine-Israeli resident Luis Har, 71, was kidnapped at Nir Yitzhak.[899] He and his family were taken to Rafah in Gaza but were subsequently rescued by the IDF.[900]

Those seeking to understand why Urim was not attacked have speculated that the Urim army base, which houses Unit 8200 (the Israeli equivalent of GCHQ), situated directly opposite the *Kibbutz*, may have been a higher priority for the raiders. Likewise, *Kibbutz* Reim, on whose grounds the Nova Music Festival took place, is at the top of the road that anyone would have to travel along to get to Urim and would have offered a significantly larger and easier target, as well as one nearer to Gaza. Multiday supplies of food and assault gear were found on terrorists killed at the Urim base, suggesting that they had prepared for an extended attack and "second phase" consisting of deeper incursions into Israel.[901] Given that *Kibbutz* Urim was not attacked until 8 October 2023 , it is possible that attacks on it were considered as part of this "second phase", explaining why it was not physically attacked on 7 October 2023 .

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Chapter 5.4 | Attacked Bedouin Villages and Camps

The Bedouin community of Israel is a semi-nomadic community made up of multiple different tribal units that have extended ties to families in Gaza and Egypt's northern Sinai. They are a subset of the broader Israeli-Arab population which account for 20% of Israel's population but predominantly reside in the southern Negev region. There are 7 recognised Bedouin cities and towns, the largest being Rahat with a population of 80,000, as well as 14 recognised villages. The Bedouin population in southern Israel is estimated to be approximately 400,000, however of this, 100,000 live in 35 unrecognised villages. These villages were either built without authorisation from the State or predate the State itself and the "Planning and Construction Law" of 1965. Many are also unrecognised because they do not have a fixed location due to the nomadic customs of the community.

Due to their lack of recognition, they are ineligible for municipal service and are not connected to the Israeli electricty grid or water supply. Simultaneously they are not covered by the *Tseva Adom* rocket warnings and are not protected settlements under the Iron Dome missile defence system as they are considered to be open areas. Many of the houses have aluminium roofs which, if hit by a rocket, turn into a huge spray of shrapnel.[1] These communities also do not have communal rocket shelters or *mamadim*, and have a general lack of civil infrastructure.

On 7 October 2023, 2 Bedouin settlements suffered casualties as a result of rocket fire, the unrecognised village of Alba'at and the town of Ar'ara. This resulted in 7 casualties across both settlements, with those affected ranging in age from 5 to 57. The village of Alba'at, situated in the north-east Negev, 32 miles from the Gaza border, has a population of approximately 1,400.[2] It is 4 miles from the nearest recognised Bedouin town of Kseifa and is situated off Highway 31 which traverses the eastern Negev through the major city of Arad en-route to the Dead Sea. On the morning of 7 October, 4 members of the al-Kra'an family, aged between 11 and 15, were killed when a rocket landed on them. Another relative, 35-year-old Taleb al-Kra'an was seriously wounded in the missile attack. According to a relative, the five boys were buried under rubble, and it took "15 minutes to dig them out with their bare hands—they didn't have any tools—and another 20 minutes to get them to Soroka Medical Center in Beersheba", which was already overwhelmed with other victims from the Gaza envelope.[3] Two other residents were killed by rocket fire here on 7 October: Mai Zuhair Abu Sabeeh, 13 and her grandmother Faizah Abu-Sabeeh, 57.

The town of Ar'ara ("juniper tree") was established in 1982, and is one of the 7 permanently recognised Bedouin towns. According to the most recent census, conducted in 2022, it had a population of 20,381 and covered an area of just over 14,000 dunams.[4] It is situated 40 miles from the Gaza border off Highway 25 and is below the Nevatim military air base.[5] It is a more developed town, with 10 schools, 7 clinics and 1 emergency medical centre which also services residents of nearby unrecognised villages. On the morning of 7 October 2023, at approximately 07:40 a rocket struck near the Abu Jaama home, killing their 5-year-old son Yazan Zakaria and injuring their 1-year-old daughter who was sprayed with shattered glass.[6] According to a neighbour, Yazan Zakaria "was standing at the door of his house near a car. When the rocket exploded, the car was blown out of place and burned with a number of other cars… Yazan was killed. He was blown into parts."[7] Due to their distance from the Gaza Strip, neither Ar'ara or Alba'at were evacuated but continued to be subject to rocket artillery fire.

Chapter 5.4 | References

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Chapter 5.5 | The City Attacks of 7 October

The Hamas assaults on Israeli cities in the western Negev were among the earliest attacks of 7 October 2023. Between the three urban attacks, the infiltrators succeeded in killing a total of 89 people. As was the case in other locations, the dead were diverse in ethnicity, ranging from Eritrean asylum-seekers to police swat team officers, and in age, but were predominantly civilians. Evidence captured on 7 October and gathered in its wake confirmed that the Hamas plan for "Operation Al-Aqsa Flood" included attacks on further Israeli cities that day, in particular an assault on Ashkelon.[1]

A large unit of Hamas operatives actually set out for Ashkelon, 7 miles from Gaza, hoping to break into the Shikma prison adjacent to the city. The 24-man unit "seemingly lost its way" after taking part in a battle at *Kibbutz* Yad Mordechai and then took wrong turnings that resulted in its arrival in Sderot, where it took part in the Hamas attack on that city.[2] The pattern and death toll of the Hamas assaults in Ofakim and Sderot (the infiltrators failed to penetrate the town of Netivot) are highly suggestive of what would likely have happened in cities such as Ashkelon and Tel Aviv had Hamas teams succeeded in getting to them also.[3] Captured documents from Gaza reveal Hamas' intelligence gathering on Israel, including the identification of possible targets like the Moshe Aviv Tower (70 storeys) and Azrieli Centre (3 skyscraper shopping centre, train station and cinema complex) in Tel Aviv.[4]

The rocket fire on 7 October placed approximately 75% of Israel's population, equating to 7.3 million Israeli citizens, under threat.[5] Southern cities were subject to some of the heaviest rocket bombardment from Gaza, killing 3 people in Netivot and 3 in Ashkelon.

I. Sderot

Sderot is a city of 33,002 people, as per the 2022 census, located in the northwest of the Gaza envelope, less than a mile from the Gaza border fence.[6] It is the Israeli city nearest to the Gaza Strip and sits right next to the *Kibbutz*im of Nir Am and Gevim.

Sderot ("Boulevards" – named by Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion in reference to the eucalyptus trees planted in the new city's main avenue) was founded in 1951, originally as a transit camp for Jewish refugees from the Kurdistan regions of Iran and Iraq.[7] It continued to be a destination for refugees and migrants from Middle Eastern and North African countries. By 1961, more than 80% of its population were families from Morocco.[8] Subsequent waves of immigration from the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia, and Romania, and Palestinians from Gaza who worked with Israeli authorities and were offered residency after 2005 Disengagement, have made it one of the most linguistically and culturally diverse cities in Israel.[9]

After the Hamas takeover of Gaza in 2007, Sderot became a frequent target of bombardments by mortar and rocket fire. The proximity of the city to Gaza is such that residents are only given a maximum warning of 15 seconds to reach a shelter once automated rocket alarms sound in the city. Almost 10,000 rockets were fired at Sderot between 2001 and 2015.[10] A survey in 2008 showed that "nearly 92% of the residents of Sderot had heard or seen a rocket land nearby, 56% had shrapnel fall on their homes, and 65% knew someone who had been injured."[11] Successive Israeli governments spent hundreds of millions building shelters around the city, with playground animals and bus-shelters doubling as rocket-bunkers.[12] The development of the Iron Dome missile protection system proved able to intercept a growing proportion of incoming missiles since 2011.

The groups which attacked Sderot on 7 October 2023 killed 52 people inside the city, of whom 36 were civilians, 14 were first responders and 2 were military personnel. The 36 civilians included asylum-seekers from Sudan and Eritrea, Chinese guest-workers and a Palestinian Israeli whose family had moved to Israel from Gaza. Thirteen of the civilian casualties were members of a senior citizens' tour group standing at a bus stop.

The exact number of attackers remains unclear but is at least 35. The bodies of 27 Hamas operatives were discovered in the wreckage of the Sderot police station. At least 6 others are known to have been killed in gun battles in other parts of the town. Footage from Telegram also shows at least 8 fighters from the Mujahideen Brigades in the city.[13]

The Hamas units that attacked Sderot on 7 October were in at least 6 vehicles. The trajectory of the attacks, and also their indiscriminate nature, was attested to by video footage from numerous CCTV cameras in and around the city, from the smartphones of residents, and from the cameras carried by some of the attackers.[14] The uniform, headbands, equipment, discipline, and shooting skill of the gunmen, as captured on various video sources, indicate that they were all members of the Hamas *Nukhba* elite force.

At least one of the Hamas pickup trucks that entered Sderot was a "technical" mounted with a 14.5mm anti-aircraft machine gun, while another had a "PK" 7.62mm machine gun mounted on its roof.[15] The route the Hamas squads followed from Gaza to Sderot took them on Route 232 past the "Black Arrow" memorial and *Kibbutz* Mefalsim and then eastward towards the Sha'ar HaNegev Junction, firing at passing vehicles all the way. The Sha'ar HaNegev junction where Route 232 and Highway 34 meet is just south-east of the city. It controls access to Sderot and is a strategically important junction in the northern Negev region. Hamas took the junction early in the attacks and set up ambushes.

The rest of the Hamas convoy continued towards Sderot and entered the city in two places. According to an official police account, one group of "2 pickup trucks and a stolen private vehicle entered through the main entrance near the Mall 7 shopping centre" at the Sderot South Intersection, while a second squad in another pickup truck drove into the city via a different entrance, opposite the Sapirim Industrial Park at approximately 07:03.[16]

This second squad drove slowly down Route 232, firing automatic weapons at vehicles and houses, while the first group of Hamas attackers in their 3 vehicles drove along Menachem Begin Street from the main entrance of the city towards Sderot's police station, firing at civilians all the way. Footage posted online by a Sderot resident at 06:58 shows a stationary white pickup truck full of black-uniformed armed men wearing white headbands who fired Kalashnikov rifles at a police squad car as it drove by.[17] The video was filmed on Menachem Begin Street. This footage from Sderot was one of the first videos broadcast relating to the 7 October attack and quickly went viral. Catching sight of it on television or on social media was the first indication to many Israeli officials north of the Negev, as well as the country's civilian population, that a major incursion from Gaza was taking place.

The officers in the squad car, Sergeants Ziv Vanunu and Yael Gottlieb, had driven to Sderot from the city of Ashkelon upon hearing of an infiltration. Gottlieb was hit in her head and hands and Vanunu wounded by shrapnel. They lost control of the car which crashed 150 metres down the road.[18] (The pair were rescued after about 40 minutes by police from the Ashkelon station who evacuated Gottlieb to hospital.)

Among the first civilians killed was Amir Tanbora, 20. The son of Palestinians from Gaza who had been relocated to Israel for their safety following the Unilateral Disengagement in 2005 before he was born, he had gone out to buy cigarettes soon after 07:00.[19] Seeing a person on the pavement who had been wounded by one of the Hamas drive-by shootings, he went over to help and was shot. According to his brothers "3 terrorists chased him, but he was unable to escape. They murdered him like that, for nothing, a good man who saw an injured person and wanted to help."[20] The brothers crept out of the house and brought his body back inside in a lull in the fighting.[21] The family reported that they became aware of Tanbora's killing after seeing a video filmed by the attackers, who also fired additional rounds into his body, on TikTok.[22]

Fireman Shalom Tzaban, his Ukrainian partner Natalia Demidova and Demidova's 12-year-old son Mark Bovra, were heading out of Sderot at 07:06 when they turned onto Jerusalem Street and encountered one of the Hamas vehicles. "A pickup truck was standing

Terrorists in the city of Sderot on white pickup trucks.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project'

there, and cars that had been shot at, and then they starting shooting at us, too" Mark Bovra recalled.[23] The gunmen hit the car with automatic gunfire. "They were something like 20-30 metres away from us. Two of them stood up and fired and there were more people behind them. I ducked. Shalom started cursing in Hebrew. Then I was hit. It hurt. I waited [for 15 minutes]."

Demidova was killed, shot in the head. Tzaban had been hit by 5 bullets: 3 in the chest, 1 in the jaw and 1 in the leg. The boy had been hit in the lower back, the bullet lodged between his ribs, but managed to get out of the car and run down the street. Tzaban died in the car shortly afterwards. The entire episode was captured by the car's cameras (the family did not release the footage but it was shown to the Haaretz newspaper.) Mark Demidova found shelter at the house of a Russian-speaking resident. The latter called for an ambulance and when there was none available, treated his wound with instructions from the ambulance service. He survived and returned to Odessa a few weeks later.[24]

When the Hamas trucks turned onto Herzl Street on their way to the Sderot police station they fired on a large number of residents on the street and in vehicles. Among the civilians they killed there was musician Wolderaphael "Tiger" Hagos, 40, an asylum seeker from Eritrea, part of a small community of Eritreans in the city.[25] He had left a party shortly before dawn and was walking home past the police station.[26] A second Eritrean asylum seeker Gigi Gebrehiyet was killed not far away.

The Hamas squad that had entered the city via the industrial zone caught sight of a group of mostly elderly people standing on the pavement at a bus stop near the entrance to Ariel Sharon Street. They were a tour group of 13 senior citizens, mostly immigrants from

Pensioners who were killed at an attack on a bus stop in Sderot.
Source: South First Responders, Telegram

Russia, Ukraine and various other parts of the former Soviet Union, on a day trip to the Dead Sea. The minibus taking them there had picked up members of the tour at Ofakim and Netivot before coming to Sderot.

At 06:15, the driver, Sarif Abu Taha, realized that the minibus had a punctured tyre. He stopped the vehicle next to a bus stop with an adjacent rocket shelter and began to change the wheel. At 06:29, while he was fixing the tyre, the Sderot rocket alarms sounded.[27] The pensioners tried to get into the rocket shelter but found the automatic shelter doors failed to open.[28] Several passengers took photographs of their fellow trip members as they stood around.

At 07:03, a Hamas pickup truck pulled up alongside the bus shelter and the pensioners were unable to run away due to several struggling with mobility issues. The bus driver later recalled that he urged the passengers to run "but how could they? They were old people." Abu Taha ducked behind the shelter together with a female passenger as the *Nukhba* troops opened fire. "I heard the truck stop and then bullets being fired non-stop. The terrorists were shooting and then checking the bodies to see that the victims were really dead."[29]

All 13 of the seniors standing at the stop were killed. According to Abu Taha, "The bullets whizzed by my neck and ear and I played dead, didn't move. The lady next to me was hit by scores of bullets. I could feel her blood on me."[30] Abu Taha, unharmed, was the only survivor. The youngest victim in the group was Berta Shamayev, 56, an immigrant from the Caucasus who worked at a nearby SodaStream factory.[31] The oldest was Nadejda Spravchikov, 79, a former chemist originally from Tajikistan. She was killed together with her sister Natalya Tomayev.[32] Images of the deceased pensioners began to circulate online from midday before the families of the victims had been informed.[33]

At 07:11, one of the Hamas operatives near the site of the shooting of the pensioners' bus, kneeled and fired at motorcyclist Avi Megira as he headed into town, killing him. Other terrorists shot at cars and pedestrians. Amram Alon Toledano, 54, was shot dead on his way to synagogue.[34] Adam Brema, a Darfuri refugee who had fled Janjaweed attacks in Sudan, and who worked as a cleaner for the municipality, left his house when he heard gunshots and was immediately killed by the Hamas gunmen.[35]

A Russian-speaking passer-by who arrived at the bus stop soon afterwards told reporters that he walked on to a nearby shop where he "saw a man trying to get out

of his car. He had been shot on each side by terrorists with machine guns, and his foot was stuck on the clutch pedal. While I was adjusting his leg to help, he died."[36]

The Hamas squad then drove on to a traffic circle near the main entrance to the city where it was confronted by a trio of YAMAM counter-terrorism officers. During the ensuing firefight, one of the officers, Sgt. Maj. Chen Nachmias, was killed and 2 others wounded. The attackers' vehicle was disabled and the Hamas operators dispersed. Some went into the Mall 7 shopping area, others to the train station. Two were killed in a gun battle with police after 08:00. The other 3 were killed after 10:00 in a series of encounters with police searching for them.[37]

Closer to the centre of Sderot the first, larger, Hamas team had arrived at the police station. Timestamped footage from CCTV security cameras at the entrance to the station shows a white pickup truck pull up and stop across the street at 07:03.[38] Ten armed men dismounted and ran in single file along the pavement. The footage shows one man placed a long rocket launch tube on the pavement to prepare it. A second pickup pulled up moments later, containing another 10 operatives.

A resident whose apartment is opposite the police station heard gunshots and looked out of her kitchen window: "they all got out of the vans, shouting 'Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar'. I told [my husband] Isaac, it's Hamas; this is Hamas!"[39] A third vehicle, "a black-coloured car with 4 terrorists" stopped nearby at the intersection of Mivtza Kadsh and Herzl Streets.[40] Its occupants set up firing positions on streets heading to the station. Some of these Hamas operatives seem to have walked from there to the area around Yirmiyahu Street in the north of the city where they fired at houses and apartments and killed a civilian.[41]

The Hamas operatives outside the police station shot and killed an off-duty police officer, Adir Shlomo, 47, as he arrived at the station in his car.[42] They killed a second officer, Eliyahu Harush, 28, who went outside after hearing gunshots and wounded a third.[43] The squad then fired a rocket-propelled grenade into the front entrance.

At the same time, 2 more Hamas trucks pulled up to the station's back entrance. The 2 teams stormed the station simultaneously, with about 20 operatives entering through the front.[44] Inside the station at that moment were 10 officers and 1 civilian police employee. The detention cells were empty. (The normal number of officers on shift in the whole city of Sderot at any one time on a typical day is fewer than 20, and the total strength of the force including support and logistics staff is just under 120).[45]

An officer in the reception area, traffic patrolman David Ben-Dayan, 58, was killed immediately. The remaining 8 people retreated to the roof and took cover behind solar panels and a water tower. Some of the defenders were unarmed. The rest had only their sidearms and 10-15 rounds of ammunition. During the fighting on the roof, 2 of the officers, Yaron Dayan, 52, and Mor Shakuri, 29, were killed (the latter after using her shirt as tourniquet for the wounded civilian) and 5 others were wounded.[46] The officers killed 2 of the intruders before they ran out of ammunition.[47] Superintendent Mali Shoshana was able to catch an enemy grenade and throw it back into the stairwell.[48]

The attackers inside the station were distracted from further pursuing those on the roof by the arrival of additional police officers to the station. One of those who arrived was investigator Lt. Col. Meir Abergel. He was killed at 07:07 when he pulled up in his car outside.[49]

Ten minutes earlier, the Swissa family, Dolev and Odaya, both 34 and 33, and their daughters Romi 6 and Lia 3, had been driving around a roundabout on their way out of Sderot when they were passed by the Hamas pickup trucks going the other way. In an incident filmed by municipal CCTV cameras, gunmen from the first vehicle opened fire on their car.[50] The Swissa family stopped in the middle of the road. Each parent picked up a child and ran in opposite directions. The father, who was carrying Romi, 6, ran down the pavement towards a nearby square, a route that took him directly past one of the pickup trucks. The attackers shot him from a few feet away. He fell, and the terrorists' trucks then drove on into the city towards the police station.

The 6-year-old got up and walked to her mother up the street. A passing motorist stopped at the roundabout, picked up Dolev the wounded father, and took him to hospital (where the 35-year-old died that afternoon). At about the same time, police officer Sgt. Shmuel Golima arrived on the scene. He spoke to the mother and the 2 little girls who were sitting in their car. Golima then asked another motorist passing by, construction worker Amer Odeh Abu Salila, an Israeli Bedouin, if he would drive the Swissa's car with the mother and 2 girls inside, and follow him to the police station. Seven minutes later, at 07:03, the 2 cars arrived outside the station. There they were ambushed by a Hamas squad hiding behind parked cars. The incident was captured by the CCTV camera at the station entrance. Sgt. Golima, Odaya Swissa, and Amer Odeh Abu Salila were shot

and killed.[51] One of the attackers came out from behind a car and checked that all 3 were dead. He did not see the 2 girls hiding under a blanket in the back seat of the civilian car. There they remained unnoticed for half an hour as an intense gunfight raged outside the vehicle. The Swissa girls were orphaned by the attacks.

At 07:15, on the outskirts of the city, another Hamas pickup truck filled with gunmen pulled into the Tapas petrol station. Moments before, 3 young Israeli men had arrived at the station saying they had been shot at on the highway. One of them was wounded. All 11 civilians at the station, including the 3 men, hid in the safe room that doubled as a storeroom. The Hamas operatives, unable to get through the locked front door of the station, took up firing positions in the forecourt and shot at passing cars. One of the civilians hiding in the storeroom was a city councilwoman. She telephoned Sderot's mayor and informed him about the attack. At 07:44 an IAF helicopter fired on the pickup truck, disabling it, as captured on CCTV.[52] Shortly afterwards police arrived in the area. There followed a series of gun battles. The civilians hiding in the petrol station safe room were rescued at 16:00 by a pair of police commandos.

The battle outside the Sderot police station between 07:15 and 08:00 involved an ad hoc group of locals, composed of 2 police officers from the station, a prison warden, an off-duty soldier, an off-duty YAMAM commando who had just exited the synagogue, and the police district commander, Amir Cohen. They fought Hamas in the street and inside the police station. The group of 6 killed 3 of the terrorists in a running firefight between vehicles.

At 07:33, one of the police officers caught sight of the 6-year-old, Romi Swissa, through the car's broken window. Maj. Aharon Amar ran to the vehicle. His body-camera recorded the girl asking him if he was Israeli.[53] On being assured that he was, she told him that she had her baby sister with her. The fire coming from across the street was too intense to take the children out of the car and the officer retreated. A few moments later, municipal security guard Yair Avinoam, was able to run to the car and open the back door. He picked up Lia Suissa, took Romi Suissa's hand and ran with them to safety, trying as he did so to block the sight of their mother's corpse in the passenger seat.

The arrival of the 6 local first responders at around 07:15, who killed 3 Hamas operatives in the street, contained the large Hamas force inside the station, and prevented it from venturing into the surrounding neighbourhood, which included a large *yeshiva*

Ruins of the Sderot Police Station after the attack.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

(religious school) and a girls' school both of which "were hosting hundreds of guests for the holiday."[54]

At about 08:50, District Commander Maj. Gen. Cohen and his improvised team attempted to rescue the police officers they knew were trapped in the station. After gaining entrance, they found themselves trapped in the station stairwell with Hamas operatives firing on them from above and below. One officer was killed and another wounded. Pinned down by gunfire and grenade blasts they were trapped in the stairwell, where they remained "for more than an hour."[55]

At 09:00 a police officer shot dead a sniper who had been targeting at everyone passing by.[56] At 10:15 a team of recently-arrived YAMAM counter-terrorist commandos forced their way into the building. They rescued Cohen and his 4 comrades from the stairwell and killed 2 of the intruders, before grenade and claymore blasts as well as heavy gunfire forced them back outside. Eight team members were wounded, 4 of whom had to be evacuated to hospital.

Fighting in the streets outside the station continued, as Hamas operatives fired on police from within the station. A Hamas sniper killed one officer Ch. Supt. Kuzmickas outside the station and wounded another. A paramedic who tried to reach them was shot and severely wounded.[57] A camera-equipped police dog that was sent to reconnoitre the ground floor was shot and killed. Police officers who took positions on nearby rooftops eventually killed 2 more Hamas snipers who had been firing from the windows of the station.

During the afternoon of 7 October, police called a fire department vehicle with a "cherry-picker" hydraulic platform and used it to place YAMAM operators on the roof of the station. Once there, they were able to rescue 2 police officers and a civilian who were hiding behind a water tank. The operatives then fought their way down the stairway from the rooftop. They were able to clear the station's top floor where they found wounded Sgt.

Shlomi Levy-Wertheim partially buried by a collapsed wall. However, the stairwell was boobytrapped in multiple places and the commandos were ambushed on their way to the first floor. Their commander, Supt. Alexei Shmakalov, was killed and they aborted the attack.[58]

After 17:00, some of the Hamas operatives attempted to break out of the station in pairs. It was only then, when several Hamas gunmen had been killed, that the authorities realized that more than 25 Hamas operatives had taken over the station. The assumption until then had been that they numbered about 4. Police and soldiers outside the station – IDF troops arrived in the city around midday - fired anti-tank missiles at the Hamas terrorists barricaded in the station, without much effect. The station had been built to withstand external attack, with concrete shelters on every floor which was "why eventually they brought the station down on them."[59]

By nightfall on 7 October, all the other Hamas attackers that were operating in Sderot had been killed, but the station was still in the hands of Hamas troops who had taken control of it at around 07:00. Anti-tank missiles fired from an Apache helicopter and shelling by an IDF tank proved unable to dislodge or defeat the surviving raiders.

District Commander Maj. Gen. Cohen decided to resort to collapsing the station with the remaining terrorists inside. At approximately 02:00 he called in 4 heavy armoured bulldozers to push down the station's walls, while a tank gave covering fire.[60] The process was complete by 05:00 on 8 October. By 09:00 the area had been scanned and the incident was declared to be officially over.[61] That morning the bodies of 27 Hamas operatives were found amidst the wreckage of the destroyed station.[62] The police station's torah scroll was also destroyed in the attack.[63]

Police said afterwards that the attackers had demonstrated precise knowledge of the city streets and the structure of the police station. The timing of their attack had ensured a larger number of targets as it was the shift changeover. In the minutes after 07:00, scores of Sderot residents were leaving their synagogues at the end of their *Simchat Torah* early morning services.

Rocket barrages continued during and after the ground attack, with 74 direct rocket hits on homes across the city over the next 10 days which wounded several civilians.[64] Between 8 October and 17 October, 90% of the city's residents were temporarily evacuated.[65] The body of the last victim from Sderot was not discovered for 18 days.[66]

Two days after the attack on Sderot there were still many bodies in the street, along with wrecked cars and bloodstains. Sky News journalist Stuart Ramsay "caught sight of a hospital gurney somewhat haphazardly abandoned next to 2 cars. I decided to take a look and saw the gurney and 2 stretchers on the floor were covered in blood. The 2 cars were riddled with bullets, their interiors splattered with blood. In one vehicle I saw 2 children's car seats, 1 for a baby, and another that looked like it belonged to a toddler."[67]

II. Netivot

Netivot ("Paths") is a city in the western Negev, located 7 miles east of the Gaza border.[68] At the last conducted census in 2022, the population of Netivot was 46,374.[69] It sits at the junction of 2 strategically vital highways, Highway 34 which connects to Sderot, and Route 25 (*Kibbutz* Saad-Be'er Sheba). Founded in 1956, Netivot began its existence as an immigrant and refugee absorption camp, most of whose residents were Jewish refugees from Morocco and Tunisia. In the 1990s, its predominantly north African communities were joined by waves of immigrants from Russia and Ethiopia.

Netivot is quite an impoverished city, with an average wage 30% below the national average, and its economy has experienced rocket attacks from Gaza for many years.[70] About a quarter of its citizens come from the orthodox and ultra-orthodox Jewish "Haredi" communities.[71] On 7 October 2023, 3 civilians were killed by rocket fire.

On the morning of 7 October, Netivot was hit by rocket fire from Gaza while 3 squads of Hamas gunmen drove towards it from Gaza. The squads of gunmen were intercepted before they could enter the city proper. Three citizens, all from the same family, were killed by the rocket fire.

The first rockets landed in Netivot moments after Red Alert sirens sounded at 06:30. At 06:45, civilians with gunshot wounds began arriving in the city. Some had been shot during the Hamas raid in nearby Sderot, others on adjacent highways. At 07:10, the municipal authorities announced a terrorist incursion in the area.[72]

The Netivot police station commander, Yuri Mozovovsky, was driving to work from his home in *Kibbutz* Or HaNer when he heard the sound of gunfire coming from Sderot.[73] At the same time he received

an order to activate the Israel Police's Gaza Periphery Contingency Plan. Mozovovsky therefore ordered checkpoints to be set up at key road junctions around the city, including the main "Fork" junction connecting Route 25 to Highway 34.[74] He also requested that his opposite number in the larger city of Be'er Sheba bring rifles and ammunition to this junction.[75]

The Netivot police, together with all 30 members of the town's OFEK Municipal Security Unit (a uniformed but usually unarmed civilian body responsible for enforcing parking, noise, and other local regulations) set up checkpoints at all the entrances to the city. At the same time a squad car was sent to *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza.

A Hamas squad that had already taken part in the attack on *Kibbutz* Be'eri set out on the highway to Netivot around 07:30. Footage taken from the dashboard camera in the vehicle captured the squad singing "our mission is Netivot. Soon you will see wonders" and then the first shots of the police ambush.[76]

By 08:20 there was a force of 18 police officers and 3 security guards at the Fork junction. Soon afterwards, police received information about a squad of 5 attackers who had headed towards Netivot from the city Sderot along Highway 34. They had hijacked a private security guard's Peugeot car in the Yakhini area, shooting its driver and pushing him out of the vehicle, before taking it on the highway. CCTV cameras captured it speeding southwards towards the city on Route 34 with its boot open.[77] As the Peugeot reached the roadblock at the Fork junction, the gunmen inside exchanged fire with police. The vehicle swerved onto Route 25 where it was intercepted by a police motorcyclist and a pair of municipal security officers in a chase and engagement captured on police bodycamera.[78] All 5 infiltrators were killed.

Survivors from the Nova Festival attack began to arrive in Netivot around 08:50. Police, still unaware of the killings there, suspected that the first white vanload of escapees that sped into the city might be terrorists. At 10:30, at the Sa'ad intersection a vehicle carrying a third group of infiltrators was intercepted by police, with all 5 terrorists neutralised.

Rocket attacks on Netivot from Gaza continued throughout the day of 7 October and in the following days.[79] Most were intercepted by the Iron Dome system or fell in an open area, but 9 rockets struck the city. One of the 9 landed on the Fahimi home at 11:30, where it ignited a butane canister on the family's balcony. The resulting explosion killed 12-year-old Refael Meir Maskalchi, his grandfather Refael Fahimi, 63, and his father Netanel Maskalchi, 36.[80] They were part of the city's ultra-orthodox community and had come together to celebrate *Simchat Torah*.

On the evening of 7 October, the city of Netivot temporarily housed families who had been evacuated from *Kibbutz* Be'eri and *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza and provided first aid and basic necessities to families before they were moved to hotels the following day.[81]

III. Ofakim

The city of Ofakim ("Horizons") is 13 miles from the Gaza border, about half-way between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. It sits on the main highway that runs all the way from Sderot to Be'er Sheba, and was the furthest point reached by Hamas invasion forces on 7 October.

The town of Ofakim was founded in 1955. Most of its first residents were immigrants from Morocco and Tunisia.[82] They were joined by members of India's Jewish community and then Jewish refugees from Egypt, Ethiopia, and the former Soviet Union.[83] The latter and their descendants make up a third of the population. Ofakim's diverse communities also includes a number of Gazan families who worked with the Israeli authorities and were resettled in Israel after the unilateral disengagement from Gaza in 2005.[84]

For years Ofakim was one of Israel's poorer cities, struggling to transition after the decline of its textile manufacturing sector. At the turn of the century it had the highest unemployment rate in the country at 15%.[85] Since the unilateral disengagement from Gaza in 2005 it has frequently been a target of rocket bombardments from Gaza. Rocket strikes and casualties became less frequent after the deployment of the Iron Dome interception system.[86] As of the most recent census conducted in 2022, the city had a population of 35,506.[87] On 7 October 2023, 27 civilians and 6 first responders were killed.

The Hamas attack on 7 October focused on the western side of the city, specifically targeting an older neighbourhood. Most of the initial killings and the fighting that ensued took place within a 0.5 square mile on the city's west side. There were 15 terrorists in total who arrived on 2 white pickup trucks. A total of 33 people were killed, of which 6 were police officers.[88] Several of the attackers wore military uniforms, including uniforms similar to those of IDF troops. All wore military combat vests or body armour. They were

armed with assault rifles, RPGs, rocket launchers and hand grenades.[89]

Ofakim is home to a single large police station, whose officers have responsibility for all of the western Negev region from *Kibbutz* Be'eri in the north to Bnei Netzarim in the south. It was the Ofakim station that provided police for the Nova Music Festival. When the Hamas infiltrators reached Ofakim shortly after 07:00 on 7 October, the commander of the Ofakim police station, Deputy Superintendent Nivi Ohana, was on her way from the Nova site (which had been not yet been attacked) having heard reports of shooting at the Urim junction.[90]

The attackers drove to Ofakim from the breached Gaza border fence in a pair of white pickup trucks, along routes 234 and 241, to reach the city. It took less than 20 minutes to arrive at Ofakim from the Gaza border. At 07:02, CCTV cameras recorded the 2 trucks entering the city along the western Sayeret Shaked Street. As they drove down the street, the gunmen in the trucks opened fire at people on both sides. They killed Binyamin Rachamim, 52, who was walking down the left side of the street, and then paramedic Aharon Haimov, 25, who was driving his ambulance to respond to the attacks. Haimov's ambulance was one of at least 3 that were attacked. [91] The next person killed was Edna Malkamo, 45, a rehabilitation therapist, shot in her car, as she returned from work.

At 07:04, the raiders' trucks turned onto Beit Vegan Street and stopped after two hundred metres. The Hamas squad dismounted from the vehicles. Ofakim resident Avihai Avilahan caught sight of them from his window: "I saw the terrorists unloading 100 meters from the house. They had a rocket-propelled grenade launcher and seemed to know where they were going."[92] The 15 gunmen entered the Mishor HaGefen neighbourhood, an older area of low-rise housing blocks. Due to its relative age and because of its distance from the Gaza Strip, it does not qualify for government funding. So, most of the area's buildings do not have *mamad* rocket shelters. During rocket attacks residents are expected to go outside to external public shelters or to shelter in stairwells. Rocket sirens had been sounding in the city since 06:32. Residents later recalled that when the attackers entered the city, they paused, seemingly waiting for the sirens to bring people outside to the bomb shelters.[93] Resident Avihai Avilahan testified that he believed that the Hamas terrorists purposefully targeted the Mishor HaGegen neighbourhood for the very reason that "people have to go to communal shelters" and that Hamas "shot them on the way to the shelters."[94]

Resident Shuki Yosef, 63, who had gone into one of the neighbourhood's small public bomb shelters recalled that he "heard explosions. The kids said maybe it was fireworks." The people in the shelter heard more explosions, then according to Yosef, "We heard more explosions and they banged on the door and yelled 'Jew, Jew, open the door' in Arabic."[95] Yosef held the shelter door closed by jamming a broken bicycle against the door handle.

In Mishor HaGefen, when the Hamas attackers entered the courtyard of one of the residential compounds, many residents were outside, having returned from external rocket shelters. Most of the residents' doors were unlocked to enable easy access to shelters and because it was also a Sabbath morning, and many of the residents who were religious, or Orthodox Jews, had left their doors unlocked as they walked to the synagogue.

In 3 minutes the attackers shot and killed residents in quick succession. Some were outside, others in doorways, stairwells, or looking out of apartment windows. The first to be killed, Elizaveta Kostzin, 78, was shot in her doorway, while Emma Polyakov, 88, also a Soviet refugee, was shot just outside the building, as she returned home from a rocket shelter.[96] The Hamas operatives shot and killed Sergey and Victoria Gredeskul, physicists from Ukraine, both 81, through the windows of their apartment. Yiftach and Maria Yakhangilov, 66 and 61, were shot dead in the stairwell of their building. Yuri Yadgarov, 78, and Rosa Yadgarov, 80, immigrants from Uzbekistan, were shot dead as they ran with their son to a shelter.[97] Zoya Zekmov, 45, was also hit as she ran to a shelter. Her brother, Andrei Zemkov ran out to help her and was shot dead; she died from her wounds a few hours later.[98]

Gil Levi, a police detective who lived nearby, heard the shots and came out onto the street carrying his service pistol. After a short firefight with the gunmen, Levi was wounded and retreated to cover. Supermarket manager, Avi Zakuto, 53, a trained paramedic, rushed out into the street on hearing gunshots and was immediately shot dead. The same happened to truck driver Reuven Weisman, 57, who told his children to hide in the bomb shelter in their backyard and then went out into the street armed with a metal rod.

The attackers then split into 3 groups. One team of 4 stayed in the same area. A second team of 8 gunmen walked to Pri Megadim Street on the eastern edge of the neighbourhood, firing as they moved. A third group of 3 gunmen went north on Goren Street to Tamar Street.

Israel Chana, 30, a private security guard, having heard gunshots, ran outside with a pistol, wearing only flip flops. He saw that neighbours were trying to get into a locked public rocket shelter. He was able to break the lock and then continued down the street. About 400 metres from his house, he confronted some of the terrorists. He was shot and killed just before 07:15.[99]

At that point a number of armed residents, off-duty police officers, off-duty soldiers, and retired police officers who had heard gunshots, began to converge on the area individually and in small groups. Most were armed only with pistols. Near the housing compound, 3 local residents Yitzhak Balti, Avi Buzaglo, and off-duty soldier Itamar Hadad, ran to towards the sound of gunfire. Neighbours' phone footage captured them running amid the sound of automatic weaponry.[100] The 3 men confronted the attackers, killing 2 of them. In the resulting firefight, Buzaglo, 26, an off-duty detective from the Rahat police station, was shot dead and the other 2 wounded. Both wounded men ran from the scene. Balti, 53, was shot dead soon afterwards. Hadad collapsed with multiple gunshot wounds to his stomach, leg and thigh but was evacuated at 08:30 by his mother Tali Hadad, 49. Tali, schoolteacher, had chased after her son to the scene of the fighting and rescued 12 people to the city's Magen David Adom ambulance station.

His mother, schoolteacher Tali Hadad, 49, had chased after her son into the street when he left the house with his gun. She saw him lying on the ground, got her car, loaded him into it and drove him through the gunfire "at 120 kilometres per hour" to the ambulance station at the edge of the city. Hadad then drove back to the scene of the fighting and picked up more wounded people. "People were yelling from windows, begging for help, but there were no ambulances coming, no one to save them." She repeated the journey 3 times, rescuing 12 in total, including her son.[101]

Rabbi Shahar Butzhak, a former member of the *Moshav* Mivtahim security squad, joined with off-duty soldier Nehorai Saeed, 21, and a third armed civilian. Rabbi Butzhak saw an armed man dressed in a green military uniform. The gunman opened fire, killing Saeed and shooting the Rabbi in the leg, who testified that the terrorist was wearing a fake IDF uniform.[102] He was later rescued by Police Officer Itamar Alus.[103]

Many of the firefights and shootings were captured by CCTV, residents' mobile phones, and by the attackers' body-cameras, which were recovered after the fighting.[104] No on-duty police personnel arrived in the area during these first killings. An officer explained that "It took 25 minutes for the first Ofakim police to arrive because they were on their way to Nova, and were then called back to Ofakim."[105]

At 07:20, the trio of gunmen killed 2 armed civilians, and then linked up again with the 8-man team who had been operating in the eastern side of the neighbourhood and walked to Tamar Street. There they split again, one group of 3 attacked homes along the street, a group of 5 went into the Edri house where they took the owners hostage. The gunmen on Tamar Street approached the home of the Bilia family. CCTV cameras captured 3 Hamas operatives jumping a fence into the side yard of the Bilia house, all were wearing body armour, one was in a black uniform.[106]

Inside the house there were 11 people: 5 adults and 6 children, including a 1-month-old baby. When the rocket alerts sounded, they had sheltered under the stairs of their house and then come out during a lull in the alarms. Hearing gunfire from the street the family went upstairs to a second story room. From the window Michal Bilia and her husband saw 3 men in military uniforms shoot a man in a police uniform.[107]

The man in police uniform was Sgt Maj Roni Abouharon, 39, who lived nearby and had come out of his house after hearing gunfire and approached the 3 gunmen believing them to be IDF soldiers. After killing Abouharon, the 3 gunmen came to the Bilias' front door. "We told our kids to keep silent and then we heard [people] trying to get into the house. ... They tried to get in through the door, but we had locked it before going upstairs." Michal and her family realised the attackers were close and they "needed to escape."[108]

As the Hamas gunmen entered the house on the ground floor, Ariel Bilia, 28, armed himself with an iron bar and led the family to a window looking out onto the next-door roof and told them to get out. He was the last member of the family to climb through the window. As he was half-way through the window he was shot in the head by one of the attackers inside the house and fell out. His death was caught on CCTV.[109] The 8 family members who had already jumped out then hid behind solar panels on the flat roof of an adjoining house, where they remained for nearly 3 hours before they were rescued by the police.[110]

The 3 gunmen left the Bilia house and climbed over a wall into the next-door property. There they were unable to break into the house in which the Elbaz family were hiding. The 3 gunmen shot dead a civilian walking in the street outside and then went down a side return, and at around 07:45 they barricaded themselves in

CCTV Footage from the Elbaz home in Ofakim showing terrorists in their home. Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

small outhouse in a Elbaz backyard.[111] One of the Elbaz family called the police, who arrived at the house soon afterwards with a response team made up of officers and armed civilian volunteers. At 09:30, the latter were able to evacuate the Elbaz family, although they came under rifle and grenade attack while doing so after one of the terrorists who had requested to surrender emerged with a Leo missile.[112]

Four police officers advanced down the side return in an attempt to root out the infiltrators barricaded in the shed-like unit, firing as they moved. One of the infiltrators was killed, but the others threw hand grenades that forced the officers to retreat and take cover.[113] One of the 2 remaining gunmen came out of the unit and climbed onto the roof. There, he shot dead Yonatan Elazari, an off-duty soldier who had joined the improvised response team.[114] The remaining intruder was besieged by police personnel until 10:45 when he was killed in a firefight. By then the Bilia family had been evacuated to safety.

The shock and confusion caused by the 3 groups of attackers in the west side of Ofakim during the first hour of the attack was reflected in radio messages from police officers who rushed to the scene: "Take note, they're in IDF uniforms. I repeat, they are in IDF uniforms, but with other vests and Kalashnikovs. Move, move, move!" "We need an armoured vehicle. Everyone here only has pistols, and I barely have any magazines. Hurry, hurry, hurry!"[115]

Around 7:30, the Ofakim police chief Nivi Ohana arrived in the city and went immediately to the scenes of fighting. "I recognized my police officers, some of them wearing flip-flops or in their underwear, and next to them were civilians armed with knives who joined them - they just jumped out of the house."[116] A civilian security guard, Yahel Sonakh, killed 2 of the terrorists.

Ohana and other police officers went to the corner of Tamar and Hita streets, the scene of intense fighting, and also the location of the Edri house, where the remaining Hamas attackers had barricaded themselves inside and taken an elderly couple hostage. When Ofakim's rocket alarms sounded at 06:30, David Edri, 65, a retired truck driver and Rachel Edri, 65, who runs the canteen at a nearby army base, had gone to an outside shelter. Upon returning to their home, 5 terrorists entered and barricaded the couple on the second floor. Rachel Edri later testified that the Hamas terrorists "entered my house through the window. They started shouting at us 'martyrs, martyrs, Tanzim." Although she thought of trying to escape, she "knew they could shoot me in the back. We decided to do what they say."[117]

The intruders confiscated and broke the Edris' mobile phones. They forced them upstairs, and "they opened cupboards, threw all the things out of them." They found the Edri's sons' police uniforms and hats, and shouted "Where are your children?" One was a police officer in Ofakim, but they told the attackers they were in America. The first police who arrived on the street corner where the Edri house stands were unaware that there were Hamas operatives inside the house or that they were holding hostages. At 07:30, 2 officers from the bomb disposal unit who had just come off duty shortly, before but joined the search for intruders, walked past the Edri house. They were hit fire by gunfire from the second storey windows. One, Yigal Illuz, 56, was killed.

As other officers arrived and tried to recover Illuz' body, they were attacked with gunfire and grenades. Ofakim police chief Nivi Ohana was wounded. Two officers took shelter in a roadside rocket bunker down the street. A gunman from another team saw them and threw in grenades (one of which the officers kicked back outside) before being shot.

At 07:50 a team of police, still unaware that there were hostages in the building, tried to enter the Edri house. One officer was shot and wounded. At 08:30,

during a second attempt to storm the house, the police heard David Edri cry out and realized that there were hostages on the second floor. They stopped the assault and called for hostage negotiation and hostage rescue teams. Rachel's son Evyatar, a police officer, provided the teams with a blueprint sketch of the house in order to aid the rescue operation but was not allowed to participate due to his personal connection.[118] By 09:00 Yamam and YAMAS border police officers had arrived in Ofakim to aid in the Edri hostage situation.

After about 4 hours, Rachel Edri offered her captors tea, coffee, and cookies. This was shortly followed by another attempt to rescue the family, during which one of the intruders was killed and another wounded. To calm the rest, Rachel Edri bandaged the latter's hand.[119] IDF troops arrived in the city around 14.00.[120] By that time, 7 hours after the attack had begun, all the Hamas operatives had been killed other than the 5 who were holding the Edri family hostage in their house. At 02:30 on 8 October, operators from the YAMAM anti-terrorist unit of the Border Police stormed the second floor of the Edri house, killing all 4 gunmen; both hostages survived unharmed. The Edri couple were held hostage for nearly 20 hours.[121]

After the intruders were all killed, they were found to be carrying detailed plans of the city, along with multiday supplies of food and weaponry. Almog Cohen, a local parliament member who took part in the fighting, testified that one map "[marked] places with crowds, synagogues and kindergartens."[122] The 2 pickup trucks used by the intruders were found to be carrying "a cache of grenades, anti-tank rockets, plastic explosives and land mines" suggestive of preparations.[123] Police Officer Itamar Alus also testified that he found bags of equipment containing pliers and screwdrivers which would have been used to break into houses.[124]

In the wake of the attack, Shin Bet reports and the local division commander of the IDF concluded that Hamas had planned to reinforce the 15-man squad that attacked Ofakim with at least 3 more teams of operatives who had first gone to the Re'im area and the Nova Music Festival. It is unclear the exact reason why the group did not receive the reinforcements, but a senior police officer did conclude it is possible that as the Nova targets were both abundant and easy, "Ofakim was saved by Nova." According to police, the attackers also arrived as police shifts were changing at 07:00, so there were more officers available to take part in the city's defence.[125]

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Chapter 5.6 | Psyduck Festival

The Psyduck Festival was an unofficial small trance music rave that took place in a "wadi" river valley between *Kibbutz* Nir Oz and *Kibbutz* Nirim. Originally intended to be held in a different location, organiser Moshe Amzlag toured the area with attendee Yuval Rabia a few days prior to the event and decided to change to the small forestry area near the border. The festival was the second music festival in the area, alongside the much larger Nova Festival, which was directly attacked by the perpetrators who killed hundreds of people.

Accessible only via dirt roads connected to the small rural roads 2428 and 2410 off Route 232, the festival was situated just 1.5 miles from the Gaza border. While nobody died at the location of this festival, 16 civilians were killed along the surrounding Routes after leaving the festival grounds. These Routes were deadly for most people who drove on them on 7 October as Hamas and other attackers held intersections and junctions.[1]

The festival began on the Friday evening at midnight and was intended to run as a 36-hour non-stop trance festival through to noon on Sunday 8 October.[2] The Psyduck Party had originated as an underground gathering that had been held every 2 months for the previous 5 years, with the location of the gathering only released shortly before the event began. Typically any event held near a border in Israel requires government approval attained through permits, but the Psyduck organisers never applied for permits.[3] Unlike the much larger Nova Festival it was held without police authorisation and not disclosed to the authorities. When the attacks began, security services did not know to send responding units or even where such units would need to be sent.

Organised via a private WhatsApp group, Psyduck did not sell tickets but instead was organised as a "hat party" - where attendees contributed whatever they wanted - with proceeds covering expenses such as music amplifiers and generators.[4] Due to the lack of official records relating to the party, the precise number of those who attended the gathering is unknown. It is estimated at 100 people.

At 06:30 the rocket barrage began across the entire envelope region, triggering Red Alert sirens and phone notifications. According to the testimony of Bell Kosovsky (sister of victim Zalta Kosovsky), the Psyduck attendees did not hear the initial rockets as the music was too loud.[5] However, DJ Tom Amar, who was scheduled to start his set at the time of the rocket barrage, stated that "We quickly realised that it was not a normal barrage. We were two kilometres from Gaza, everyone was running in a different direction."[6] By 07:00 approximately three-quarters of the attendees had left in their cars in an attempt to get to a road where they would have a greater chance of seeking shelter in a *migunit* (roadside shelter). Organiser Moshe Amzlag testified that "At first, we had no possibility to escape, because the rockets exploded around us in a radius of 10-15 meters, so we hid. At some point I realised we had to run. I told my friend 'let's fly from here', we got into the car and drove with a rain of bombs all around us."[7] He testified that as he drove past *Kibbutz* Nir Oz, which had been infiltrated shortly after 06:30, terrorists fired on his car. After he passed through the Ma'on junction, on Route 232, he realised that he was driving between 2 squads of terrorists that would go on to attack the city of Ofakim.

A small group of 25 attendees had initially stayed at the party grounds to pack up the music equipment when they received calls from those who had left saying that terrorists were firing at them and throwing grenades along the roads. Tom Atar, another organiser for the event, testified that those who remained at the site split into 3 groups and hid across the ravine as terrorists swarmed the surrounding fields, stating that they "heard shouts in Arabic above us."[8] While terrorists never attacked the party site, there would have been a significant presence in the surrounding area due to the attacks on the neighbouring *Kibbutz*im. Those who remained in hiding at the site stayed buried in nearby ditches and creeks from approximately 07:30 to 17:00 until IDF forces arrived at the site.[9]

Those who left the festival area were attacked almost immediately, especially those who went south towards Nir Oz. Yuval and Noam Rabia, 33 and 30, and Yuval's fiancé Noa Zafraani, 27, were killed in a shelter near Nir Oz alongside Zlata Kosovsky, 28, and her boyfriend

Itay Houston Hadar, 28.[10] Itai Hadar's aunt testified that his body had been boobytrapped with grenades and that initially it was a struggle to identify him, with his body not confirmed as found until 11 October.[11]

Shachar Gal Kadman, a food scientist at the Tara Dairy company, was also estimated to have been killed in the Route vicinity next to Nir Oz. Whilst fleeing he was on the phone to his family, when his mother heard Arabic voices and shouts of "get out of the vehicle, get out of the vehicle now. You come with us" before the phoneline cut off.[12] Kadman's body was recovered on 13 October.[13]

Daniel Asher Cohen, a DJ who had performed at Psyduck, also left with a friend almost immediately after the rocket barrage began. He was killed after terrorists shot his car along Route 232, with a bullet hitting him in the chest. His friend took him out the car but was forced to run away, leaving Daniel's body, after a "squad of terrorists arrived in their direction."[14]

Dor Hanan Shafir, whose mother is a British citizen, and Dor's fiancé Savyon Kipper last contacted their friends at 07:03 to say that they had driven for 2 minutes and found a shelter.[15] No further contact was had with either Dor or Savyon and their bodies were not recovered for several days. During Savyon's funeral on 10 October, funeral mourners were notified that Dor's body had formally been found and identified.[16]

Moti Elkabatz, 40, left the party site and headed north, with his nephew Matan Rozenberg, 17, and his brother-in-law Noi Maodi, 29. Friends and family received a message from them at 07:00 stating that they were hiding in a shelter near Nirim and a video showing the rockets.[17] The bodies of Motti and Noi, both residents of *Moshav* Yated which was also attacked on 7 October, were not recovered until 11 October, while Matan's body was not identified until 16 October.[18]

Gilad Ben-Yehuda, a video and animation editor, and his friend Dan Zomer, a psychology student, had headed north and took shelter in the Be'eri roadside bomb shelter. Zomer chose to leave the shelter as he felt unsafe. His last contact with his family was shortly after 12:30 in a call to his mother where he said, "They're killing me, mom they're killing me."[19] Gilad had already been killed by this point after terrorists threw grenades and fired into the Be'eri roadside shelter, which was also filled with escapees from the Nova festival. His body was identified on 14 October.[20]

Yuval Ben-Yehuda, 26, and Dudi Sharon, 47, were also killed fleeing along the Routes but the exact location of their deaths is unconfirmed. Some reports have placed an approximate location of their deaths as near the Gamma Junction next to *Kibbutz* Re'im.[21] Dudi, a father of 2 and animal rights activist, was initially considered missing and his body was not identified for 2 weeks.[22]

Chapter 5.6 | References

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Chapter 5.7 | Nova Festival

The Nova Festival – sometimes called Supernova - was an 18-hour dance music "rave" held at a desert campground near *Kibbutz* Re'im in the centre of the Gaza Envelope region. A popular venue for large musical events, the 15-acre site with its large parking lots is located 3 miles from the Gaza fence, on the West side of Route 232, the main Route that runs from Kerem-Shalom at the Egyptian border northwards to the city of Ashkelon. Surrounded by fields and orchards, the campground is just 0.6 miles north of *Kibbutz* Re'im and 1.2 miles southwest of *Kibbutz* Be'eri. The Re'im army base, headquarters of the IDF's Gaza Division is just over 3 miles away.

The Festival was scheduled to coincide with the end of the week-long *Sukkot* holiday. Between 3,000 and 4,000 people, most of them under 30, were at this event when it was attacked just after dawn on 7 October 2023. Of all the locations targeted in the Hamas-led attack, the Nova Festival was the deadliest with 375 killed, of which 357 were civilians, 16 were first responders (mostly police), and two were soldiers from the 77th Armoured Brigade, killed after arriving in a lone tank to the festival site, early in the attack. A further 43 people were taken hostage - 34 were taken alive and 9 were dead bodies. Accordingly, of the total people killed on 7 October, including bodies that were taken hostage, a third of the deaths were from the Nova Festival.[1] Bodies were found everywhere on the site: in the bar, in the medical tent, among the tents in the thinly-wooded camping area, in the dancing space, in the parking lots, in the toilets, and in the rubbish skip containers. Several hundred people were severely wounded. A number of attendees were raped or subjected to severe sexual abuse during the 4 and a half hours that Hamas and then other groups and individuals from Gaza had control of the site.

The death toll made the attack on the Nova rave "the deadliest concert attack in history."[2] It inflicted more than double the deaths of the Bataclan theatre massacre in Paris in 2015 and more than 10 times the casualties inflicted by the Manchester Arena Bombing of 2017. The exact number of attackers who came to the festival site is unknown. Some police sources have estimated 350 Hamas-led gunmen; 170 terrorist bodies were found in the area.[3] The assault was also one of the most documented – in particular the most filmed – terror attacks and incidents of mass killing of modern times. Hundreds of the mostly young people at Nova recorded what was happening to them and others on their mobile phones.[4] There is also abundant footage taken by the attackers on their GoPro weapon-cameras and body-cameras. Some was broadcast in real time on pro-Hamas media and social media; some was recovered from attackers' bodies or later found, on hard drives in Gaza.[5]

Many of the Nova victims – estimates of 50% to 60% – did not die at the festival site itself, but were killed as they fled the attack. Many were killed on the road as their cars were ambushed with automatic weapons fire and rocket-propelled grenades or were killed by grenades thrown into the roadside rocket shelters where they had sought safety. Before attacking the festival, Hamas raiders had blocked roads leading to the site, and set up a series of ambush positions on Route 232, the main Route in the area. Others were shot in fields, wooded areas or stretches of desert as they fled the party site on foot. Other Nova attendees were killed in *Kibbutz*im and army bases to which they had gone to find safety. Almost all the people killed in the *Migunit* (open door, concrete rocket shelters) along the side of Route 232 were escapees from Nova.

Of the total Nova victims killed, at least 30 had foreign nationality. Among them was Shani Louk, 22, a German-Israeli women whose half-naked body, with one leg at an unnatural angle, on the back of a pickup, was photographed driving into Gaza amid cheering crowds. This image became synonymous with the 7 October attack. It was taken by an Associated Press (AP) photographer who was embedded with the Hamas invaders and won the AP Team Picture Story of the Year.[6]

Three of the Nova dead were British citizens: Jake Marlowe, police officer Sgt. Maj. Dvora "Debbie" Abraham, and Aner Shapira. Marlowe, 26, was a musician working security at the site, Abraham, 40, was a police officer on duty.[7] Both were shot dead at the festival grounds. Shapira, 22, was able to escape from the Nova site but was then killed inside a roadside rocket shelter at Re'im. Video footage taken from inside the shelter shows Shapira catching grenades that Hamas gunmen threw into the shelter and throwing them back out, until the eighth grenade killed him.[8]

The Nova dead also included Arab Israelis and Bedouin Israelis. Paramedic Awad Darawshe, 23, from Iksal near

Nazareth, insisted on remaining at the festival after the order came from his management for his team to leave. The only paramedic left after the other 5 departed, he was shot dead by Hamas as he treated wounded attendees in the first aid tent.[9] Osama Abu Asa, 36, was an unarmed security guard at the festival who was killed after fleeing the festival site. He took refuge at a rocket shelter near Re'im, where Hamas operatives beat and shot him. His death was captured by the dashcam on his car.[10] Both Khaled Elfrahin, 50, from Asara, and Abed al-Rahman Nasara, 57, from Kseifa, were Bedouin men who lived locally and were working as taxi drivers at the festival.[11] Suhaib Razeem, 22, from East Jerusalem, was also at the festival to collect partygoers and bring them home but was kidnapped by Hamas attackers and taken to *Kibbutz* Be'eri to act as a translator. He died in the hostage stand-off at Pessi Cohen's house (See section: *Kibbutz* Be'eri). His kidnapping was filmed by the gunmen.[12]

Although the majority of people at the Nova festival were in their 20s and 30s, the age of those killed in the attack ranged from 16 to 73. The oldest victim was retiree Motti Zoherman, 73, a trance music devotee and spiritual seeker who spent much of his time in India. His body was identified by the large, round 'Go Global' tattoo on his stomach.[13] The youngest victim was Ruth Peretz, 17. The wheelchair-bound teenager, paralysed by cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy, had been brought to the festival by her father Arik Peretz, 58, who frequently took her to trance music events and who would carry her on the dance floor. He was also killed.[14]

FIGURE 17 | MAP OF NOVA FESTIVAL

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The Festival

The Nova Festival was a local production of the Brazilian "psytrance"[15] festival Universo Paralello[16] organised by the Israeli organisation "Nova Tribe", which arranges many electronic dance music festivals in the country. Although Israel has many electronic dance music festivals and a large community devoted to the psytrance lifestyle, the 7 October dance party was the first iteration of the annual Brazilian event to take place in the country. The co-founder of the original Brazilian festival Juarez Petrillo was not only present at Nova but performed as a DJ.[17]

The dead included at least 3 of the Tribe of Nova co-organisers and one of the 16 DJs. The organisers who died there included Daniel Ben-Senyor, 34, a nurse from Los Angeles who had moved to Israel to care for her parents.[18] Two of the festival's senior co-producers, twin brothers Michael and Osher Vaknin, were also killed. Osher Vaknin's wife Sunny went down to the site 2 days after the attack when he was still deemed missing. They found his "whole car was covered in blood. All the front windows were shattered. Full of bullet holes." Osher Vaknin's body had in fact been found though not yet identified; that of his brother was found a week later.[19]

The trance music scene in Israel is popular, with a culture of Yoga, Buddhism and other eastern traditions embraced by the large numbers of young Israelis who travel in India, Nepal and Thailand after their compulsory military service. One of the foreign DJs associated with the Nova Festival described the Nova ethos as "based on a philosophy of life, … "It's Woodstock with electronic music. It's that kind of mentality: a hippie culture, but the music is different. These are the sweetest people. They would never harm anybody."[20]

The Nova Festival was one of the largest and most elaborate of its kind to be held in Israel. It was effectively a continuation of another, smaller dance event, the "Unity" party that had begun at the same site on Thursday evening. It was to last from 22:00 Friday Evening until 17:00 Saturday afternoon, with music playing continuously. Some of the Nova victims were people who had not yet arrived at the festival but were heading to it on Saturday morning when they were killed on the Route (see section on Route 232).

The campground on which the festival was held is a four-sided flat area on the west side of Route 232. On the festival site, there were 2 main stages with dancing areas in front of them. There was also a circular bar, a first-aid tent, a "chill-out area" under brightly-coloured tarpaulins, and a number of camping zones in wooded areas adjacent to the central dancing space. There were 2

The Nova Festival at its height.
Source: Ido Darby for KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

parking lots. The main parking area was not near the main entrance but at the back of the site, about 0.6 miles west of the main Route. The smaller parking area near the main gate was reserved for the organisers, performers, police, and paramedics.[21]

According to police, there were about 3,500 people on the festival site at dawn on 7 October. A team of police officers, led by the Sderot police chief, Ch. Supt. Nivi Ochana, had been assigned to work at the festival as required by law. At 06:30 when the attack began there were 41 officers at the site, some of whom were about to go off duty at the 07:00 shift change, some of whom had just arrived. Four officers, including Ch. Supt. Nivi Ochana left the site around 06:45 in response to reports of shootings on the Route near Ofakim. All the police at the site were armed only with sidearms and small amount of ammunition. The western Negev region in which the Nova festival site is located comes under the Army's security responsibility rather than that of the police.[22] The Gaza Division's Northern Brigade had approved the festival, but there are reports that army units who were on duty that morning did not know about the party.[23]

The Rocket Attack

For many of the Nova attendees the high point of the all-night party was sunrise. Many testimonies by attendees recall taking drugs timed to kick in at dawn. It was less than half an hour after sunrise, at 06:29, that the first rockets came in sight. Many partygoers were filming themselves and others on their phones. Rockets are visible in their footage even before the person holding the camera realised they were there. The loud music masks the rockets' sound.

No automated rocket alarms went off when the first barrages of rockets appeared in the sky. Most of the hundreds of rockets visible from the site were heading

over the festival grounds to targets elsewhere in the Gaza Envelope and other parts of Israel. It was an unprecedently heavy barrage. Attendee Eitan Halley said of it "it was the most rockets I had ever seen in my life. I was on the border of Gaza in other wars, so I've seen rockets going over my head, but I've never seen it at this volume."[24]

Footage taken by organisers and attendees shows the moment that organisers reacted to the rocket barrage. At 06:29, the Israeli DJ Yarin Ilovich was on stage performing when a producer came and told him to shut down the music as it was a "code red." The music was turned off and the producer and Aviv Eliyahu, the event's security director shouted "*Tseva Adom*, *Tseva Adom*" and "everyone lay on the floor, hands on your head."[25] That is the standard practice in Israel if there are no rocket shelters nearby. The police then shut down the event and told the 3000-4000 attendees to disperse and go home.

Elizabeth Chinsom Anukwu had taken LSD half an hour before "a bunch of rockets just filled the entire sky." She recalled asking her friends if they should leave but they questioned how they were going to drive as they were on drugs. They decided to wait in the parking lot. When there were only about 30 cars left, they "started to hear like gunshots…. Everyone in the car is super high. We turn our heads and there are these jeeps driving towards us. We start running."[26]

The majority of those who left by car in the first minutes after the order to disperse drove north on Route 232 towards Sderot and central Israel. Some of those who drove south on Route 232 encountered ambushes at either the Re'im Junction or the Gamma Junction. It was civilians fleeing back from those ambush sites who first warned police at the festival site that there were terrorists in the area.[27]

Many of the attendees who left the Nova site soon after the first rocket attack reacted to the ongoing barrages by getting out of their cars and taking refuge in one of the *Migunit* that line Israel's Routes and are often located at bus-stops. Some were directed to do so by police after the first reports of gunfire. Scores of Nova escapees packed into these shelters on Route 232 between Re'im and Sderot. (see Shelter Massacres below).

In the half hour after the music was turned off and the alarm given at the festival site, some of the revellers found it hard to understand what was happening. In footage collected by the makers of the film "#Nova", one partygoer runs over to a friend sleeping in a car and shouts "Wake up bro! I'm not tripping, there are rockets from Gaza. Wake up!" Another exclaims "what a freaking trip and laughs."[28] The drugs taken by many of the attendees often made them more vulnerable to the attackers. Some were too confused to flee. Elad Hakim recalled, "I'm totally out of it and I'm the one driving. I'm not even sure where the pedal is. I try to understand the situation. I'm slapping myself…I never thought I'd see hell. The whole road was covered in bodies. So many bodies."[29]

Shortly after 06:30 British-Israeli Jake Marlowe was on a quad bike, as part of his security role, telling the festival goers to leave as soon as possible. He sent a WhatsApp voice note to a friend in the UK: "We are rounding up the people from the party now, we are on an ATV and we are telling everyone to get the fuck outta there."[30] He was not heard from again. Initially Marlowe was believed to be among the hostages abducted to Gaza. However, a body found 4 days after the attack turned out to be his. Despite decomposition, his father was able to identify his corpse by the tattoos on his calves. Marlowe had been shot 9 times.[31]

After the police shut down the event, DJ Yaron Ilovich, helped some German friends get to their car but did not leave himself. He remained at the party site even after those friends telephoned him to say that they were being shot at on the Route. "I thought 'There are many guards here.' I didn't feel unsafe." When the first Hamas-led attackers arrived outside the festival ground around 08:00, Ilovich went to the VIP and organisers' car park but found it in chaos. He and some of his friends joined hundreds of people running into an adjoining field. "They're shooting at us; people get shot and fall down. People get scared and fall down. People are drunk and fall down," he recalled "you can hear the bullets cut above your head." Ilovich and his friends ran across the open fields and reached *Kibbutz* Re'im to the south. There was intense fighting taking place there between a small number of police and the Hamas attackers. The police told him to hide under their vehicle: "I stayed for 4 hours under the car." Eventually, police officers were able to evacuate Ilovic from *Kibbutz* Re'im to the city of Ofakim, further east. The DJ described the journey as "the most apocalyptic thing I have ever seen, it was in the middle of the desert and there was nothing but dead bodies and burned vehicles."[32] Ofakim turned out to be under attack as well.

The Ground Attack

By 08:00, the police working at the festival had already heard from attendees who had tried to drive south on Route 232 that there were armed infiltrators near the

Re'im junction shooting at cars. Two officers from the Nova detail drove to Re'im junction where they came under heavy fire from pickup trucks. After taking cover behind a water pipe by the side of the road one of them, Sergeant Aliona Ostapenko, was killed.[33]

At the festival, police officers learned that the main Route had also come under attack to the north. They therefore set up a barricade with 2 cars and a pair of golf carts on the Route near the northeast corner of the campground. Mobile phone footage shows about 10 police and security guards manning the barricade around 08:00. The police there told attendees leaving the event in their cars not to continue up route 232 but to turn onto a dirt road that went east alongside a ploughed field, in the opposite direction to Gaza.

The initial Hamas attackers were *Nukhba* commandos who arrived by pickup truck between 08:00 and 08:10, having driven along Route 232 from other attack sites. The first three trucks arrived from the direction of Re'im to the south, followed a few minutes later by "5 trucks from Be'eri" to the north one [of which] had a heavy machine gun" mounted on it.[34] They wore full or partial military uniforms with webbing fighting vests and/or body armour, and headbands identifying them as *Nukhba* commandos or members of the Hamas Qassam Brigades.

The attackers at the police barricade at the far northern end of the campground easily outnumbered the 10 defenders and enjoyed the advantage of heavier firepower in the form of assault rifles, machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades.[35] The police officers there quickly ran out of pistol ammunition, and were all killed. Another, smaller, group of police officers, including PMSg Ramo Salman El-Hozayel, attempted to defend the main entrance to the site from attackers who had come up from Re'im. El-Hozayel, a Bedouin officer, had taken the place of a colleague who wanted to take off the *Simchat Torah* holiday. Normally he took 2 15-round magazines with him on duty. In the early hours of 7 October, he took a third magazine, having had a strange feeling.[36] Soon after the ordered evacuation from the Nova site began El-Hozayel saw between 10 to 20 teenagers running towards him yelling "There is terrorist shooting at us. There is one badly wounded."[37] El-Hozayel ran to the road, followed by about 10 other police officers. At 06:56, he made a video for safekeeping saying, "If we die, at least there will be documentation."[38]

The roads quickly became blocked with cars as people who managed to escape from Re'im and from Be'eri, came back. They informed the police officers about "the terrorists that [were] shooting and killing with no

Footage from a dashcam of a car at the Nova Music Festival captured the taking of some of the hostages.
Source: KAN Digital Memorial Archive

mercy and kidnapping." El-Hozayel testified that in the beginning there was one truck of terrorists, and then from another direction came 3 trucks of terrorists. More then came from the woods on foot, surrounding them from 3 directions.[39] As the pickup trucks approached and the attackers in them opened fire, the officers held fire with their pistols as long they could, knowing that the attackers were out of range.[40]

Overwhelmed by automatic weapons fire, some ran back into the festival area behind them; others crossed the Route and joined the partygoers who were fleeing across a large open field. El-Hozayel ran back into the open field into which attendees were fleeing. He recalled that "The terrorists from the woods [were] shooting at me like crazy because [they saw] my uniform. The 2 detectives, they were in civilian clothes so I was the hot target." At one point El-Hozayel stopped running and threw himself to the ground to replace his last magazine. "The terrorists thought they maybe hit me so they left me alone and continued to the area of the party." Then an RPG "hit exactly the spot where we had been defending, a matter of 10 seconds before."[41]

Inside the festival grounds, where there were still thousands of attendees, people could hear heavy gunfire from the barricade on the Route. Police officers told some revellers that they should leave their cars and try to make their way by foot northwards to the city of Netivot. After the police and security guards at the barricade north of the festival area were killed, the terrorists began moving along the road attacking anyone found in the long convoy of cars stuck between the exit from the festival grounds and the turn to the eastern dirt road.[42]

Attendee Yoni Diller recalled that "People were panicking… Suddenly we see this car bumping into another car very slowly. The door opens, and we see a wounded girl. Someone shot her in the leg, and her

whole left knee was disconnected from her body. She couldn't brake. Her knee was shot."[43] Diller and his friend left their car and ran into the open fields along with hundreds of others, and then "hid in the bed of a dried-up river in bushes and trees; bullets were flying on top of our heads."[44]

The girl they had seen on the road was Shani Gabay, 25, a recent law graduate working at the festival. She had just driven back to the festival site from the rocket shelter near *Kibbutz* Alumim, having taken refuge there with other early Nova escapees. Hamas gunmen had thrown grenades into the shelter. She had run out and then been shot twice in the leg but made it to her car.[45] After being given water by Diller, Gabay made it to the police tent at the centre of the festival area. There, her friends Michal Ohana and Li'am Bor tied a tourniquet around her leg.[46] Around 09:00, her brother phoned her to say that their father was on his way to pick her up. Soon afterwards, the policewoman defending the tent saw gunmen approaching and told everyone to run. Gabay could not run, so 4 other young women helped her get to an ambulance parked about 100m away. They hid inside the vehicle. It was already crammed with people. Hamas attackers arrived and saw immediately that there were people hiding in the ambulance. At 09:23, having fired on it with their rifles they fired a thermobaric rocket-propelled grenade into it. Of the 20 people inside, 18 were killed including Gabay.[47]

The intense fire generated by the thermobaric grenade incinerated many of the bodies, preventing easy identification of those killed inside. Authorities initially thought that only six or seven people had been in the ambulance. Gabay was considered missing for the next 47 days until authorities realised that her remains had been mistakenly combined with another girl killed.[48]

Footage from a car dashcam filmed at about the same time shows a bloodied man being taken away at gunpoint. In the background, a wounded partygoer lay beside a nearby car, perhaps playing dead. He lifted his head and was seen by another gunman wearing body armour. This gunman hurried over and shot him in the head. Another mitant appeard, wearing a Hamas green headband.[49] The killing of people in and around their cars in the slow moving or jammed convoy continued for nearly an hour before the terrorists turned westward and entered the actual festival grounds.[50]

The kidnapping of Noa Argamani from the Nova Music Festival. She is on the back of a motorcycle between two men, crying for help and reaching out to her boyfriend (Avinatan Or) as the vehicle carried her away. Source: Hamas footage broadcast on social media.

Attack on the Nova Party site

Within the actual festival grounds, the killing began immediately after the attackers who had come by truck from north and south on Route 232 overcame the 2 groups of police guarding the exits. Hila Fakliro, 26, a fitness instructor who was bartending at the festival, recalled that "It was like a shooting range."[51] By about 08:30 the police officers trying to defend the party area had been overwhelmed by the attackers.

The Hamas attackers then had the entire festival site under their control, which they retained for approximately 4 hours until 12:30.[52] On foot, on motorcycles, and in golf buggies the terrorist force chased and hunted down attendees who were hiding in the trees, bushes, ditches, and dry riverbeds in and around the festival site, and in the wooded area to the west. After 10:00, they were joined by other raiders including civilians from Gaza. The latter arrived in three or four waves, some walking east from Gaza.[53] The timecodes on dashcam videos show Hamas gunmen and the Gazan civilian raiders who followed them, "were still combing the site at midday."[54] The majority of people who had decided to stay and hide at the main festival site were killed.

Hamas terrorists established a command post on the grounds, where they began collecting bodies of those they had massacred and hostages to take to Gaza.[55] A few attendees who had taken drugs such as Ketamine and MDMA apparently tried to embrace their attackers and were quickly killed or dragged away to be kidnapped or raped.[56] Those who had taken heavy doses of hallucinogens such as LSD before the attack and survived the violence are reported to have sustained particularly severe psychiatric damage.[57] It is not yet clear if most of the hostage taking took place during the early part of the takeover of the festival grounds or after the initial corps of attackers from the Hamas Qassam brigades were joined by members of other organisations and civilians from Gaza.

The best-known kidnapping, because a video of it was posted on Hamas Telegram sites during the day which then went viral, was that of Noa Argamani, 26. The half-Chinese student had been hiding with her half-British boyfriend Avinatan Or for some 2 hours. He had been calling friends and family for help, messaging one of them "Tell them there's a gang of 20 men that are finding people who are hiding and lynching them". After 10:00 Avinatan stopped responding to messages. The video shows Argamani on the back of a motorcycle between 2 men, crying for help, and reaching out to her boyfriend as the vehicle carried her away.

Avinatan was also kidnapped. The same attackers' video shows him being led away on foot, his hands tied behind his back. Their captors are all in civilian dress and most are not armed, suggesting that they were part of the large wave of Gaza civilians that came to Nova.[58] On 7 October, videos of Nova attendees being kidnapped taken to Gaza appeared on social media sites by 09:39, some of them still wearing their festival wristbands.[59]

Revellers still at the site when the Hamas attackers arrived tried to hide from them under the stages, behind the bar, in the portaloos, and in 2 large yellow trash containers. All these hiding places in the central part of the site proved dangerous, as did obvious hiding places such as abandoned vehicles: "a van parked in the vicinity of the stage.. was set ablaze, killing those hiding inside."[60] Others ran to hide in nearby ditches and culverts. Some, like Elizabeth Chinsome Anwuku and her friends hid in a nearby wooded area west of the festival ground, closer to Gaza, though the tamarisk trees there offered little cover. More attackers from Gaza came by foot through that area. "We heard people screaming, we saw people falling, we were between booms and gunshots, and we were trapped." In the footage she and others took with her mobile phone, the gunfire is loud and continuous and gets closer.[61] A group of gunmen appeared half a mile away and opened fire on them, so they got up and ran again. They made a circuitous route back to the Route where they were rescued sometime after 13:00.

Several people hid under one of the stages. Video footage filmed by a survivor who was hiding under the stage reveals that at 08:19 the stage area was largely empty, while at 08:26 at least 11 people were hiding there. Eventually some 30-40 people were hiding there. Most escaped by running to an area of bushes where they remained undetected for the 5 hours until rescue arrived.[62] Some of the people who hid under the stage took shelter soon after the rocket attack. One of them was Halely, 21, who only reaslied that terrorists were attacking the site when a man under the stage called out to her to hide. They said "get under the stage, there are terrorists here." Haley recalls, "hiding under the stage there were dozens of people there, all quiet, looking at each other in horror. We're hearing gunshots constantly; they're getting closer and closer. People screaming, begging. People begging, and then bang, silence." The tables that were in front of the stage were suddenly moved and the group were told to run. Haley ran with "bullets whizzing over [her] head," and was able to take cover behind a tank that had come down the main Route.[63]

Eighteen people hid from the attackers by climbing into two high-sided rubbish containers in the middle of the festival grounds. Several of them filmed themselves with their phones. After the attackers saw movement from one of the containers they shot into their sides and threw in grenades. Four out of the 18 survived.[64] One of them was artist Noam Ben David. She and her boyfriend David Newman, 26, had tried to drive out of the festival grounds and then abandoned their car. Running from approaching gunfire they both fell over. They got up and carried on, and when Noam saw the yellow containers, she told David, "I'm not asking you; we're getting into the container." Once inside, they saw there were other people there who'd already been hiding there. Noam described that there was a small opening in the container, through which she could see the stage area. She raised her head for a split second, and "saw a huge number of terrorists there.". At some point, those inside the container heard gunfire and Arabic. Everyone in the container was "calling [their] family and friends on [their] mobile phones, sharing [their] location and begging for help."[65]

Then the attackers threw a grenade into the other container. The people in Noam's container kept as silent as they could, even as they heard gunmen moving around the outside of the container. "One of the girls in the trash container, raised her head and she screamed: "They saw me!" It was at that moment that David pushed Noam further into the container, deeper into the rubbish and pulled a plastic bag over her. Noam heard someone get inside the container, and a scream of "Allahu akbar!" He opened fire with an automatic inside the container. In a couple of seconds, Noam "heard David trying to breathe. And I knew I couldn't scream. I couldn't even cry." David was killed. Noam was shot in the hip on her left side and had to stay silent for the next 2 hours until she was rescued and given medical treatment.[66]

Elinor Gambarian, 24, had ran into the bar area seeking a place to hide, which quickly became full of people who sat down. Elinor instead got inside a small fridge. She remained there for hours "I knew any move I made was

death. I hear someone opening a fridge, and someone saying: "Why, why, why?" And then 'bang bang'" Elinor recorded herself inside the fridge in a sort of testimonial as she was convinced, she was going to die. She found herself losing consciousness from the lack of oxygen and had to take the risk of opening it, or suffocating. She opened the fridge door and raised her head and saw a body, immediately closing herself inside again.

Hours later, "when the gunshots were a bit distant, [she heard]: "IDF, IDF, is someone here?" Elinor did not reveal herself thinking it was a trick, but when they asked again, she decided to come out. She opened the fridge and she saw "not just one body, everything is full of blood."[67] Footage filmed by arriving security forces, including IDF volunteer first responder Eran Masas, who had driven from Haifa himself, to the Nova Festival site around 13:00, show bodies shot and bloodied in front and inside the bar. At least 15 people were killed in the main bar area.[68] Among the bodies was that of a policewoman. That body has not been identified publicly however it is known that Sgt. Maj. Dvora "Debbie" Abraham was stationed at the festival's police Forward Command Post and radioed reports of the terrorists. She was offered the opportunity to escape in vehicles to the east but refused to abandon her position defending the grounds, and was ultimately killed.[69]

Some festival-goers tried to hide in a row of portable toilets. According to testimony of 2 survivors "a large group of armed Palestinians positioned themselves close to their toilet stalls and were shooting at the festival site from there, with their backs to the toilet stalls." After a short time, they heard someone calling out in Hebrew, "Is anyone here?" They remained silent, but moments later, they heard "Allahu Akbar," and the militants began firing at the row of toilet stalls. One of the shooters had a gun camera which captured footage of the raiders firing into each one. It is not publicly confirmed how many people died, but 3 people survived, all of them hiding in a single stall. They spent a total of 9 hours in the stall until they were rescued.[70]

Among the Nova attendees who found they could not leave the site because of the traffic jam on the exit road – and the gunfire coming from other directions – were Yael Zeevi and her husband. After trying 3 times without success to drive out, they returned to the festival grounds and hid first in the bathrooms, and then under the main stage, running again when they heard the gunmen coming closer. "After three hours, we curled into a [drainage pipe]. … There was a lot of shooting above our heads." Zeevi testified that another woman came to hide in the drainage pipe. Suddenly an attacker put his gun into the pipe and opened fire. Multiple shots

Dead bodies within the Nova bar who were discovered by first responders after the attack on the Music Festival site.
Source: South First Responders Telegram

Blood-stained portable toilet from the Nova Music Festival. People hid inside them but the doors were sprayed with bullets.
Source: South First Responders Telegram

hit the woman, whose body largely protected Zeevi and her husband, though both were injured by bullets to their right and left arm, respectively. Zeevi and her husband crawled out of the pipe and ran toward another pipe. From there, Zeevi looked back at the festival site for the first time and said she saw "fire and smoke, like in movies." Zeevi later learned that the woman in pipe with her had been shot 6 times but survived.[71]

Michel Ohana, a veterinary nurse based in Portugal, and who was at Nova as part of the production team, recalled that after the music stopped, "we decided to stay in the parking lot, because we thought that this close to Gaza the missiles will just fly over us. But at 8:00, people started running in our direction, shouting that terrorists are coming." Ohana and her friends started driving but after a few hundred yards "there were a lot of shots at the car so we got out and started running."

She recalled the attackers were "everywhere…they were shooting in a frenzy." Ohana stopped running at a small white tent that had served as a police command post for the festival. The moment is captured on her mobile phone videos, along with the presence of a policewoman looking out from a corner of the tent with her pistol drawn. Ohana went inside the white tent which was crowded with people, many of them wounded. Among them was Shani Gabay. When the policewoman told them to run (and Shani went to the ambulance) Ohana was able to hang onto a car that was driving out. As the car pulled out onto Route 232, the occupants saw bodies on the ground and burned vehicles. However as terrorists started shooting at the car, those inside abandoned it and tried to run. Ohana saw a tank, and ran to take shelter behind it.[72]

The tank was part of the 77th Armoured Brigade that was directed to the border once terrorists were reported shortly after 06:30. Inside was the officer of the tank, Sgt. Shai Levinson, guiding the loader, Sgt. Ophir Testa, the gunner, Sgt. Ariel Eliyahu, and Sgt. Ido Somech, the driver. It was hit by an RPG at 06:55 by Hamas forces on motorcycles and pickup trucks, which badly injured Testa and Eliyahu. In the flames Levinson went missing.[73] With the loader and gunner critically injured, Somech made the decision to drive it towards Re'im to seek medical help. The tank driving along Route 232 found itself in the middle of the initial 10-man police road blockade outside of the Nova festival, which had become a shoot-out against some 50 terrorists. The tank was unable to shoot but could act as cover for the police. Testa, barely alive at this point, was able to get down from the tank to give his gun to someone, but was then killed.

Somech shot a terrorist that had climbed the tank and tried to enter it. The terrorists then threw grenades inside the tank, but as Somech was in the drivers compartment he was not harmed. Shortly after 09:00, he drove it left off the Route into an open area just north of the festival ground where it stopped, the engine giving out. Eliyahu was dead inside the tank (it is unclear exactly when he died in the battle). Levinson also died, his body was taken hostage to Gaza.[74] Ido managed to escape the tank, joining attendees fleeing into the woods. He recalled that they "saw 5 people coming towards us, with rocks and knives. I killed one, but then my gun jammed. They started attacking me with the rocks, breaking my jaw and nose." Somech was able to escape again, reaching an area of bushes, where he hid, injured on the ground for 5-6 hours.[75] A few hundred metres away his tank became a place of shelter for a number of attendees, as seen in footage recorded by Michal Ohana and Liron Avigzer.[76]

Nova attendee brothers, Daniel and Neriya Sharabi had previously tried to leave the festival grounds when the rocket fire began, with their friends including Itai Bausi, Ben Mizrachi, Karin Jounro, and Yosef-Haim Ohana. They initially tried to seek shelter from the rockets behind parked cars, but the police ordered everyone to disperse so Neriya went to retrieve his car. As the gunfire began, Daniel – as a trained combat medic from his military service - was called by friends to try and help some of the initial victims. He recalled that whilst trying to evacuate a wounded girl the terrorists were "spraying bullets… it must have been five hundred rounds a minute," and RPGs were being fired at the civilian vehicles trying to flee.[77]

The brothers saw the tank and tried to get it moving but to no success, so they instead took the weapon of the deceased Sgt. Ariel Eliyahu. The rifles chamber was full of sand, so the brothers used a tub of Vaseline from a woman hiding nearby to clean it so it could be used. The brothers called their army units for help, and Daniel is able to speak to his deputy reserve commander Yoni Skrisewsky, who advised "to shoot a bullet every sixty seconds so they know there is someone with a weapon." Yoni got in a car with people from his unit and drove from Tel Aviv to try and help, but only reached them 5 hours later. He stayed on the phone with Daniel the whole time.

The brothers were aided in the defence by others, including Daneil Ben Guzi, who brought the MAG heavy machine gun down from the tank. Every 30 minutes there was a new group of attackers that targeted the tank with gunfire. Michal Ohana hid behind the tank with other escapees for several hours, continuing to record on video

as much as she could "I kept filming because I knew that if I died, someone would find my phone and see what happened to us." Around 11:00, she was "shot in the leg. Then they shot an RPG at us. I was hit by shrapnel in my stomach and back."[78] Daniel Sharabi, the only trained medic, was using people's clothes as tourniquets, empty magazines and branches for splints.[79] Around 15:00 an armoured military vehicle arrived which evacuated the wounded. Ohana filmed their arrival on her phone.[80] The Sharabi brothers saved dozens by their actions, but their friends Bausi, Mizrachi, and Jounro were all killed, and Yosef-Haim Ohana was taken alive as a hostage.

Escaping On the Dirt Road East and Across The Field

With the road north blocked by the police barricade and then the trucks of Hamas-led attackers, hundreds of cars full of Nova escapees took the dirt road east of Route 232 that ran alongside a large field. A traffic jam developed and the convoy on the side of the field came to a halt. Satellite footage taken that morning shows hundreds of cars abandoned in 500 metre stretch, as more than a thousand people left vehicles and fled into the ploughed field. "We were hiding and running, hiding and running, in an open field," recalled attendee Arik Nani.[81]

Video footage taken by the attackers and dashcam footage shows a cluster of Qassam Brigades gunmen on the Route firing at the fleeing revelers. Some of them stood on the hoods or roofs of their vehicles.[82] Many victims were shot in the back as they ran. A number of escapees had four-wheel drive cars capable of navigating the furrowed field and were able to escape with relative ease. Other cars quickly became stuck. The hundreds of attendees who fled east across the large field were chased by Hamas attackers on foot and in cars. Videos show the Hamas attackers executing revellers who had fallen or were wounded.[83] One survivor described how armed militants chased after them in the field, driving on motorbikes and in pickup trucks, and were shooting at the fleeing people. The survivor observed that "everyone who stayed alive did so because someone else got the bullet... we saw people running and just falling."[84]

Some of the people who fled into the countryside east of the party site were rescued in the ensuing hours by residents from nearby communities who came to the fields east of Route 232 and picked up survivors.[85] Oz Davidian, a farmer from *Moshav* Maslul, used his knowledge of back routes in the area to rescue 120 Nova escapees in 15 journeys to-and-from the festival. He zig-zagged past wrecked cars, avoiding roadblocks and driving across country to take them to safety in *Moshav* Patish. His dashcam recorded the journeys and his conversations with the people he rescued.[86] Oz's relative Rami Davidian, who lived in Patish, rescued over 700 people from the festival over 48 hours, putting up to 15 people in his car at a time. On one occasion he prevented a girl from being kidnapped by speaking in Arabic to the group of terrorists surrounding her. After there was no one left to rescue he went to the festival site and tried to match body parts and cover corpses that had been left in indecent positions or states of undress.[87]

Nadav Hanan, 27, from Yavne, ran barefoot into fields and scrubland, zigzagging 15 miles over 9 hours to get to safety. After the 06:30 rocket attack prompted police to shut the festival down, the first hint Hanan had of the Hamas ground assault was when he was phoned by both his girlfriend and his mother who had seen reports on the news. He and his friends initially thought they would drive to safety. They sat in a long traffic jam on the road out of the parking lot before getting to the exit. A policeman was directing people to the right. Hanan then saw a car approaching from that direction, those inside told him that they had got as far as a gas station where

Escapees from the Nova Festival running across the open field
Source: South First Responders Telegram

they were shot at." After hearing gunshots coming closer from the right, Hanan and his friends decided to leave their car and flee by foot.[88]

They came to a wadi (riverbed) which already had a lot of people in it, when Hamas operatives then appeared above them. Fleeing partygoers climbed up a steep bank and ran into the open desert. Hanan recalled, "You start running in one direction and you hear more shots, so you run the other way, then they shoot you from another direction." The large group was chased across a ploughed field by Hamas gunmen on motorcycles stopped nearby and dismounted to shoot at them. "You could hear the bullets whistling and hitting the sand... I could hear screams and people falling but I thought, if I look back I'm dead." Hanan and his friends made it to the end of the field, and 3 hours after fleeing the initial festival site they reached a barn where they found some water. They decided to go to Patish (comfortably 7 miles east from the Nova site), which they reached at 16:00.[89]

PMSg Ramo Salman El-Hozayel saved at least hundred attendees hiding in the brush adjacent to the party site. He caught sight of an abandoned car with a key in the ignition. He piled 8 to 10 people into the small vehicle—some were in the trunk – and drove the car along a dirt road past the Re'im reservoir until he eventually reached a large greenhouse complex. He dropped off the attendees and then drove back to the fields east of the party site to rescue more.[90] At 11:00 he found another police officer in the greenhouse, who had a pistol and joined him. Together they picked up some 200 fleeing festival goers and brought them to the greenhouses.

After 3 hours, distant gunshots could be heard and El-Hozayel realised that "the terrorists were still coming [eastwards] on foot," so he told the Nova escapees to continue to Patish. At 12:30 he was able to get a lift to the police station at Ofakim, where he was able to pick up 5 boxes of semi-automatic 9mm pistols, and returned to the festival site, where the first military and police units were arriving. There he saw that his car, parked near the police tent, had been destroyed. "Some kids had been hiding behind it and the terrorist fired an RPG." El-Hozayel and his fellows "captured 5 terrorists" in the woods near the festival site, whose civilian clothes suggested they were part of the later waves that attacked the festival. He continued until 21:00 that evening.[91]

Escaping Along the Route

Earlier that morning Hamas operatives had set up over 30 ambush positions along Route 232.[92] The attackers seized control of Route 232's main intersections at Gamma, Re'im, at the Mefalism Bend and the Sha'ar HaNegev intersection, where Route 232 meets Route 34, just outside of the city of Sderot. This was part of a strategic plan that enabled them to block Israeli security reinforcements from reacting to the attack and turned Route 232 – which was the obvious escape route for anyone trying to leave an attacked *Kibbutz*, or the Nova

The aftermath of the attack on the Nova Festival site showing abandoned cars near the exit on Route 232.
Source: drone footage via South First Responders Telegram

Burnt cars from the Nova Festival.
Source: Photo provided by MSgt. Ramo El-Hozayel.

Festival – into a trap. (For more information see section on Route 232).

Those who left the festival site had the highest chance of survival if they either fled early, or later if they ran across the open field to the east. For those who went on the Route, along Route 232, either to the south towards Gamma junction, or the north towards *Kibbutz* Be'eri, Alumim and the Mefalsim bend, or through the woods towards Gaza, the chances of survival were much lower. After about 07:15, the chances of getting away safely diminished as the main exit from the site and then the access roads from parking lots became jammed with cars. For those who made in onto the main Route, the odds of getting through or around the multiple Hamas ambush positions between Reim and Sderot – all of them in place by 07:30 - became minimal as the road became blocked by scores of shot-up or burning vehicles.

Music agent Noa Beer, 29, who was raised in Manchester, came to the festival to support her client, the Hungarian DJ Wegha, whose set began at 03:30. The pair decided to stay through dawn. When the music stopped with the beginning of the rocket bombardment, Beer immediately left the festival site together with her client in a jeep she had borrowed from her boss and which was nearby in the VIP parking area.[93] Beer was able to get on the road very quickly, as far as Mefalsim before she was involved in a car crash when the cars in front of her stopped suddenly. At first, she thought it was an ordinary car accident, however when she opened her door she "heard the first bullet". Thirty metres from her, a terrorist was shooting at the cars. "Bullets hit the car from both sides… I looked in the back mirror and I could see the car behind me that had stopped - the driver and the guy that were next to him were shot in the head."[94] Beer was able to get three injured people into the back of her car and reversed, driving back the direction they had come, through the Hamas ambush. As she did so, she saw "cars coming towards [them] but the drivers were shot."[95] Beer was able to get to a hospital in Be'er Sheva.

Many festival goers who fled from the festival site along Route 232 to nearby *Kibbutz*im were killed when they arrived or soon after. Several Nova escapees arrived at the front gate of *Kibbutz* Alumim, just after 07:00, unaware that Hamas Nukbha operatives had infiltrated the *Kibbutz* through its back gate and taken it over. CCTV footage from the main gate at Alumim shows Hamas soldiers running to gate from inside the *Kibbutz* and aiming at the partygoers who run out towards the Route. A uniformed Hamas soldier with a rifle comes out of the entrance and chased two young women. He caught one of them and shot her in the head before chasing the second girl. She fell to her knees, facing him, and appeared to beg for her life. He fired over her head at a vehicle driving along highway 232, and then at exactly 07:10 shot the girl in the head.[96]

The Shelter Massacres

Israel's *migunit* roadside shelters, sometimes called "mobile shelters," are built to withstand rockets and bombs. They have open doorways, though there is usually a concrete wall perpendicular to the doorway which shields the interior from shrapnel from the outside. Many of the shelters, which usually measure no larger than 7 by 12-15 feet have colourful murals painted on their outside walls.

There were killings in at least 7 of these shelters along Route 232, but the most deaths occured in 4 shelters at Re'im junction on the western and eastern sides of the road (south of the festival site), one shelter near *Kibbutz* Alumim and another near *Kibbutz* Be'eri, both to the north of the festival site. Of the people inside most of them were partygoers who had escaped from Nova. The gunmen shot automatic fire into the concrete structures - none of which were larger than 15 feet by 7

feet - and threw grenades through their open doorways. Those who tried to escape were shot, and for some who survived the attacks, they were taken hostage badly injured. Like with other Nova victims the exact number of those who died in this shelter is not publicly known, but tabulating information from obituaries, this report places 82 deaths across the 7 shelters.[97]

Alumim Shelter

The Alumim shelter is attached to the "Alumim Junction" bus-stop. Its front wall is painted with blue with a large mural of a dog's face amidst pink flowers. Noam Cohen, a 19-year-old filmmaker, left the Nova party with friends and drove North after rocket fire brought the festival to an end. He had only been on the road for about 4.5 miles when he said they started to hear the whistle of bullets flying past their windows. Suddenly, a group of militants came into view, dressed in black with green headbands worn by members of Hamas, and started firing on them. They turned the car around and after approximately 150 metres they saw a shelter with a police officer outside, with his gun out, "saying everyone [get] in." The time was approximately 07:10. There were already about 30 people packed into the rectangular shelter. Cohen filmed the scene on his mobile phone.[98]

Within minutes there was a large explosion from an RPG that hit the shelter, which collapsed part of it, followed by an eruption of gunfire and several grenades came through the doorway. Some 10-20 attackers were shooting at the shelter, killing many who stood at the entrance.[99] Cohen testified that "after a few grenades it [was] very cold. Your ears are bleeding. You can't really understand what's happening."[100] Most of the people inside the shelter were killed by the grenades, whose blasts sent thousands of fragments of shrapnel into the walls and ceiling. Cohen's friend, Yahel Irony, 18, said that after the explosions "suddenly it was quiet... people were dead or dying, without arms, legs. People were cut in half."[101] Cohen covered himself in dead bodies to survive.

Footage from the aftermath of the grenade blasts shows Cohen's face covered in blood, and also the scene inside the shelter with injured people bleeding on the ground.[102] Less than 40 minutes from arriving in the shelter, Cohen was able to escape into a car with a lapse in the gunfire. Some hours later, two police officers had arrived on the scene. "We entered the shelter" one of them recalled, "and I saw the most horrible sight I have ever seen in my life."[103] The attack on the Alumim shelter was shorter than the others and included intervals in attacks, this likely because there was some police presence at various points who actively engaged in the attackers.[104]

Be'eri Shelter

The Be'eri Shelter is notable for its mural of a girl blowing bubbles, painted on its front wall. Lee Sasi, an American citizen, who was in Israel on vacation, went to the Nova Festival with her American uncle, Avi Sassi, 65, who was one of the music producers of the Nova festival, and her cousins. Soon after the rocket attack began, Lee and her family left in their car to find a bomb shelter. They drove for just 2 minutes to the one outside of *Kibbutz* Be'eri. There were already cars parked outside and it gradually filled up. At its height, approximately 40 people were in the shelter, with some overflowing outside.

Lee recorded the inside of the shelter on her phone, and people can be heard telling those shouting to be quiet, fearing they would attract attention. The language barrier prevented her from fully understanding what was happening, but she discerned the severity of the situation from the faces of those who joined the bomb shelter, which were "full of terror." Another group of "kids from the street" then ran into the full shelter causing those tightly packed inside to "fall on each other like a pile of dominos." The impact enabled Lee to move further into the shelter, from the place in the entrance where she had been standing, which proved lifesaving.[105]

After having been in the shelter for 45 minutes, screams were then heard from the outside. Lee described then hearing "1,000 bullets from an automatic AK-47" which hit the hallway of the shelter, the people in front of her getting the impact of the bullets. Dashcam footage places militants with Hamas green-headbands at the doorway to the shelter at 08:09 where they can be seen shooting and throwing grenades inside.[106] One of the grenades was thrown onto the right-hand side of the wall and landed in the middle of the shelter, near Avi's foot. Lee sought to help her uncle up who had fallen from the impact, but as she did a second grenade was thrown into the shelter. Avi took the impact of it, which killed him.[107]

The terrorists then threw a molotov cocktail into the shelter which hit the bodies. Lee recalled how the bodies didn't break the glass: "they were trying to burn us alive."[108] After the first attack, where most people died, the terrorists stopped trying to come inside as there were too many bodies so instead threw grenade

after grenade. After the eighth bombardment, Lee was hiding under dead bodies; the terrorists came back intermittently attacking every 20 minutes. By 13:30 the IDF reached the shelter.[109] Survivors said only 12 people lived.

The Re'im west shelter

The Re'im west shelter stands on the west side of the Route, and its outside is adorned with a painting of a blue bird. By 06:50, there were already 25 to 39 festival goers at the shelter.[110] Some of the first into the shelter were Ziv Abud, 26, her boyfriend, Eliya Cohen, 26, her nephew Amit Ben Avida, 19, and his girlfriend, Karin Schwartzman, 20, who had left the music festival together after the rocket fire began. British-Israeli Aner Shapira and American-Israeli Hersh Goldberg-Polin arrived some time after 07:20 with the news that Hamas had infiltrated, but said everyone should remain calm as the IDF's Re'im base was close by.

However, as the sound of gunfire grew closer, everyone who was hovering in the hallway and just outside, crowded into the shelter. "Soon after 07:41, according to time-stamped texts and survivors' testimonies, the attackers arrived outside the bunker."[111] Eitan Halley recalled how it was just after a final group of escapees arrived and said that terrorists had shot at their car, that a few seconds later "we heard cars pull up, a group of people jump out screaming in Arabic, and they started firing at the entrance."[112] Osama Abu Assa, 36, from the Bedouin town of Tel Sheva, had been working security at the Nova festival and had driven in his car to the shelter. Ayelet Arnin, 22, a news editor at the Israeli television channel Kan TV, was inside the shelter and recorded what was happening on her phone. It begins at 07:52, and minutes later Abu Assa can be heard speaking to the terrorists, he tells them he is a Muslim and they yell at him to "come out!" at gunpoint, and lie on the ground. They asked him "are there Jews inside?"[113] Dashcam footage from Abu Assa's car shows that by 07:56, he had been pulled from the shelter by Hamas troops, all but one in military uniforms, who repeatedly beat and kicked him. His shirt had been torn off. Survivors from the shelter said that he "pleaded with the gunmen" not to go into the shelter and kill the people inside.[114] In the dashcam footage that shows grenades being thrown in and out of the shelter, Abu Assa is visible sitting against the shelter wall. He would later be taken away and shot in the chest and head. He was one of at least 15 Bedouin Israelis killed on 7 October.[115]

Over a period of 4 minutes, the dashcam footage then shows Hamas terrorists firing into the packed shelter and then throwing in grenades. One by one the grenades were tossed back out again. In the aftermath of one of the resulting explosions a man sprinted out of the shelter, left past the front of the camera and out of frame. Two gunmen opened fire at him, one of them sprinted across the road before taking aim. The man, Lidor Levi, 28, was killed. His fiancée, Nitzan Rahoum, also 28 and who was pregnant, was killed by one of the grenade explosions (she was the niece of Avi Sassi who died in the Be'eri bomb shelter).[116]

The grenades were being thrown back out by Aner Shapira, who was an off-duty IDF soldier. Halley recalled that "Aner told us if we saw a grenade, we'd either have to point it out to someone or grab it and throw it out ourselves. I was pretty close to him, pointing out the grenades, and he was taking all the responsibility [for] throwing them out." The dashcam footage captures the scene from the outside, and shows the attackers ducking round the side of the shelter after throwing in each grenade, the grenades bouncing out again and exploding between two cars.[117] At 08:02, Itamar Shapira (no relation to Aner) asked people if the police had been called. Many were trying, including Alon Ohel, 22, who can be hear saying "Come as quickly as possible, please, please."[118] By 08:06, Shapira had caught and thrown back 7 grenades, before the eighth exploded and killed him.[119]

Halley was thrown back into the wall from the impact of the explosion, hitting his head on the wall and "lost consciousness for a few minutes." When he came to, he took over, and when the next grenade landed at his feet, he threw it out.[120] Segev Kizher, 22, also tried to take control of the situation and can be heard, on Arnin's phone recording, telling people to throw the grenades out as they came in. At 08:10 Goldberg-Polin is heard saying, "I don't have a hand," as someone urges that a tourniquet be tied around the wound.[121] The terrorists threw in more grenades one of which hit a wall and then

Footage from a dashcam parked outside the Re'im West Bomb Shelter, with majority Nova attendees hiding inside. It is surrounded by Hamas gunmen who shot and threw grenades into the shelter. Osama Abu Assa can be seen sitting shirtless on the floor. Source: Screen-capture on X.

landed inside the shelter. It exploded before it could be ejected, and "everyone was sitting in a cloud of black smoke."[122]

Halley then saw the terrorists enter the shelter and point at AK-47 at Goldberg-Polin's head. The man was "wearing a bulletproof vest, a green Hamas bandana, and he was smiling."[123] Mobile phone footage from the inside of the shelter taken by one of the Hamas operatives shows those inside the smoky shelter covered in blood.[124] The gunmen dragged some of the survivors out, all were bloodied with apparent shrapnel wounds. Two young men, one is Golderberg-Polin – his arm ending just above the elbow – climbed into the back of a white pickup truck. A third man is dragged by his hair. He screamed in pain and is pushed into the flat bed of the truck. Gunmen hit the wounded men and shouted at them as they lie there.[125] Four people were taken hostage alive from the shelter: Goldberg-Polin, Alon Ohel, Eliya Cohen and Or Levy. Arnin's phone recording captured the hostage taking. At around 08:27 one terrorist can be heard saying in "Yalla, yalla, pull him out, pull them!" Another says "There they are, there they are, those dogs" Then another says, "Pull him out, pull him, pull by the hair."[126] After the abductions, the terrorists sprayed bullets inside the shelter to ensure others are killed.

Inside the Re'im West bomb shelter where British-Israeli Aner Shapira can be seen standing near the entrance. He threw back 7 grenades that were thrown inside the shelter. The eighth killed him.
Source: image from a survivor of the shelter massacre.

In total 16 were killed, 7 were able to survive and await rescue. In footage recorded after the attack, items are strewn on the ground nearby the shelter including body armour, prayer beads, a trash bag filled with medical supplies, and a black T-shirt emblazoned with the emblem of the Qassam Brigades.[127]

Re'im East Shelter

A hundred metres or so from the Re'im west shelter, further north on the other side of the road is the Re'im east shelter which is painted with a brown and green landscape. Sisters Norelle, 25, and Noya, 22, Manzuri last spoke with their mother at 07:00, but by 07:39 there was no further contact. They were both killed when the shelter was attacked. Norelle's boyfriend, Amit Cohen, 25, was also in the shelter and died. Recovered video footage taken minutes before their deaths showed Cohen sitting on the floor of the shelter, with Norelle on one side and Roya on the other, holding them both in his arms.[128] At 07:00, someone shouted that the IDF had arrived, but they had misidentified approaching khaki-wearing attackers. Like at the Re'im west shelter, militants fired Kalashnikov indiscriminately into it and tossed in grenades. Similarly, some people also threw them out.[129] Noy Aviv, 29, from Eilat, spoke to her father at 08:30 and again at 09:00. In the second call, she told him that "smoke was coming into the bunker."[130] Only 7 of those who hid in the shelter out of some 30-40 survived.

The Aftermath

The nearest army post to the festival site, the Reim base, was the headquarters of the Gaza Division and command centre for the entire region and just 4 miles away. However, it too had been attacked (see section on Attacked Military Bases). It was only around noon that small forces of police, soldiers and prison guards arrived at the festival site and began to clear it of the attackers who were still there.[131] Among the first rescuers to enter the party area was reservist Lt. Col. Eran Masas, who filmed the footage within the site.[132] The police and soldiers began evacuating wounded civilians. They also took away 11 captured Gazans.[133]

In the confusion of mid-morning on 7 October both the Israeli military and the Israel police apparently thought the other was sending forces to rescue the attendees and relieve the surviving police officers at the site. Then-police commissioner Kobi Shabtai called IDF Chief of

Staff Herzi Halevi at 11:45, informing him that forces had not been able to reach the site of the festival. Halevi dispatched more forces but due to the events of the day did not arrive much before 15:00. However, other reports depict the army's understanding that the police force had cleared the area and therefore, the military did not prioritise deploying forces there.[134] Ambulance driver and EMT Moshe Weitzman arrived at the same time as the troops. "It is difficult to even think again about the sights we saw there. The quantity of dead people. The abuse against the bodies. There was not much for us to do there. It was horrible."[135]

Senior Israeli police officers such as former Negev Police Commander Eyal Azoulai have suggested that the abundance of soft targets the attackers found at Nova may have played a role in saving the cities of Sderot, Ofakim, and in particular Netivot from more deadly attacks by larger numbers of Hamas raiders.[136] The growing assessment is that Hamas did not know about the festival in advance. It was not marked on the maps terrorists were carrying and the attackers came largely from along the Route, rather than directly from the border. There are some reports that the festival was spotted by paraglider-born commandos headed to other targets.[137]

The Nova attendees represent the largest fatality group of the attacked locations. Throughout the day the civilians trying to hide at the festival site and those who tried to flee were deliberately killed. The atrocities committed in the attacks on the *Kibbutz*im and *Moshav*im were also perpetrated on Nova victims. There is evidence suggesting that, during the 4 hours after Hamas took full control of the Nova site and were joined by other armed groups and civilians, the attackers raped and sexually abused attendees who had been unable to get away.

First responders who came to the site after the departure of the raiders testified to finding a number of dead women tied to trees, often stripped naked below the waist. Some of the women were bound together. EMT Weitzman testified to seeing a considerable number of dead girls at the site who were naked or naked below the waste in positions that were highly suggestive of rape or abuse. "A girl without clothes lying on the floor…How did the clothes fall off her? You see one, two, three, four girls without clothes, you say to yourself, Ok, they weren't at a party without clothes."[138]

Multiple witnesses attested to seeing or hearing acts of rape, gang-rape and other forms of sexual violence at Nova. These include 10 eyewitnesses who have spoken to the SafeHeart organisation, set up to provide psychological support for Nova survivors. Yair Grynbaum of that organisation has said that eyewitness testimony has described that "an armed man raped a woman and shot her to death," two additional witnesses saw "a gang rape in which, between 7 and 10 assailants took part." Another witness saw "a gang rape in which 5 assailants took part. One of the gang rapes was in a field, the other on the grounds of the party. Both ended with the victims' murder."[139] Among the eyewitnesses who have testified publicly was Nova attendee Yoni Saadon, 39, who hid from the attackers beneath a pile of bodies under one of the festival stages. He described one woman who was beaten and raped by 8 to 10 fighters. She pleaded them to stop, and "when they finished, they were laughing and the last one shot her in the head."[140] Rami Davidan, one of the 7 October civilian 'heroes' who rescued Nova attendees testified to seeing women's bodies tied to trees, sometimes multiple were bound to each other and a tree, as well as seeing more than 5 bodies with genital mutilation.[141]

The rape of Nova victims occurred along Route 232 as well. In October 2024, Nova survivor Yuval Sharvit Trabelsi, whose husband Mor Trabelsi was killed at Mefalsim as they escaped the party (she lay in their overturned car smeared herself with his blood, so that his killers believed that she too was dead),[142] revealed that she "saw murder, kidnappings, but the hardest of them all was rape."[143] She described a girl who was injured in the next car who was dragged out by the terrorists. She started screaming as 3 men ripped her clothes off. When they finished they fired an RPG at her car, and burned her.[144]

Tali Biner, a surgical nurse, who hid in a caravan for 7 hours during the attack, recounted hearing a number of women being raped and a man begging the attackers to leave a woman alone. When Biner finally exited the caravan she saw the bodies of women with their legs spread, underwear pushed aside and shirts ripped from bodies.[145] One of the more infamous viral videos and photographs from the Nova site showed the "woman in a black dress" later identified as Gail Abdush, 34. Taken in the early hours of 8 October on the Route about 9 miles north of the Nova site, it shows the corpse of a woman lying on her back, her right hand covering a badly burned face, her legs spread wide and her dress pulled up, revealing her vagina. Her husband, Nagi Abdush was also killed at the festival).[146] (For further information see: Chapter 6.7 Conflict Related Sexual Violence).

As in other locations attacked on 7 October, the killings at the Nova party were accompanied by deliberate mutilation or desecration of corpses. The United Nations Commission of Inquiry confirmed the that "bodies of civilian victims killed in *Kibbutz*im and the Nova

Festival were used as trophies of victory for propaganda purposes, often with a clear gender element to the display. Militants posed with bodies in videos and photos, violating the personal dignity of the dead persons by humiliating or degrading treatment. In several of these cases there was a clear gendered element to the crime, where the bodies were displayed undressed as a means of humiliation and disrespect, while these acts were filmed and disseminated."[147] Moreover, Pramila Patten's report on sexual violence specifically determined "there are reasonable grounds to believe" that rape and gang rape occurred in and around the Nova Festival site.[148]

ZAKA reported that they ran out of body bags due to the scale of death at the festival site and that soldiers were putting bodies in large, refrigerated trucks.[149] Many of the bodies on the Routes and in the shelters were badly burned, reflecting the fact that they were killed with rocket propelled grenades and hand grenades, some of which were thermobaric grenades which burn at extremely high temperatures.[150] Bodies at the Nova site were also burned, suggesting that they were deliberately set alight. Brigadier General Dan Goldfus, one of several Israeli officers who independently drove to the South said that when he arrived at the Nova site "Bodies were burning."[151]

The Nova death toll may have increased in the year after the attack as survivors have suffered psychologically. Among the survivors publicly confirmed to have committed suicide was Shirel Golan, who killed herself on her 22nd birthday.[152] Psychological professionals treating damaged survivors of the Nova Festival have said that the task is made more complicated by the fact that some of the survivors were on mind-altering drugs when the attack took place and the profession has little or no experience of treating people traumatised while under the influence of hallucinogens.[153]

Some of the bodies collected from the Nova Music Festival.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

Chapter 5.7 | References

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Chapter 5.8 | Highway Route 232

Route 232 is the main north-south highway in Israel's Gaza Envelope, running roughly parallel to the Gaza border. It connects more than twenty rural communities in the Gaza Envelope to each other, and to the city of Sderot, continuing further north. Route 234 meets Route 232 at the Re'im intersection and leads to Route 241, and the city of Ofakim. Near Sderot, Route 232 also intersects with Route 34, which to the south leads to the city of Netivot, and to the north leads to Route 4 – the Ashkelon Road from which several highways lead to central and northern Israel. On 7 October 2023, nearly 300 people were killed on the highway of Route 232 between Kerem Shalom at its southern end and Sderot to the north, Routes 34, 234 and 25. Over two-thirds of those who died on the road had attended the Nova Music Festival and the Psyduck Festival.[1] As so many killings took place on a 33-mile stretch of Route 232 it deserves treatment as a locus of attack and mass killing equivalent to other locations discussed in this report. In Israel it has become known as the "Road of Death."[2]

The Hamas takeover of Route 232 had clear strategic and tactical purposes. It enabled the initial attacks on the communities and cities of the western Negev. It prevented or inhibited effective responses by security forces and medical personnel, both within the area and from the rest of Israel. It offered additional opportunities for Hamas-led forces to achieve the combined goal of killing Israeli civilians and inflicting terror on the region's population through targeted assaults on vehicles and roadside rocket shelters. It made possible, and then protected, the secondary attacks on Israeli communities by civilians from Gaza after mid-morning.

By strategically seizing control of key intersections along this major north-south artery from the outset, the attackers created chokepoints and ambushes, effectively transforming the highway into a confined killing zone, enabling mass casualties. Finally, control of the artery was essential for the attacks Hamas planned to make on communities further east and further north (SEE Chapter 3: Hamas Aims and Plans).

Those killed by Hamas-led attackers on Route 232 on 7 October included cyclists and runners, farm labourers headed to work, late partygoers on the way to the Nova Festival, commuters heading to and from Negev communities, escapees from the Nova Festival and Pysduck Festival, police officers heading to attacked villages and cities, and volunteers from northern Israel doing the same. The deaths of these people at the hands of Hamas and other attackers from Gaza were captured on film. They were recorded on CCTV cameras, car dashcams, the mobile phones of victims and survivors, and the body-cameras and gun-cameras worn by the attackers, sometimes simultaneously. Some killings were broadcast live or later that day on Hamas-linked social media.

The Highway killings took place at more than 30 separate locations, primarily at 3 major road junctions, and in roadside rocket shelters along Route 232 that were packed with escapees from the Nova Music Festival. They took place between 06:30 and 14:00, with the bulk of the killings completed by midday on 7 October. During most of those 8 hours, much of the highway was under the effective control of Hamas' *Nukhba* commando forces. Parts of the highway were also under near-continuous mortar and rocket bombardment from Gaza itself.[3]

The Route 232 attacks took 3 three main forms. The first and primary form was ambushes of civilian vehicles by Hamas gunmen firing from the roadside, sometimes hiding behind trees and fences, but often standing in the open or besides parked pickup trucks. Hamas set up ambush positions at a total of 37 different locations on Route 232.[4] Then there was the deliberate killing of civilians packed into *Migunit* (roadside rocket shelters), and the shooting of those who tried to escape.

Finally, there were the ambushes of military and police vehicles responding to the first attacks. Because of the general confusion of the morning, and because Hamas had taken out the surveillance systems along the border, the size of the invasion from Gaza was unclear to the IDF for many of the initial hours. Therefore, only small units of soldiers and police, often in 1 or 2 vehicles, were sent down 232 during the first 5 hours of the attack. They had to either bypass, survive or neutralise an ambush to reach attacked communities and military bases.

A large proportion of the thousands of cars left abandoned on Route 232 were found burned or were still afire on 8 October.[5] In some cases, this was

Figure 18 | Route 232 & Shelters

the result of gunfire or a rocket-propelled grenade explosion igniting a fuel tank. In many it was the result of the use of thermobaric grenades. IDF estimated that as many as half of the thousands of RPG rounds Hamas operatives brought into Israel had thermobaric warheads.[6] (SEE Chapter 4 Weaponry) The raiders also set alight many cars on Route 232 after they had crashed or the people inside were killed, which created both effective barricades and optics wise, a demoralising psychological effect. Scores of these cars were set on fire using magnetic mines that the attackers had brought for use against *Merkava* tanks; the raiders attached them to the cars' fuel tanks. (A significant number of them failed to explode).[7]

Hamas *Nukhba* commando squads began to take control of intersections and other strategic points along Route 232 almost immediately after the initial breaches of the 36 mile border fence, doing so under the cover of heavy rocket bombardments that drove the citizens and defenders of the border region into shelters. They attacked the Sha'ar HaNegev intersection, next to the city of Sderot around 07:30, and were in control of the Re'im and Gamma intersections by 07:39. At the same time, they set up many ambush positions between the major junctions, some consisting of just a few gunmen, others involving several pickup trucks full of *Nukhba* commandos. At 07:40, a full squad set up an ambush between the Re'im intersection and Gamma Junction. Some were wearing Israeli style uniforms and impersonated police officers to prompt motorists to stop or slow down. Nova escapees Yuval Bar-On, 25, and her fiancé Moshe Shuva, 33, slowed down in this area because a "police officer" signalled them to do so. The individual then opened fire killing both. The ambush was witnessed by friends in the car behind who turned round and escaped.[8]

YAMAM counter-terror police forces were the earliest first responders mobilised on the day. They were deployed at 06:45 upon the first reports of a terrorist infiltration (though the scale of the threat was not understood). They quickly realised that "Sha'ar HaNegev, Sa'ad and Re'im intersections were the bottlenecks and the terrorists were hitting any force that came" and so began conducting short-range battles to retake the highways. Five of their officers died at the Sha'ar HaNegev junction in the early hours of the attack, and it was only retaken by Israeli forces at 10:30.[9]

Going from north to south, the key intersections on Route 232 include the Sha'ar HaNegev junction, the Sa'ad Junction, the Alumim Junction, the Re'im Junction, the Gamma junction, the Ma'on Junction and the Mivtahim Junction. In addition, there are 2 further locations that whilst called junctions by Israelis are not road intersections, but instead bus stops: Mefalsim Junction (opposite the *Kibbutz* of the same name) and Magen Junction.

The Sha'ar HaNegev junction, is a major road intersection. It is adjacent to the city of Sderot and is where Route 232 connects with Route 34, the highway that runs north to Ashkelon and upwards to Tel Aviv. Reports place 39 people who were killed at the junction in both ambushes and the battles between the attackers and Israeli security forces.[10]

Less than 2 miles south from Sha'ar HaNegev is the Mefalsim Junction, sometimes called "the Mefalsim Bend." This section of Route 232 takes its name from the fact that it curves around *Kibbutz* Mefalsim. There is also a *migunit* at the bus-stop at this junction. The Bend was a major ambush area and one of the deadliest locations of 7 October. Hamas squads had taken control of it and set up ambush positions there by 07:00.[11] More than 40 people were killed there, most of them civilians killed in vehicle ambushes.[12] The two senior commanders who led this area of the attack was *Nukhba* company commander Jihad Mahmoud Yahya Kahlout and Hamas company commander Muhammad Riad Ali Oukal. They were supported by Anas Jalal Muhammad Abu Shakian, Nur Al-Din Muhammad Yahya Abu Jadian and Sihab Hassan Ali Matar Adaim.[13]

The strategically vital Sa'ad junction, is 3.4 miles south of Mefalsim Bend, and is where Route 232, coming from the North intersects with Route 25, the main east-west highway that runs west past the Nahal Oz Base to the closed Nahal Oz Crossing with Gaza. The adjoining Alumim-Be'eri junction, on the other side of *Kibbutz* Sa'ad, is where Route 232 coming from the south connects with Route 25 as it runs east to the city of Netivot.

The Re'im Junction is 14 miles south of Sderot and approximately 8 miles south of the Sa'ad Junction. It is where Route 232 intersects with Route 234, a rural road heading due east to Urim. The junction is south of *Kibbutz* Re'im and the land where the Nova Music Festival was held, as such many of the Nova attendees were killed in this area.

The Gamma junction is just slightly further south from Re'im, and is where at least 29 people[14] were killed on the morning of 7 October. It is here that the west-east Route 242 from Kissufim and the Gaza border meets Route 232. Its main significance lies in that it leads to the Re'im army base. That base, the headquarters of

the IDF's Gaza Division, was attacked and paralysed early on 7 October. (SEE Chapter 5.9 Attacked Military Facilities).

Ma'on Junction, 4.5 miles further south, is where Route 232 intersects two other highways: Route 2410 which runs west to the Nir Oz, Nirim and Ein HaShlosha *Kibbutz*im, and then up to the Kissufim junction; and Route 241 which leads east towards Urim, home of a key IDF base as well as a *Kibbutz*, and then the city of Ofakim. Hamas raiders successfully attacked the Urim Observation Outpost but failed to penetrate Urim Base or the Urim *Kibbutz*. They also attacked Ofakim but via a more northern route. (SEE Chapter 5, sections on 5.5.3 Ofakim, 5.9.7 Urim Observation Outpost, 5.3.30 *Kibbutz* Urim)

The Magen Junction is less than 1.5 miles south of the Ma'on junction and is a bus-stop near *Kibbutz* Magen which was attacked on 7 October, as was the Magen petrol station whose staff survived by hiding in a walk-in fridge.

Finally, the Mivtahim Junction is 3.6 miles further south, and where Route 232 links with Route 2310, a road leading to *Moshav* Mivtahim, *Moshav* Yesha and four smaller *Moshav* farming communities. It was the most southern junction that Hamas forces attempted to control on 7 October.

Maps and plans subsequently discovered on the bodies of the attackers suggest careful planning and preparation of the initial stages of the invasion. Nevertheless, some of the attacking Hamas squads had difficulty finding their targets. One piece of recovered Hamas bodycam footage shows a team of motorcyclists heading down Route 232 soon after the rocket barrage began. Several are dressed in IDF-style uniforms, some even wearing the distinctive IDF helmet covers. They stop at a roadside *migunit* near Kissufim and at gunpoint force a Bedouin man who had been sheltering inside to come outside. They shouted at him "Get out! Raise your hands! Get out, get out!". And "here is the dog!". He told them in Arabic "I'm a Muslim" One of the attackers then said to the Bedouin, 'If you don't tell me where Re'im is, I'll kill you. Where is Re'im?" It is not clear if the terrorists were referring to the Re'im base, the Re'im *Kibbutz* or the Nova site to its north. The gunmen forced him to get into a car. One of his captors then shouted "Whose car is this, you animal? Where is Re'im? Where is the car key?'. They stripped the man, beat him, and tied his hands behind his back, and placed a Hamas flag on the back of his car.[15]

Abandoned cars on the side of Route 232.
Source: South First Responders Telegram

Among the first people the Hamas raiders killed on Route 232 were cyclists and runners engaging in morning exercise or training. At least 11 of southern Israel's tight-knit competitive cycling community were killed on 7 October.[16] Tomer Shpirer, 37, was gunned down near the Mefalsim bend around 06:45.[17] Ron Benjamin, 53, was also cycling near Mefalsim when he was shot dead and his body was kidnapped to Gaza.[18] Shlomi Davidovich, 50, from *Kibbutz* Gevim, pulled over and entered a roadside shelter opposite *Kibbutz* Mefalsim, on the Mefalsim Bend, when the rocket bombardment began. It was attacked by Hamas raiders who threw a grenade inside. Davidovich threw it out. When more grenades were thrown in, he shielded other people in the shelter with his body and was killed.[19] Triathlete Aya Meydan was out cycling near Be'eri but was saved by a Bedouin family.[20] Her riding partner and fellow triathlete, Lior Waizman, 37, who was supposed to meet her that morning, was shot while cycling into Sderot via the Sha'ar HaNegev junction.[21] Waizman messaged his wife "Limor, I was shot come and get me." His wife tried to reach him together with her father. They made it to within 400 metres of him but were driven back by gunfire. "They shot at us and we ran away. But I really tried" she told an interviewer. Dashcam footage taken by an ambulance shows Waizman's body and bike by the side of the road around 13:00 near an area of brush that had caught fire.[22] Haim Benaim, 56, of *Moshav* Netiv HaAsara was shot and killed while riding near Zikim.[23] Teenage cyclists Zohar Shahar and Itay Cohen, both 15, were on a training ride on 232 near Kfar Aza when they were shot and wounded; Itay Cohen lost an eye.[24]

Commuters on their way to work or returning from night shifts were also killed on Route 232 in the aftermath of the first rocket sirens. Among them was Evgeny Galsky, 34, a firefighter, who was returning from work in Netivot to his home in *Kibbutz* Erez. He was killed near the Sha'ar HaNegev junction.[25] Dimitri Sorokin, 50,

had finished his night shift at a plastics factory in Sderot and was on his way home to Ashkelon. At the Sha'ar HaNegev Junction he was caught in an ambush by two terrorists lying in wait and was shot dead at close range.[26] Dr Michael Murzakhanov, 69, left his house in Netivot at 07:00 on his way to work at the Shikma prison in Ashkelon. He was not heard from again. The following day, his son went looking for him and near the Sha'ar HaNegev intersection found Michael's car abandoned and filled with bullet holes and blood, but no body. It was only 10 days later that his body was found and processed having had difficulties in the identification because he had been shot in the face.[27]

Among the civilians who were ambushed while driving south on Route 232 were Daniela Gandi and Naor Levi, who were heading towards the Nova party early that morning. As they drove, they came upon the earliest scenes of cars that had been "riddled with bullets." They slowed to see if someone needed help and found "the person was simply dead on the ground. [People] pulled him out. He was face down lying on his stomach. He had been shot. His legs were ridden with holes, and his head, just holes." They continued driving and noticed more cars on the side.

Near Sha'ar HaNegev junction their car was shot at by gunmen on a white pickup truck wearing red headbands, indicating they could have been members of the PFLP. The gunfire shattered the windows and Gandi remembers "seeing the guns inside the window." Both Gandi and Levi were hit. Levi was shot in the stomach and the hands. He was unable to continue driving and the car swerved at 70 mph before it came to a stop. Levi bled to death in the car, Gandi was wounded but survived by playing dead for 6 hours in the car, having covered herself in blood, until she was rescued.[28]

The Sha'ar HaNegev Junction

At 06:45 Hamas attackers came through the Sha'ar HaNegev junction on their way to attack the city of Sderot. Soon afterwards, another Hamas squad attacked *Kibbutz* Nir Am, north-west of the intersection. By 07:30, Hamas operatives had full control of the junction and were killing motorists driving through it.

At least 7 of their victims were escaping the Nova party. Among them was Naomie Aliza Bikhar, 23, a French-Israeli, who had attended Nova with her boyfriend, Or Ezra Moshe, 23. The pair tried to flee in a car with two others but it was shot at injuring Moshe. The couple then switched cars, and as Bikhar was trying to stop her boyfriend's bleeding, terrorists approached them — while they were on a video call — and asked if they had a weapon. Naomie said no, and they immediately opened fire, killing all 4 inside. Naomie called out "I'm wounded! I'm wounded. They're killing us" before the call cut out.[29] Eli Refai, 42, had set out to rescue his sister Sharon, 27, from the Nova Festival. She rang him from the Mefalsim area to say that her boyfriend had been shot and their car had flipped over. Refai was killed at the junction while on the phone to her. Sharon was killed soon afterwards together with the other two people in her car, her boyfriend Shahar Manzur, 28, and her friend Oriya Ricardo, 26.[30] Some of the Hamas ambushers at the intersection were wearing uniforms resembling those of the IDF. Adam Ilaev, 22, and his girlfriend Shani Amin, 18, were killed at the junction at about 08:24 after telling his mother on the phone, "I'm near Sderot; there are soldiers here and I don't understand what's going on. I think there are terrorists."[31]

Other victims killed at the Sha'ar HaNegev junction include all 4 members of the Kapshetar family. Evgeni 36, Dina 34, Aline 8, and Ethan 4, were returning to their home in Dimona from a camping trip near Ashkelon. As they were driving back, Dina wrote to her mother at 07:10 that although there were many *Tseva Adom* sirens they were rushing to get back as it was safer in Dimona (Ashkelon is nearer in proximity to Gaza). At 07:27 Dina sent a message to friends who were with them on the camping trip and also set off home - "Did you see the soldiers and the shooting?" The other car had gone a different route.[32]

Inbar Boyum, 22, from *Kibbutz* Be'eri was with his girlfriend at *Moshav* Mabu'im, having just finished work on a nighttime security shift when he received a message from his father that terrorists were attacking the *Kibbutz*. He immediately set off to pick up his gun at work and then head down to the *Kibbutz*.

Attacked cars along Route 232.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project. Photo by Ziv Koren.

He reached the Sha'ar HaNegev Junction at 07:27, where Hamas *Nukhba* commandos had already set up ambush positions on both sides of the highway. (They killed at least 20 people at the junction between 07:20 and 07:40). Boyum was most likely killed at 07:34, the moment when his phone –later found scorched – went silent.[33] (His father Gil Bayum, a member of the Be'eri security squad was also killed that day – SEE Chapter 3.4.15 *Kibbutz* Be'eri.)

The Sha'ar HaNegev junction is covered by multiple CCTV traffic cameras, which captured many of the ambushes.[34] One of the vehicles shown by CCTV cameras being attacked at the junction was a minibus driven by Sammi Elgargawi, 52, a van driver from the Bedouin town of Wadi al-Na'am. He had 7 passengers, all of them Gazan farm labourers. From the town of Beit Lahia, the men had Israeli work permits and were on their way to *Kibbutz* Nir Am. Elgargawai was killed as were 5 of the Gazans: Suliman Al-Atar, Khoury al-Masri, Hashem Barawi, Zayed Ghanem, and Souhail Masri. The other 2 Palestinian workers were apparently taken to Gaza by the attackers and their fate is unknown.[35]

It was also at the Sha'ar HaNegev junction that Hamas attackers kidnapped a motorist, held him hostage and used him as bait to ambush security forces. The motorist was Dr Tarek Abu Arar, from the Bedouin town Ar'ara in the Negev. He had been working the night shift at Barzilai Hospital in Ashkelon and was heading home. As he approached the intersection on Route 34 he saw an injured man on the side of the road, and stopped, presuming that the man was the victim of an accident. *Nukhba* ambushers shot him twice. He was hit in the chest and leg but was wearing body armour issued to him as a volunteer paramedic (having heard from his wife that there were terrorists in the area). "After they shot me in the chest and then in the leg, they grabbed me and tied me to a post. They started questioning me. I was in shock, I thought it was a dream."

They questioned him, and at first thought he was Jewish, when he told them he was a Muslim they spoke to him in Arabic: "They asked me verses in the Quran. What are the people of the Prophet Muhammad? Then they said: 'Shut up, you traitor, working with Jews."[36] The terrorists tied him hostage to a post, using him as bait to catch cars slowing down to help him, and also to protect themselves. He testified that his captors said "We have found our shield," to each other as they forced him face down in the intersection, hands zip-tied behind his back. The doctor was a witness to "the execution of 17 drivers at a Sderot intersection and the point-blank execution of every driver and passenger in those cars that followed- many of whom were children."[37] After more than an hour, police arrived, including a YAMAM anti-terrorist unit. The doctor was able to signal to them that he was a hostage and to point out Hamas men hiding nearby. Two YAMAM officers were killed in the resulting battle but Dr Abur Arar was rescued and his captors killed.

Anyone who drove west toward the Sha'ar HaNegev Junction that morning encountered a line of cars which at first looked abandoned but on closer inspection their passengers were lying on the ground or inside the car. Blood covered the highway, as did broken glass.[38] After the junction was retaken by Israeli security forces, the latter found the bodies of 10 Hamas operatives. Paramedic Moshe Weitzman reached the Sha'ar HaNegev junction at about 10:30. According to his testimony "the entire 500 metre radius" around the junction saw 30 to 40 people killed. He went from vehicle to vehicle with his ambulance looking for wounded but did not find a single one.[39]

Mefalsim Bend

The curved section of Route 232 was one of the deadliest sections of the Highway on the morning of 7 October. Between 40 to 60 people were killed at the Mefalsim bend. One person was taken alive as hostage, and 5 dead bodies are known to have been taken to Gaza.[40] It is a key stretch of Route 232 that connects the main stretch of *Kibbutz*im to Sderot and highways that leave the Envelope region. Taking control of the Bend was a strategic move to slow any security response to the attack, and trapping civilians in the area. Upon seeing the ambush ahead of them, many civilians left their cars and tried to escape on foot. Most were shot.

The majority of the victims were Nova escapees. A Nova survivor and her husband who fled the festival at 06:50, taking Route 232 north for 8 minutes towards

Image taken from the Go-Pro cameras worn by the attackers targeting a civilian car off the side of Route 232. Source: Hamas Telegram

Kibbutz Mefalsim would witness the killings over the morning. At around 07:00 they reached the Bend and saw "a firing squad" of militants on the road, standing in front of the *Kibbutz*. One of the shooters was described as a "young boy around 12-years-old." Their car was shot at multiple times, and their tyres exploded, forcing the couple to abandon the vehicle. They tried to play dead at the side of the road and were there for 5 hours. During this time they witnessed the attackers "burning people alive, dragging women by their hair to a pickup truck and verifying the killing of people who were seated in their cars." At one point the gunmen came near the couple and smashed the woman's elbow, saying "Allahu Akbar sharmuta" [sharmuta means whore in Arabic].[41]

Ori Arad, 22, had left the festival soon after the rocket attacks. At 07:10 he called his parents from the highway and told them that he was stuck amid traffic and the developing massacres. His father recalled him saying that he had no choice but to try to drive through the terrorist ambush. The family did not hear from him again. However, young women would later tell the family that Ori picked them up after their own car was totalled and tried to get them out of danger. He tried to speed through the ambush, but terrorists opened fire on the car and it flipped over. Ori was wounded and lost consciousness, while the women played dead in order not to attract attention. When he came to, the terrorists saw him move and fired at him again killing him.[42]

Shani Louk, the German-Israeli girl whose body was abused by large crowds of men and boys as it was taken into Gaza in the bed of a pickup truck, was most likely killed at the Mefalsim Bend. In the controversial footage and photographs of her body's abduction, a head wound is clearly visible.[43] Parts of a skull were DNA matched to Louk on the Bend.[44] In the area her French-Mexican boyfriend, Orion Hernandez-Radoux, 30, was also killed and his body also kidnapped to Gaza.[45] The pair had been at the Nova Festival with their friend Keshet Casarotti-Kalfa, 21, who was killed in the less than 2 miles stretch between Mefalsim Bend and the Sha'ar HaNegev Junction, while driving with Motti Zoherman, 73, the oldest Nova victim.[46]

Uriel Baruch, 35, left the Nova Festival with his friend Michael Yoav, 46, when the rocket fire began. Yoav called his wife to update her in the first instance. He called again a short while later and was heard yelling "Drive! Drive!" before the call cut off.[47] They were both last seen in a video that was posted online at approximately 09:45. It showed Baruch's car, with Yoav already dead inside and Baruch on the ground.[48] It was later confirmed that Baruch was taken hostage alive to Gaza. (He was killed in captivity).

At least 10 of those killed along the Bend were not Nova attendees. Tour guide Michel Nissenbaum, 59, a Brazilian immigrant, was driving from Sderot to the IDF's Gaza Division base near Re'im to pick up his 4-year-old granddaughter, Mika, who had been staying with his non-commissioned officer son-in-law. He was at Mefalsim junction and on the phone to his family when the call abruptly ended. When they called him later they heard an unfamiliar voice speaking Arabic. It was not clear how he was killed though his car was completely burnt. His corpse was kidnapped to Gaza.[49]

Eitan Levy, 52, a taxi driver, dropped someone off at *Kibbutz* Be'eri that morning some time around 07:00. Fifteen minutes later he spoke to his son on the phone to tell him about the intense rocket fire when he ran into the ambush at Mefalsim. His son Shahar said he heard voices arguing, and Arabic being spoken in the background.[50] Videos later appeared online of his body in Gaza stuffed in the trunk of a car, whilst a crowd cheered and ran after the car. It then also shows Levy stripped and being beaten by Gazan civilians. It is understood that he was already dead in the footage.[51]

The IDF published a recording of a WhatsApp call made from a telephone belonging to an unnamed victim of the attacks at Mefalsim Bend to a telephone number in Gaza.[52] In the recording a man speaks to his father, and boasts about his killings, and sends photos of the victims. The father passes the phone on to the man's mother who says "Alhamdulillah" (praise be to God). The transcript of the call reads:

"Hello Baba, I am speaking with you from Mefalsim. Open your WhatsApp, tell Wiam. Look at all the dead bodies. See how many I killed myself, Baba. Your son killed Jews! Here, I'm inside Mefalsim, Baba. I am speaking to you from a Jewish lady's phone. I killed her and I killed her husband. I killed ten myself, Baba. Ten!. Ten with my owns hands. Baba, open your WhatsApp and see how many I killed. Open up, I'll call on WhatsApp. Tell Wiam, come on."[53]

There was intense fighting close to Mefalsim at the Black Arrow Monument, a large memorial, less than half a mile from the Gaza border. If travelling on roads, that existed from the time before unilateral disengagement from Gaza in 2005, the journey on the road north of the monument is about 0.8 miles, and the road to the west, is about 1.4 miles. On 7 October it was the site of a significant battles between the police and army commandos against large numbers of Hamas fighters.[54]

The invading forces used the Black Arrow Monument as a convergence point, almost like an internal base from which they could go onwards to attack locations further north. It was likely chosen due to its proximity to the Gaza border itself, the fact it was a known location that could be easily "searched for" online when in the planning process of the battle, and its proximity to Route 232. Members of Unit 33, an elite undercover counter-terrorism unit of the Israeli Border police, confronted 20 pickup trucks worth of attackers and other vehicles according to the unit commander.

Estimates place the number of terrorists at the Monument at over 200. The elite police forces held their position and once joined by IDF Commandos "Duvdevan" soldiers and Maglan units, and received aerial support from the Air Force, they were able to overcome the force. (Further detail is not publicly known as the battle involved multiple covert and elite units of the Israeli security forces).[55] On 8 October, Col. (res.) Leon Bar, 53, was killed near the Monument and the Mefalsim Bend. He had spent the previous day with his son Omer, rescuing people from Nova – one of the volunteers who jumped into action on 7 October. The following day he turned to the road and started collecting information on bodies for ZAKA, and stopped near a bullet-ridden police car on the Bend to see if anyone needed help. When they got out the car, they were ambushed by a terrorist who shot them both. Omer was injured in the legs, but his father died.[56]

Re'im Junction and Gamma Junction

The stretch of Route 232 between Re'im Junction and the Nova Festival site to its north, and the Gamma junction to the south was the most lethal location on the highway; approximately 120 people were killed there. By 07:40 Hamas-led attackers were positioned at both junctions. Scores of Nova attendees were killed in their vehicles in the traffic jams on the highway and on the access roads leading to it. Ten police officers were killed at a barricade set up to protect them. Over 40 escapees from Nova were killed in the 2 rocket shelters, Re'im East and Re'im West, which Hamas attacked around 07:55. There were also numerous ambushes of motorists and later ambushes of first responders and battles with security forces. (For details SEE Chapter 5.7 Nova Music Festival)

A number of the ambushes in the Re'im area killed people heading to nearby bases or volunteers trying to join the defence of attacked communities and outposts. One was IDF Maj. Avraham Hovelashvili, 26. When the attack began, he was at home in Ashdod and attempted to connect with his unit, the Caracal brigade, which was fighting in various parts of the southern Gaza Envelope. He set off to join his unit. At around 08:45 he had been in a firefight with Hamas attackers at the Sa'ad junction. After alerting authorities to the presence of large numbers of infiltrators on the highway he continued southwards. He was ambushed just before arriving at the Re'im Junction, exited his car to fight and was killed soon afterwards.[57]

Kobi Shmaya 47, a truck driver with a recycling company, was driving his son Osher Shmaya, 19, an army cook on vacation for the holiday, back to the latter's base at Re'im. They were shot dead in their car just outside *Kibbutz* Re'im along 232 while en-route from their home in Be'er Sheva.[58]

Police Commander Jayar Davidov, 43, the commander of the Rahat police station, was wounded in the fighting at *Kibbutz* Re'im. His colleague Itzik Buzukashvili came in a car to take him to hospital. Their vehicle was hit by an RPG just east of Re'im junction, in the area between the *Kibbutz* gate and the junction itself. Both were killed, along with two other officers in the car.[59]

At least 29 people, most of them civilians are believed to have been killed at and around the Gamma Junction

Photos of burned and shot cars on Route 232, near Re'im Junction. Source: photo provided by MSgt. Ramo El-Hozayel.

where Route 232 meets the west-east route 242 from Kissufim. Hamas attackers killed at least 5 civilians in the rocket shelter at the Gamma junction. Limor Permuter and her friend Alina Master had escaped the Nova Festival in a car that was hit by an RPG. Shaken but unwounded by the blast, both ran into the shelter. When the Hamas raiders threw a grenade into it, Permuter, 49, wrapped herself around Master and was killed.[60] Two other people in the shelter, Joseph 'Sefi' Genis, 30, and programmer Gal Navon, 30, had been wounded when a rocket hit the car they took to escape Nova. They attempted to charge the Hamas raiders and were both killed.[61]

Two of the civilians killed near the Gamma junction were Ukrainian immigrants. Vitaly Logvinchenko, 34, and his father-in-law Oleg Lifshitz, 60, had been on a fishing trip at the reservoir near *Kibbutz* Ein HaShlosha. They left around dawn to pick up Logvinchenko's sister Katya and her nephew who were camping further north at Ashkelon National Park. The pair contacted a friend at 06:40 showing them driving down a dirt road to get back to the highway. They then sent their location pinned at the Gamma Junction but they did not pick up the phone when their family rang them at 07:05. Their car was found empty at the intersection and the bodies were found a week later.[62]

Magen and Ma'on Junction

Less than 1 mile separates the 2 junctions on Route 232. By taking these junctions, the invading terrorists hindered any security force response from the east such as police from Ofakim and Rahat, and military support from Urim. It also created an ambush for soldiers coming from east or south trying to meet up with their units. The Ma'on Junction also connects to Road 2410, which provides alternative access to the *Kibbutz*im of Nir Oz, Nirim, Ein HaShlosha, and Kissufim. This obstructed anyone trying to relieve these *Kibbutz*im who sought to avoid the block at the Re'im and Gamma junctions.

CCTV footage of Magen Junction at 07:00 shows fighters riding 6 motorcycles northwards on Route 232. Around this time a Bedouin-Israeli family from Ar'ara was heading at speed to the Soroka hospital at Be'er Sheba. Tarafi Abu Rasha had been woken by his 9 months pregnant wife, Naama, who had begun to have labour pains before dawn. He and his brother Bilal decided to risk the rocket bombardment and drive her to the hospital. At the Magen junction they came up to two vehicles that had stopped. Abu Rashed "blinked his lights" and saw a truck with a carpet in the back. Suddenly, someone in the truck moved the carpet to reveal a machine gun and opened fire at the car. It then drove away. Naama alerted her husband that she was bleeding from her stomach and they tried to race to the hospital.

They were forced to stop to change a tyre at Patish junction, near Urim, one of the bullets had pierced it. There the family came under Hamas fire a second time. The attackers shot anything that moved he recalled: "Anyone who passed on the road was shot." A bullet grazed the neck of Abu Rashad's brother Bilal. He called for an ambulance, which was able to arrive and took the 3 to the Soroka hospital. Naama survived, but the bullet had hit the baby, still in the uterus, in her leg. "Some time later, the doctor told [Abu Rashed] that my wife was healthy, thank God, but not the girl. The bullets hit her; they entered through a leg." Although the baby was born alive – and was named Na'ama – she died at 22:00.[63] At 14 hours old, she was the youngest of Hamas' victims on 7 October.

At 07:50 the Paz Eshkol petrol station next to Magen Junction was attacked by a large group of terrorists who fired on it. CCTV footage shows at least 14 fighters, in both civilian attire and camouflage, storming, shooting, and looting the store. The employees were able to hide in the walk-in freezer and survived.[64]

CCTV cameras at the Ma'on junction captured the killing of Fatima Alttlaqat, 35, a mother of 9 from the Bedouin town of Ar'ara who was accompanying her husband Hamad Abu Arar, to his job at *Moshav* Mivtahim together with their baby and another Bedouin man. The traffic camera footage shows 6 Hamas motorcycles each with 2 gunmen aboard drove up to the junction and veered right, and fired as they went at Abu Arar's car in the middle of the junction.[65] Even at a distance multiple bullet strikes are clearly visible. Another car pulled up behind and also fired out from, not in the footage's frame. Both Al-Talaqat and the other man in the car were killed, as was the driver of the second car. Abu Arar ran with the baby and hid in an electricity junction box by the roadside. He was there 5 hours, telephoning for help and watching the road through bullet holes in the door to the box. Arar saw "fighters using the intersection as a dispatch point, with different groups of gunmen passing through in trucks heading north, at least one with a large weapon mounted on the back, and then sometime later returning, and men on motorbikes carrying what he recognised as AK-style assault rifles and RPGs heading in different directions." He witnessed the shooting to death of a lone Israeli soldier in a car at the hands of 4 fighters at the intersection. The attackers also stopped 2 men driving in a taxi who were yelling out that they were Arabs. He said 2 of the fighters went up to them on either side of the car and shot them in the head.[66]

Two senior IDF officers were also killed at or near the Ma'on junction in separate incidents. Col. Yonatan Steinberg, 42, (head of Nahal Brigade) and Lt. Col. Yonatan Tzor, 33. Steinberg was Tzor's commander. They were both travelling from their homes in the morning of 7 October to reach their units and help in the battles at Sufa Outpost and Kerem Shalom Crossing (where the Nahal Brigade is stationed). Tzor heard on his radio that Steinberg was being fired on and rushed to find him. As he reached Steinberg's car on the roadside, he too was ambushed by dozens of terrorists. Tzor used his car as a weapon and was able to overthrow a terrorist truck which had been parked in the middle of the road to ambush all who came. He was shot dead while in his car.[67]

Mivtahim Junction

The Mivtahim Junction was the site of one of Route 232's first small battles and was only briefly under full control of Hamas invasion forces. If Hamas had taken control, it would stop any responding units from Kerem Shalom Crossing, Sufa Outpost and the Caracal battalion from being able to go North and relieve *Kibbutz*im there. The junction is also the entrance to the a number *Moshav*im including Yesha, Amioz and Mivtahim.

One of the first people killed there by Hamas invasion squads – most likely around 07:00 - was Zion Levy, 72, a retired farmer turned bus-driver, who was driving to his home at *Moshav* Dekel, having dropped off some Thai labourers, when he was shot dead in his car as he passed through the junction.[68]

Dashcam footage shot at Mivtahim junction, beginning at 07:39, shows about 10 gunmen in black standing on both sides of the highway. The car is fired at by several of them. The windscreen fractured with each of the many shots that hit it. The car veered across the road and crashed into the back of a black Toyota parked next to a bus stop.[69] Inside the car were 5 friends who had escaped from the Nova party. They were Dor Nahum, 24, Shir Naron, 21, Chen Ben Avi, 23, Dudi Turgeman, 26 and Dan Damri, 21 - all of whom lived in nearby communities. All were killed.[70]

Argentine Israeli Rodolfo Fabián Skariszewski, 57, had left his home at *Moshav* Ohad to pick up his daughter in Be'er Sheva when he was shot dead at the junction at 07:15. Dashcam footage from his car shows 2 gunmen in uniforms with headbands firing from the right-hand side of the road. Along with gunshot reports bullets can be heard striking the vehicle.[71]

Around 07:15 Brett Isaacson, 54, of *Moshav* Sde Nitzan set out for the junction with a rifle upon getting a call for help from a friend at *Moshav* Mivtahim.[72] Arriving at the junction at 07:20 he met a solo police officer and saw the bodies of 16 people, all of whom had been killed in their cars fleeing the Nova Festival.[73] Isaacson also began to hear shooting coming from the *Moshav*im behind him; they had been infiltrated from another direction. He was joined by 2 local men and the group of 4 tried to hold the road waiting for the military to arrive. At 11:40 a small special forces unit arrived – just as a group of attackers on motorcycles bore down on the junction.[74] The special forces troops were able to neutralise the remaining attackers and open the road. Further south on the Kerem Shalom-Yated section of 232 there was a three-hour battle, beginning at 09:00 between various IDF units and as many as 40 Hamas raiders.[75]

Route 232 was not the only "highway of death" in the Gaza Envelope. Police officer PMSg Ramo Salman El-Hozayel said that after he escaped the Nova party and rescued a number of party-goers, he drove back to the festival area via Route 234. "The road was full of bodies."[76] Route 34, the highway that starts at Netivot, intersects with Route 232 at the Sha'ar HaNegev junction and then runs north to Yad Mordechai and Ashkelon, was the site of multiple killings by Hamas gunmen. The victims included Firefighter Sgt. Maj. Roei Moshe, 36,deputy squad commander of the Be'er Sheva Fire Station, who was shot in his car as he drove home from work, and 4 early Nova escapees, Naama Moalem, 28, Jonathan Seidman, 26, Liam Shrem, 25, and Ilai Bar Am, 27.[77]

Among other atrocities, Hamas attackers committed acts of rape and sexual violence at various places along Route 232. Four witnesses described in graphic detail seeing women raped and killed at 2 different places along Route 232. It was also along the highway that the half-naked body of Gal Abdush, the "woman in black" was found sprawled on the road.[78] Reviewed and verified video footage of a corpse of a woman found outside Kfar Aza on Route 232, also displayed signs indicative of sexual violence. "The woman's clothing was pulled up, her legs were spread apart, her underwear was missing, and her genitals were exposed. According to an independent evaluation carried out by a forensic pathologist, the woman had burns covering at least 45 percent of her total body surface, along with a fourth-degree burn on the left side of the head." The burns were assessed by an expert as most likely due to a fire ignited by the perpetrators using an accelerant.[79]

Chapter 5.8 | References

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Chapter 5.9 | Attacked Military Facilities

Unlike the *Kibbutzim*, *Moshavim*, Cities, Nova and Pysduck Music Festivals, and the attacks along the highway, there is less in the public domain about the attacks on the IDF bases and outposts. This is because details about the bases themselves is sensitive military information.

Information relating to typical numbers of personnel, regularly stationed units, and the main operative function of a base has only been included if it could be drawn from the public domain. Moreover, many of the survivors who were at the bases are still serving in the military and therefore are restricted in sharing their experiences with the media or testimony collection projects, as they are bound by military classification considerations. As such, some IDF personnel have been referred to using pseudonyms. The report has drawn from the available open-source intelligence, testimony from the families of the deceased, and placed questions to the IDF Spokesperson's Office to gain further clarification where possible.

This report details the attack on 15 IDF bases, outposts, and crossings, which will be discussed as they are situated in the Gaza envelope from north (Zikim) to south (Kerem Shalom). The simultaneous Hamas-led assault on these military facilities, at the same time as the attacks on the civilian *Kibbutz*im and *Moshav*im overwhelmed Israeli resources and delayed coordinated responses, exacerbating the consequences of the attack.

The central base in the area is the Re'im Base, which serves as the central headquarters for the IDF's Gaza Division, coordinating operations across the western Negev and functioning as the nerve centre for regional defence. Its strategic importance made it a primary target during the 7 October 2023, attacks, as outlined in Hamas' "Jericho Walls" plan (SEE Chapter 3: Hamas Aims and Plans). Overrun by at least 120 gunmen, the base lost critical communications infrastructure, leaving commanders blind to much of the unfolding situation. Brigadier-General Avi Rosenfeld attempted to maintain command amid heavy fighting within the base itself, while the death of Col. Asaf Hamami, Commander of the Gaza Division Southern Brigade, near *Kibbutz* Nirim further disrupted operational leadership (SEE Chapter 5.3 Attacked Small Communities, *Kibbutz* Nirim).

The attacks on Nahal Oz Base and the Erez Crossing and COGAT Base, created further tactical challenges for the IDF's response. Early in the attack, at Nahal Oz Base, a vital intelligence hub, surveillance and targeting systems were destroyed, leaving field observers blind. As the observation command centre was attacked – and eventually set alight with soldiers inside, killing 15, the IDF's situational awareness was severely hampered. The base had the most casualties of all the military locations with 50 dead, and 10 taken hostage. At the Erez Crossing and COGAT Base, attackers destroyed the crossing infrastructure and killed 10 soldiers while taking 3 others hostage. These events rendered the civilian and military hub inoperative, creating an unmonitored entry point for further infiltrations throughout the attack.

Sufa Outpost and the Kerem Shalom Crossing (along with the nearby smaller outpost – Lollim – and Camp Amitai) faced sustained assaults which inhibited the ability of the soldiers stationed there to fulfil their operational roles. The crossing's infrastructure was also damaged. The attacks on the military facilities in the Zikim area (Masha Erez Outpost, Yiftach Outpost and Zikim Training Base), the Kissufim and Mars Outposts, and the Paga Outpost (known as the 'Be'eri protector') restricted their capacity to provide reinforcements to nearby civilian areas.

I. Masha Erez Outpost, Yiftach Outpost and Zikim Base

In an approximate 1.5 square mile area, just off Zikim Beach there are 3 military compounds. Two are smaller outposts – Masha Erez and Yiftach – and the third is the Zikim Base Home Command training and rescue centre. All 3 were attacked simultaneously on 7 October 2023, by Hamas naval commandos via the sea and in large quantities from an infiltration through the Gaza border fence. *Kibbutz* Zikim sits approximately 0.5 miles north of the bases, and due to the defensive actions of the military and the civilian squad, the *Kibbutz* was not

breached (SEE Chapter on *Kibbutz* Zikim). A total of 20 soldiers died across the 3 military sites, including a British Israeli citizen, Nathanel Young, 20.

Masha Erez Outpost

As elsewhere in the Gaza envelope, rocket alarms began at 06:29, the beach was infiltrated shortly after. Soldiers from the Masha Erez Outpost (100 yards from the beach) were some of the first to action on 7 October, when the members of the stationed 51st Battalion of the Golani Brigade, responded to the Hamas infiltration on Zikim Beach, arriving in a Savannah vehicle (SEE Chapter on Zikim Beach). At the Masha Erez outpost, another group of 3 soldiers, Company Commander Itai Maor and 2 soldiers from his platoon, Amit Tzur and Uri Locker, went to confront the attackers outside the outpost, killing 2 of them. They then headed to *Moshav* Netiv HaAsara to help counter the attack, where they were killed (SEE Chapter on *Moshav* Netiv HaAsara). At the Masha Erez Outpost, a larger group of "dozens of terrorists penetrated through the fence." The soldiers at the outpost fought for an hour until their ammunition ran out. One soldier, Staff Sgt. Ofir Tzioni was killed at the outpost during the attack.[1] The soldiers contacted Zikim base for back-up only to find out that it too was under attack.[2]

Yiftach Outpost

The Yiftach Outpost is located less than 1 mile north of the Gaza border. It was the only military base to pass a snap inspection at 06:30 just 3 days before the attack.[3] Observers from the 414th Battalion Combat Intelligence Collection Corps stationed at Yiftach witnessed the initial border breaches along the fence. A group of approximately 10 terrorists armed with RPGs sped on motorcycles, trucks and tractors, reaching the attacking forces already at Yiftach Outpost by 07:00.[4] Cpl. Naama Boni, 19, from the 77th Battalion of the 7th Armored Brigade, was alone manning the sentry post at the entrance. She made a call for reinforcements at around 06:30, when the rocket fire was already in full swing, and reports of the infiltration began to arrive.[5]

In the first instance 3 soldiers came to join Cpl. Boni. One was a soldier from the 13th Battalion of the Golani Brigade, who joined from the rear guard, 20-year-old, British Israeli Nathanel Young who was killed fighting the initial wave of attackers.[6] Another was Staff Sgt. Ido Harush, 21, from the 77th Battalion of the 7th Armored Brigade; he had gone straight to the mobile shelter 300 meters from the base's entrance when the rocket sirens began. When Harush heard shooting coming from the guard post, he and Staff Sgt. Yuval Ben Yakov, 21, started running towards the front entrance.[7] Both Harush and Yackov were in their pajamas and barefoot, having just finished a nightshift and gone to sleep. Yackov was shot and fell whilst running, and the bullet killed him.[8] Boni took videos of the firefight which showed Harush barefoot firing his rifle. He was killed in battle but eliminated at least 6 terrorists.[9] Another solider then joined, Lt Yoav Malayev who reportedly fought against 10 terrorists, killing 4.[10]

The initial attacks, where Boni, Young, Yakov and Harush, were killed lasted about an hour. Boni did not abandon her post in the battle and instructed soldiers who had taken shelter in a nearby precast shelter to move to the operations room and lock it. Locked in the operations room were civilians, including the battalion commander's wife and his two children who were at the base that day for *Simchat Torah*.[11] She texted her friends at 07:30 saying she had "a head injury, and a terrorist nearby might start shooting at me."[12] Her exact time of death is not known.

Intermittent attacks continued for a further 12 hours, but the Hamas attackers did not make it into the outpost's command room.[13] Two fighters who were on leave at the time and received a message from the company group that terrorists had infiltrated and needed rescue, arrived in their private vehicle and were shot at the entrance to the outpost. Both were very seriously wounded.[14] Lt. Sahar Tal, 20, travelled from his home near Beit Shemesh to Ashkelon to meet members of his unit, which went to the Yiftach outpost. He was also shot by Hamas while trying to help evacuate wounded soldiers from the base.[15] A total of 9 soldiers were killed.

Zikim Base

The Zikim Home Command training and rescue base is located 400 metres from the beach and 1.2 miles from the Northen border of the Gaza Strip. The base serves as a training base for the Search and Rescue Brigade of the IDF Home Front Command, a co-ed brigade with female soldiers who extend their mandatory military service from 24 months to 30 months. The base also trains combat personnel for dispatch during emergencies. Trainees at the base do basic and advanced training for 10 weeks, followed by a further 13-week training course to reach a higher level in rifles and gun handling.[16] Alongside the Search and Rescue Brigade, units from the 414th Battalion of the Combat Intelligence Corps were also stationed at the base on 7 October.

As with other bases across the envelope, the base was operating at between 40 and 50% of its full capacity, as soldiers had been released for the Sabbath and *Simchat Torah*. On 7 October 2023, 90 trainees were stationed at Zikim base and they were protected by 14 senior personnel, who fought against approximately 50 terrorists across 3 sectors.[17] Also on the base were 30 unarmed administrative staff and civilians present, including the respective member of the military rabbinate and his family.[18]

With the onset of the rocket barrage at 06:30, Capt. Adir Abudi ordered officers to relieve the new recruits who were deployed in pairs along the base's perimeter fence and sent the new recruits to shelter in safe rooms on the base. He then sent out a "Green" alert which indicated that all positions were to be manned by officers.[19] Gunfire was soon heard from the surrounding military locations (Yiftach and Masha Erez) and from Zikim Beach.

At 06:50 20 civilians who had fled the attack on Zikim Beach arrived at the base seeking shelter.[20] They had been hiding in the bushes attempting to avoid drawing the attention of terrorists from the beach which included snipers. Initially the female soldier at the base's gate entrance was hesitant to let the beach escapees in but after 10 minutes allowed them inside where they took shelter.[21]

Reports of infiltration within the internal base communications systems were reported at 07:19, when a soldier reported that terrorists who had landed on Zikim Beach had begun to attack the base. At 07:30 Sgt. Ron, who was stationed at the bases firing range alongside 2 other female soldiers, reported being under fire over the base's wireless radio network, with terrorists opening fire from 50 metres away and throwing grenades at the soldier. A bullet grazed her head, causing injury and calls for evacuation. Further reinforcements rushed to the firing range and a second soldier was wounded by 07:51.[22] Staff Sgt. Eden Alon Levy and Lt. Yanai Kaminka, who had been guarding the civilian beachgoers, arrived at the firing range and took over the positions from the wounded soldiers. Sgt. Levy wrote to her family at 07:00, that she was being "bombed," at 08:00 her mother tried to call her, getting through for only a second. Sgt. Levy said "Mom, they're shooting at me," before hanging up, and at 08:10, she sent a farewell message of "I love you".[23] Both Sgt. Levy and Lt. Kaminka were killed shortly afterwards.[24]

At 08:15 Staff Sgt. Omri Niv Fierstein, a non-combat soldier who served as a driver, was killed, after taking up a defensive position with a trainee's weapon after the call had gone out of senior soldiers to replace the trainees.[25] This initial battle at the firing range lasted for approximately 50 minutes, during which Lt. Adar Ben Simon was also killed.[26]

The battle near the firing range continued and after the deaths of several of the senior soldiers, Maj. Adir Abudi, one of the most senior commanders of the base that morning, attempted to divert the attention of the Hamas commandos by running in a "zig-zag" formation but was killed after being shot in the heart.[27] Two other soldiers were killed whilst attempting to rescue Maj. Adir, including the only trainee soldier to die at Zikim base that day, Cpl. Neria Aharon Negri and deputy commander Cpt. Or Moses.[28]

By 08:30 the beach goers hiding in the shelter near the entrance to the base had become aware of the attack on the base and the deaths of several soldiers after hearing it on the radio of the 2 soldiers who were guarding them. They decided that their best chance of survival was to flee, in spite of the dozens of terrorists attacking the base. Ariel Ein Gal, one of the civilians who had fled the beach, testified that "as soon as we got out [the shelter], we split into fives and ran to the vehicles, defining who would be the gunner (who would sit in the front) so as not to waste time. Just then, two terrorists came out of the bushes and started shooting at us."[29] One of the soldiers who had been protecting the civilians shot the terrorist and the beachgoers made it to the cars. Terrorists continued to fire at the cars as they fled, hitting the oil tank on one car igniting a fire and forcing the civilians to hide in the bushes.[30]

Ein Gal's car was speeding away from the base when it noticed an ambush ahead. As they got closer terrorists began to open fire, injuring the passengers, and the cars turned around and returned to the shelter where they remain until they were rescued at 14:30.[31] Ein Gal testified "I remember the bullets coming in through the windshield and us all lowering our heads. All those 'pings' of the bullets whistling inside the car."[32]

At 09:00 IDF reinforcements arrived at Zikim base from the Maglan Unit Commando Brigade reconnaissance unit.[33] They took up positions along the base's fence and began evacuating soldiers, including Sgt. Ron who was evacuated with a head wound at 09:14.[34] The wife of the military rabbi on base, Michal Elon, provided medical care for wounded soldiers and was herself shot in the arm, stomach, and thigh. She testified that when the terrorist initially entered the room that "[she] thought it was a soldier, that he had come to help. But then [she] looked at him better, and he simply raised his weapon and fired."[35]

Combat around the Zikim base and in the surrounding Zikim area continued for several days after the base had been evacuated. On 8 October reports of further "amphibious landings on the occupied shores" and "commando fighters of the Al-Qassam brigades engaged in combat in at the "Zikim" military site" were posted to the Resistance News Network Telegram channel (a pro-Hamas channel that collates statements from multiple groups and translates them into English). More reports were posted that evening claiming that naval commandos invaded the area.[36]

Three soldiers from the Maglan unit were killed in an ambush on 11 October.[37] In total 10 soldiers were killed at Zikim base and in the surrounding area between 7-11 October. The remaining approximately 90 trainees, administrative staff and civilians who were staying on the base and those who had escaped from the beach were saved on 7 October by Maj. Abudi's early infiltration warning and call for the trainees to retreat to secured rooms.

II. Erez Crossing and COGAT Division and Base

The Erez Crossing is a civilian crossing between the Gaza Strip and Israel located on the northern border of the strip. It was a major hub for Gazans crossing into Israel for work and medical care prior to 7 October, with an average of 17,000 individuals travelling through weekly.[38] The crossing was managed by the Coordination and Liaison Administration (DCO) a part of the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), which is responsible for implementing Israeli civilian policy towards the Gaza Strip.[39] The crossing itself is located directly on the border, with *Moshav* Netiv HaAsara directly west and *Kibbutz* Erez just 1 mile north-west. It is supported by the COGAT Base which is located 290 metres east of the crossing. The regularly stationed units across the two locations included the 13th Battalion of the Golani Brigade, 414th Battalion Combat Intelligence Corps, the Combat Reconnaissance Division, the Border Protection Corps, and COGAT DCO soldiers.

The Erez crossing has been targeted in the past by terrorist groups. In 2004, during the Second Intifada, a female suicide bomber approached the crossing with a fake limp and told the guards that a metal plate in her leg would trigger the scanner's alarm and request a personal body security check. After entering the inspection hall, she detonated the explosive, killing 3 soldiers, a civilian employee of the crossing, and 10 other civilians of which 4 were Palestinians were injured. Hamas and the Fatah-affiliated Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade jointly claimed responsibility for the attack in the aftermath.[40]

On the morning of 7 October, although the crossing itself was closed for the religious festival of *Simchat Torah*, 25 soldiers were stationed at the base, supported by 8 Golani fighters and small unit of soldiers from the 414th Battalion, which was responsible for surveillance along the border. Over the course of the assault 10 soldiers were killed and 3 were taken hostage to Gaza. The crossing itself was also destroyed due to a combination of looting, explosions, fires and gunfire damage.

At 06:29 as the rocket barrage began, a bulldozer destroyed a section of the border fence to the east of the crossing, opposite *Kibbutz* Erez.[41] Immediately the first *tseva adom* (Red Alert) sirens sounded at the crossing and at the DCO base calling the soldiers into action, however the personnel were largely non-combat soldiers who did not carry any weapons and only had basic combat training.[42]

At 06:45 approximately 20 *Nukhba* terrorists blew up the protection wall and entered the crossing via trucks and motorcycles and immediately began to destroy the base's infrastructure. Security footage from the base shows heavily armed militants in full combat gear throwing water over electrical systems, smashing glass, setting off explosions and fires, as well as shooting at security camera and destroying the imaging and scanning equipment.[43] Security footage also reveals the presence of an ambulance belonging to non-profit Palestinian humanitarian organisation, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS), and what could be PRCS personnel evacuating wounded terrorists from the crossing.[44]

By 06:50 the crossing itself was taken over and further truckloads of terrorists were able to pass through and continue onwards to *Kibbutz* Erez and the city of Sderot. At 07:00 terrorists entered the DCO COGAT base after placing an explosive device on the fence and engaged in a firefight with Golani Brigade soldiers. The duty commander of the base Maj. Omar Hajajara ordered the DCO soldiers who were standing in a rocket shelter to leave and lock themselves in a saferoom as the shelter had no doors as per infiltration protocols. Maj. Hajajara then returned outside to confront the terrorists squad to delay their entry and enable the unarmed non-combat soldiers to get to the safe room. He testified that "I was completely alone against 8 terrorists, wounded, with a long weapon and a pistol. I didn't even have time to put on a vest. I started shooting slowly, I knew I only had

one cartridge."[45] After running out of ammunition he was forced to retreat into the base's headquarters, which had two locked doors. Four soldiers from the 414th Battalion arrived outside the locked room and knocked to be let in but by the time Maj. Hajara was able to open the door, Sgt. Or Mizrahi had been shot and killed and another soldier, Staff Sgt. Max Rabinov, was severely injured, later dying inside the room.[46]

At 07:20 in a different part of the base three soldiers from the COGAT division were taken hostage to Gaza. They last had contact with their families at 07:12 and informed them that they had taken cover in a rocket shelter.[47] Hamas body-cam footage of their abduction was uploaded to Telegram and shows the soldiers, dressed in shorts and t-shirts and barefoot, being taken to the gate of the base and then dragged through the concrete wall into Gaza.[48] Two of the three soldiers, Cpl. Nik Beizer and Sgt. Ron Scherman, were killed in captivity and their bodies were recovered by the IDF in December 2023.[49]

Three other soldiers from the COGAT division were killed in a separate shelter. Sgt. Emil Samoilov had been standing guard at the entrance to the base when he was wounded and retreated to the shelter where Staff Sgt. Or Malka and Cpl. Lidor Makayes were sheltering. Contact was lost with the soldiers shortly after 08:00.[50]

By 09:30 the communication system on the base had been destroyed by the terrorists, leaving those remaining in the dark and with no way to communicate for rescue or amongst themselves.[51] Wounded soldiers were hiding in various saferooms across the base as terrorists moved from room to room.[52] They were rescued by 17:30 by soldiers from the elite Yahalom unit and paratroopers who arrived at the base.[53]

Over the course of the day, 4 Golani Brigade soldiers were killed defending the base. Sgt. Ariel Erez was wounded during the initial hour-long firefight by a grenade and was evacuated to safe room where he was then killed alongside 2 other Golani soldiers, Sgt. Adir Tahar and Staff Sgt. Daniel Moshe Danino, when terrorists shot through the door.[54] At least 100 bullets were found near Tahar's body. The attackers also fired a rocket and grenades at him. He was then decapitated post-mortem and abducted to Gaza, with images of this decapitated body alongside the body of another soldier who had been stamped on uploaded to Telegram.[55] The family held a second funeral after his head was recovered by the IDF in December 2023.[56]

Staff Sgt. Roey Weiser was killed while helping to guide a group of soldiers to a safe room on the base.

An image of a beheaded soldier, believed to be Sgt. Adir Tahar, from the attack of the Erez Crossing and COGAT base. It is understood that the beheading occurred postmortem, and was perpetrated by the Mujahedeen Brigades. Source: Telegram

His actions saved the lives of at least a dozen soldiers, according to testimony from the survivors.[57] A further Golani soldier, Sgt. Ofir Yeruchin, succumbed to his injuries on 9 October.

In the aftermath of the assault both the crossing and base were damaged to the extent that they were decommissioned and the crossing no longer functional. At the crossing all the scanners and imaging equipment were destroyed, the entire crossing was covered in bullet and shrapnel holes, and the ceiling partially collapsed with wires ripped out of the walls.[58]

Hamas captured significant footage of their actions at the crossing and the base including evidence of pillaging and looting, desecration of corpses, hostage taking, and murders of surrendered and hors de combat soldiers. Footage uploaded to Telegram showed the capture of Israeli military tanks and other military vehicles, fires being set, and the movement of terrorists across the crossing and base.[59] Also visible in the footage are the bodies are several killed soldiers, and a Hamas terrorist continuing to kick and shoot into an already deceased body, as well as images showing further abuse of corpses. This included individuals

standing on the faces of deceased soldiers and images of the decapitation of Sgt. Tahar.[60]

III. Nahal Oz Base

Nahal Oz Base sits approximately 0.5 miles from the Gaza border and less than 0.3 miles from *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz. The base operated as a hub for signals intelligence and monitoring of the Gaza perimeter fence. The regularly stationed units there include the Unit 414 of the Combat Intelligence Collection Corps, and the 13th Battalion of Golani and the 7th Armored Brigade.

The outpost was previously attacked on 28 July 2014, when Hamas Al-Qassam brigades emerged from a tunnel dug beneath the separation fence and attacked the base. They killed 5 IDF soldiers and stole some firearms. The incident was filmed by Hamas and broadcast on Al Jazeera.[61]

On 7 October 2023, due to Shabbat and the festival of *Simchat Torah*, about 160 soldiers were stationed there.[62] Most were not fighters but unarmed female field observers from Unit 414, whose task is monitoring surveillance cameras along the Gaza border and dispatching forces to tackle potential incidents. The surveillance soldiers collect information using a range of cameras, sensors, and maps, and are expected to maintain a keen awareness of every minor change occurring within the 15 to 30 kilometres of land they are each tasked with monitoring. If they see something suspicious, they must alert via phone or radio. They are not permitted to take their eyes off the screen, if they must leave, even to go to the bathroom, they have to be replaced with another.[63]

Due to their proximity to the border both were hit almost immediately during the 7 October 2023 attacks. The *Kibbutz* had 15 civilian and 3 military fatalities, and 9 hostages (SEE Chapter on *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz for more detail). In contrast the military location had the most casualties of all the IDF bases and outposts with 50 dead (of which 15 were female field observers), and 10 taken hostage, of which 2 were dead bodies. Of the hostages, 7 were female field observers taken alive. Five of them remain captive in Gaza (as of January 2025). Cpl. Ori Megidish was rescued in an operation in Gaza, and Cpl. Noa Marciano, body was recovered, she died in captivity after she was wounded.[64]

At least 4 different Palestinian armed groups participated in the assault, totally about 150-170 attackers, from Hamas Al-Qassam Brigades, PI's Al-Quds Brigades, Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and the Al-Ansar Brigades.[65]

Like in other locations on 7 October 2023, the groups filmed their actions, capturing moments from across the approximately 6-hour battle at the military base with the IDF soldiers on site, before reinforcements showed up.[66] The attack had 3 waves, the first came from initial border breach of 06:30, with 70 terrorists reaching the site at 06:54. Six minutes later, a second wave came with about 50 more attackers. Three and half hours later, at 10:30, a third invasion with another approximately 50 gunmen. At some point towards around the third wave, and towards the end of the attack, civilians from Gaza crossed the border in large quantities too. Footage shows excited Palestinians in civilian clothing heading inside Israel, towards the base, and militants from Al-Ansar Brigades, can be seen returning towards Gaza.[67]

In the weeks leading up to 7 October 2023, female observation soldiers had reported Hamas' increasing patrols along the border fence.[68] But on that day it was a quiet morning on the base. Recordings between 04:48 and 06:29 on 7 October only included commanders speaking over the radio, and not any of the female surveillance soldiers.[69] At 06:29 as intense rocket fire began, and Sgt. Roni Eshel, radioed to ground forces "4 people running to the fence, copy. I am identifying 2 armed people running to the fence, copy."[70] Soldiers from the Golani Brigade remembered that "minute to minute the reports grow more alarming and their voices rise: "2 men are doing something to the fence," "There are 5 of them, they've blown up the fence!" and after that, "50 men on motorcycles have gone through the fence!" and then already really shouting, "Turkish horseman!! Turkish horseman!!"[71] The latter is a code for a terrorist infiltration into the outpost.

At 05:30 members of the Golani Brigade had prepared to begin a standard jeep patrol along the Israeli side of the fence but were instructed by their superiors to delay due to a threat of anti-tank missiles. However, in response to the Eshel's radio communication at 06:30 they jumped from their jeep into an APC and headed towards the fence. At first as they approached, they could not see anything, and even assumed it was a drill, but when Sgt. Shimon Malka's unit reached the fence, at around 06:40, they saw Hamas trucks breaking through. "They started to shoot at us. Maybe 5 trucks." The soldiers shot back and ran over those on motorbikes.[72] Footage of the border breach shows a large convoy of Palestinian militants, over 30, in jeeps and on motorcycles. Rocket fire can be heard and seen in the background.[73]

The breaches in the Nahal Oz sector alone, which included the areas of Re'im, *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza and Be'eri saw 600 -1,000 terrorists enter Israel.[74] The invasion

was part of Hamas "Operation 402" – found on maps carried by the militants - which beginning in Shejaiya, in northern Gaza, travelling at 40 mph would reach the target (Nahal Oz *Kibbutz*) in 2 minutes and 8 seconds.[75]

At around 06:40, in response to the infiltration a platoon commander activated the sniper-sighting "see-and-shoot" system from the Hamal (the command centre in the base), but only a few minutes later the system and camera stopped working. At a similar time, an observation post in the base was damaged by rocket fire. The female field observers had little to no visibility on their surveillance cameras due to disruptions; by 06:51 a situation report is submitted to Southern Command that terrorists are in the area of the outpost.[76] The targeting of the surveillance camera was done using armed drones, filmed and uploaded to Telegram by the Qassam Brigades.[77] As the attack progressed, surveillance screens went dark, and the base's observation balloon, which was supposed to provide a deeper view into Gaza, was also out of action. There have been reports, from Eyal Eshel, father of Sgt. Roni Eshel, and fellow Unit 414 soldier Sgt. Roni Lifshitz, that there were issues with the cameras on the fence before 7 October, with only some of them working.[78]

When the rocket sirens blared at 06:29 many soldiers ran from their beds to a shelter. Lt. Yochai Duchan, from the 13th Golani Brigade, ran barefoot to the mobile shelter in his boxers, ceramic vest, helmet, and with his weapon. As a platoon commander, he monitored the radio, hearing reports from his company commander, Shilo Har-Even, who was heading to join an armoured personnel carrier outside the outpost. By 06:45, 25 fighters had gathered in the shelter, including Lt. Nimrod Eliraz. Duchan took command, instructing soldiers to retrieve their gear in groups of four. By the time they returned, the first wave of 70 terrorists had entered the base.[79]

The Nahal Oz Base shelter after the Hamas attack. Source: IDF

The terrorists are identified entering the base from 3 main points, aiming to seize the operations centre. To counter this, the soldiers split into 4 fire-teams. Duchan's team heads to the pillbox guard post near the first infiltration point, Eliraz's team to the watchtower near the second, a third team to the main gate, and the fourth to the mobile shelter near the operations centre. Each group begins engaging the terrorists upon arrival. Heavy fire forces Duchan and Eliraz's teams to abandon their elevated positions. As Eliraz's team descended from the watchtower, an RPG stuck it immediately after. Meanwhile, the infiltrators exploited holes in the cement barricades around the base, turning them into protected sniper positions. Their fire fatally wounds two soldiers, Sgt. Naor Siboni and Sgt. David Ratner.[80]

In the largest of the concrete barricade shelters at 06:29, off-duty observers had also taken shelter. Like elsewhere that day, the concrete walls were designed to protect them from rockets and mortars not physical attackers. Through the gaps in the ceiling, they could see terrorists paragliding and landing inside Israel, and heard increasing gunfire around them as they sat in their pyjamas. Audio and video recordings taken by the female soldiers show them alive in the shelter 06:45. Repeated loud bangs can be heard in the background. They passed around each other's phones and contacted their parents. They soon stated getting messages from the command centre that there had been an infiltration.[81]

At 07:00, one solider reported hearing Arabic outside of the shelter.[82] Within 20 minutes, the bomb shelter was under attack. There were only 4 armed female soldiers from the Sky Rider Unit inside with them who tried to keep the terrorists at bay. At 07:38, Sgt. Aviv Hajaj, sent the last messages received from the location to her mother, she said "Mommy, it'll be ok, please God. Recite Psalms."[83] The attackers broke through the defences, throwing grenades inside and fired at will. Eight unarmed female soldiers were killed in this shelter safe room: Sgt. Shai Ashram, Sgt. Aviv Hajaj, Cpl. Hadar Miriam Cohan, Cpl. Noa Abramovitch, Cpl. Shirat-Yam Amar, Staff Sgt. Shahaf Nissani and Staff Sgt Noa Price. and Staff Sgt Sivan Asraf; also killed was Capt. Eden Nimri of the Sky Rider Unit.[84]

Another 7 females were taken as hostages: Cpl. Daniella Gilboa, 20, Cpl. Karina Ariev, 19, Cpl. Liri Albag, 18, Cpl. Naama Levy, 19, Cpl. Agam Berger, 19, Cpl. Ori Megidish, 19 and Cpl. Noa Marcian, 19. The

abduction was videoed by Hamas bodycams; in the video they can be seen wounded, with blood on their faces, handcuffed standing facing a wall, the attackers are wearing the green and white headbands of Al-Qassam Brigades. They yell "you dogs, we will step on you." The girls are turned around and one gunmen orders them to be photographed. Levy tells them she has friends in Palestine (she was a part of a Hands of Peace programme, a non-profit peace initiative for Israeli and Palestinian youth), and Albag asks if they speak English.

They are then told to sit down, and the Albag can be seen trying to help them use a presumably Israeli phone to call someone in Gaza. Another attacker questions Berger where she is from. It is understood that the hostages were kept there for a while and sat opposite their dead friends. The terrorists are also videoed praying, kneeling on the floor, with the girls behind them. Another part of the footage shows the girls from another camera's perspective, and one gunmen says "These girls are Sabaya" - the word in Arabic refers to female captives, who become sex slaves. Another says "you are so beautiful."[85] At around 09:00, the militants later load the hostages into a captured IDF Humvee.[86] Hamas also uploaded footage of Levy being transported into a different car, now inside Gaza; chants of 'God is great' can be heard from bystanders as she moves barefoot, her hands tied behind her back and with a large bloodstain around her lower bottom, and genital area. This has led to speculation that she was sexually assaulted but as Levy remains captive, further verification has not been possible.[87]

About 10 soldiers were able to escape the attack and ran to the accommodation barracks, where they locked themselves in. Eden B said she "was covered in blood and couldn't tell which was mine and which wasn't," as they lay on the ground, not speaking for hours. Girls urinated on themselves out of fear and anxiety. Twice the door to their room was attacked, and the windows smashed.[88] Yael R. was injured in the grenade explosion in the shelter and got a bullet in her hand; she hid in another room, "bleeding non-stop, we waited in complete silence." When they rescued after 13:30 Yael passed the shelter, and saw the "bodies of [her] friends"[89] In the aftermath, a picture of the shelter from one angle shows bullet holes across the concrete walls.[90]

At 06:29, as the sirens blared at the Nahal Oz base, Cpt. Daniel Peretz and his tank crew immediately ran to the mobile shelter. Although the base had not yet come under attack, Peretz' crew which included Sgt. Itai Chen, Sgt. Matan Angrest, and Sgt Tomer Leibovitz were fully

Stills from footage self-recorded by the attackers showing female IDF soldiers from Nahal Oz Base who were taken hostage, unarmed, and in their pajamas. Source: Israel HaYom

prepared, dressed in uniforms with weapons in hand. Within minutes, they decided to leave the shelter, man their tank, and take their usual post near. Another tank, commanded by deputy company commander Ido Pe'er and Yonatan Golan, joined them. By 06:45, both tanks were en route to their positions: Daniel's tank near *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz and Golan's tank closer to the border.

While advancing, the tanks encountered terrorists on motorcycles and semi-trailers. Peretz's tank sustained an RPG hit but remained operational, enabling them to fire on the approaching attackers. By 07:45, Peretz overheard radio reports that the base had been overrun, with the operations centre under attack.

He and his crew returned to the base, patrolling the perimeter to locate terrorists. Unable to enter the base, due to the size of the tanks, Pe'er and Golan's tank also circled the base but failed to spot the infiltrators. However, by this point 70 terrorists had breached the base from four directions. Peretz's tank moved toward the base entrance, hearing on the radio that it was being hit, but when they arrived they instead found bodies of fallen soldiers. Pe'er's tank was struck by an RPG and disabled, killing Sgt. Yonatan Golan and Sgt. Or Avital.[91]

By 08:40, Peretz's tank had returned to its post near *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz, joined by an armoured personnel carrier (APC). At this time they saw another wave of terrorists, armed with RPGs and grenades, arrive on motorcycles and pickup trucks. The tank fired on the attackers, attempting to prevent further advances. At 09:01, Daniel's voice was heard on the radio after gunfire erupted nearby. Exposed while operating the tank's commander machine gun, he was shot in the neck and succumbed to his injuries. By 09:45, another group of terrorists reached the tank, killing or capturing its crew. Peretz and Chen's dead bodies were taken hostage, while Angrest was kidnapped alive. Leibovitz's body was left. At first it was unclear if Peretz had been killed, and he was only counted as missing, until footage was found of his dead body on the back of a motorcycle in Shuja'iyya.[92]

Inside the base, attackers came to the door of the command centre – the Hamal – at 07:00. The Hamal sits a few dozen meters from the shelter where the female hostages were taken. It is the nerve centre of the base, where the surveillance officers work. It is the location that Sgt. Roni Eshel transmitted her radio communication from at the start of the attack. When the attack began the observers were ordered to gather in the office of their commander, Cpt. Shir Eilat. Eilat's office was deep inside the operations centre; it was more similar in size to a small cubicle, two by three metres, which fits a desk, chair, and laptop. Eighteen soldiers, mostly women, crammed into this cubicle; most of them did not have weapons, and none of them were trained in combat.[93] Eyal Eshel testified that for "nearly 6 hours they are barricaded in a little room and waiting to be saved, knowing exactly what is happening outside. They unanimously made a decision not to tell their parents what was really happening."[94]

Lt. Duchan and Lt. Eliraz heard on their radio that the women were trapped and tried to rescue them. They had by this point be joined by Sgt. Itai Avraham Ron. On the way they engaged with a group of attackers up close for the first time and saw they were "armed from head to foot, with army boots, green Hamas bandanas tied across their foreheads, grenades, Kalashnikovs, RPG missiles, knives, and maps." After eliminating them, the soldiers were able to see the maps more closely. The command centre – had been marked in red, as had the generators and women's and men's dormitories.[95]

By 07:30, the 3 soldiers reached the Hamal. At around 08:00 it came under intense gunfire. Fifteen minutes later, Sergeant Major Ibrahim Kharuba, a Bedouin Israeli solider who was a tracker, joined them. They quickly organised positions covering the door in shifts, and making short sorties outside, engaging with the attackers. Eliraz said that the "terrorists just kept on coming and coming."[96] In one run outside the soldiers reached the canteen and found "six terrorists tearing open snack bags and just devouring everything in sight."[97] The 4 combat soldiers engaged with the attackers for close to 4 hours in total, but by 10:30 they were low on ammunition - Duchan was down to his last 10 bullets. The soldiers were taking cover behind an overturned table.[98]

At 11:00, the electricity to the command centre went out as the terrorists used a saw to cut the cables. The loss of power released the lock on the doors which were on an electric system. The attackers began shooting inside and throwing grenades. One was a dud, but others exploded. One attacker was able to enter and was killed in hand-to-hand combat with a knife. By this point the 4 soldiers were wounded from shrapnel and ricochets.[99] The terrorists began to yell in Arabic, Kharuba an Arabic speaker translated, that they were calling on those inside to surrender.[100]

At around 12:30, the terrorists decided to burn the Hamal down. Climbing onto the roof, they covered its vents with multiple mattresses and set them alight, creating thick, toxic smoke that streamed into the building. The attackers also threw a toxic flammable substance at the entrance to the command centre.[101] Maya – one of the female soldiers recalled as "people started to cough and choke…we knew that we didn't have long in that room."[102] Some tried to extinguish the flames but to no success. In an attempt to ward off the smoke, the soldiers soaked some paper towels with water to fill the gap under the door but it didn't work and the effects of the gas began to take hold. The soldiers tried to search for the emergency exits but found the door was also on fire. Seven of the 22 were able to escape through small windows above 2 cubicles in the bathroom. One was Eliraz, who was "half dead," and lost consciousness went he hit the ground, only awakening in hospital 4 days later.[103] The 7 who escaped

The aftermath of the burnt and destroyed Hamal (war room) from Nahal Oz Base. Source: Israel Channel 12

hide in the crawl space between the command centre walls and defensive cement barriers that surround the building. All others – including Sgt. Roni Eshel, Lt. Duchan, Sgt. Ron and Sgt. Kharuba suffocated to death.[104] Images of the operations room after, show blackened walls, melted keyboards and charred remains of the equipment.[105]

Supplementary IDF forces arrived at Nahal Oz Base at approximately 13:15. Gen. Noam Tibon who had gone to *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz to help rescue his son, said by the time they arrived the base it "was already burning like hell."[106] An Israeli "Zik" drone had been dispatched around 08:00 to engage in the battle but it had struggled to distinguish between IDF forces and Hamas fighters. An IDF helicopter had also aided in firing on Hamas gunmen, striking the base 12 times throughout the morning, from 09:45, but the Golani soldiers attempting to secure the area faced heavy fire, including from an unseen Hamas sniper.[107] Observation balloonists on site, including Sgt. Neta Bar, Sgt. Amir Eyal, and Sgt. Daniel Sperber, neutralised around 10 gunmen across the attack but were vastly outnumbered. They were found dead in a mobile shelter at 14:30. The Nahal Oz observation balloon, which could have provided critical intelligence, was not operational, as it was scheduled for repairs the following day.[108]

As the IDF sought to reestablish operational control over the base they discovered that in many of the rooms that had been ransacked and booby trapped. Hand grenades were placed in soldiers' bags, and sheets, money and credit cards were stolen. Sgt. Roni Eshel's backpack was stolen and her id card and driver's licence, which were in her backpack, were found in the house of a Gazan family living in the heart of the Zeitun neighborhood.[109]

Military investigators told Lt. Duchan's family that the rooms that had been targeted were those were the attackers hoped to find communications and intelligence. "One room been full of booklets on IDF warfare doctrine; the pages were all laid out in a row; one of the terrorists must have spread the pages out to photograph everything."[110] In footage uploaded to Telegram by Al-Qassam Brigades, they can be seen looting gear of killed IDF soldiers. The footage also shows desecration of corpses with some militants are placing their shoes on the throat and head of a deceased IDF soldier while another militant is wielding a knife.[111] Other footage shows a deceased female soldier on fire.[112] The United Nation's report, conducted by the Office of the Representative to the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, found that a "discernible pattern" existed, whereby "soldiers displayed apparent, often multiple, gunshot wounds to the head."[113]

IV. Paga Outpost

The Paga outpost is a small military outpost located south of *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz and West of *Kibbutz* Be'eri, approximately 300 metres from the border fence. Also known as "Magen Be'eri", which translates to "Be'eri Shield", its main purpose is to monitor the border fence and serve as the main protector outpost for *Kibbutz* Be'eri. On 7 October 2023, a reduced force of 25 soldiers and 1 officer from the third company of the 13th Battalion of the Golani Brigade were stationed there. Fourteen soldiers would be killed over the course of the day.[114]

At 06:29 the onset of the morning's rocket barrage triggered sirens across the outpost, forcing soldiers to take cover in shelters. Many of the soldiers were not yet in uniform or equipped with protective vests and helmets. Those inside the outpost took cover in the dining room which doubled as a protected area. However, there were also several contingents outside the walls of the outpost, including soldiers who were on duty in the mortar command centre.

By 06:45 gunfire could be heard in the vicinity of the outpost and at 06:47 dozens of terrorists entered the area surrounding the outpost.[115] Footage uploaded to Telegram shows the Palestinian Mujahideen Brigades attacking the outpost.[116] Rockets were still falling in and around the outpost, trapping the soldiers in position. This enabled the terrorists to attack the soldiers in the mortar compound. Three were killed immediately using grenades and gunfire. The three soldiers killed initially were Staff Sgt. Tomer Barak, Sgt. Habib Kiean and Sgt. Ido Binenstock, who was a combat medic killed whilst trying to treat Sgt. Kiean.[117]

The group's senior officer was forced to evacuate a critically wounded soldier back to the outpost's dining room, to safeguard them against being kidnapped. The injured, Staff Sgt. Haim Meir Eden succumbed to his injuries on 9 December 2023. The senior officer, Staff Sgt. Itamar Ben Yehuda would also killed later during the battle.[118] Two other wounded soldiers remained trapped in the mortar compound area, hiding underneath a Tiger armoured personnel carrier (APC). Both would survive, however one of the injuries would later require an above-knee leg amputation.[119]

A second group of soldiers, including the post commander Capt. Dekel Suissa who were initially in the protected area dining room came out and positioned themselves at the entrances and exits of the outpost to fight the invading Hamas fighters. However, they quickly realised that they were outnumbered significantly. According to the testimony of one soldier who survived the assault, over the course of the day approximately 150 elite *Nukhba* troops attacked the outpost, with many of the troops wearing the signature green headbands of the Qassam brigades in footage.[120] Later IDF intelligence confirmed that these *Nukhba* troops were from the Zeitoun Battalion, operating under the authority of Fahmi Salami.[121]

At approximately 08:00 reinforcements from a Golani unit under the authority of Lt. Tshager Twaba who had been stationed 2.5 miles from the outpost arrived in a Tiger APC. They aimed to evacuate the wounded and the soldiers trapped in the dining area.[122] Initially they fought alongside the mortar compound soldiers, slowing down the terrorist assault by destroying their vehicles and killing the attacking forces. However, this evacuation attempt was hindered after terrorists detonated an IED on the ramp of their APC which prevented the back door from opening and disabled the machine gun, trapping the reinforcement soldiers and the wounded evacuees inside and preventing them from alleviating the attack on the outpost.[123]

Estimated to have occurred at a similar time, Sgt. Itamar Cohen was shot and killed after firing a rocket towards the oncoming terrorists. His body was evacuated by Capt. Suissa to the dining room to protect against potential corpse kidnapping.[124]

At 08:30 a second wave of terrorists, equipped with RPGs, grenades, and sniper rifles finally broke into the outpost. This caused Capt. Dekel Suissa to order most of his troops to retreat to the protected area dining room. Capt. Suissa stayed at the entrance gate to the outpost to try and defend against the oncoming assault. He was accompanied by Sgt. Roey Peri, both of whom were killed and their bodies found in the evening surrounded by 5 neutralised terrorists.[125]

The terrorists then tried to capture the fortified dining room where the rest of the soldiers were, including several wounded hors de combat. After failing to break in using gunfire and grenades the *Nukhba* troops then set fire to mattresses and used them to block the doors in an attempt to force the soldiers out through suffocation. This caused some of the soldiers to faint and vomit blood, particularly badly affecting those who had already been wounded.[126]

Five soldiers left the dining area in an attempt to draw fire and enable the others to be evacuated. The 5 soldiers—Sgt Lior Azizov, Staff Sgt. Shalev Baranes, Staff Sgt. Itay Glisko, Staff Sgt. Yakir Levy, Sgt. Idan Raz— were killed.[127] The terrorists never breached the dining room.

During the attack on the dining room, Lt. Twaba was still trapped in his APC outside the outpost along with the evacuated wounded soldiers from the mortar compound. Aware that he was running out of ammunition, he evacuated to the Sa'ad junction with the intention to return to aid his besieged colleagues but was redirected to support the military response to *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza.[128]

At 12:00 a combat helicopter arrived at the outpost and had authorisation that had earlier been ordered by Capt. Suissa to fire upon anyone inside the outpost. In the footage from the helicopter cameras, smoke rising from fire outside the dining room is visible. Aware that there could still be soldiers trapped inside the outpost, the helicopter pilot only fired upon the vehicles which did not belong to the outpost, killing many of the remaining terrorists and causing others to flee.[129]

At 17:00 rescue forces from a different company of the 13th Battalion of the Golani Brigade arrived along with support from the LOTAR unit, and air support from an IAF combat helicopter and a UAV. During the operations to evacuate the wounded, one armoured vehicle was hit by a Kornet rocket missile, killing Sgt Dolev Amouyal and severely wounding combat medic Ron Harir.[130] Ron Harir would later require the full amputation of his right arm.[131]

Due to the defence of the outpost's soldiers, and because of strikes on the outpost by the combat helicopter, the terrorists never breached the dining room, and never captured the outpost. However, the attack on the outpost directly did succeed in preventing the soldiers from being able to provide a response to

the concurrent attack on *Kibbutz* Be'eri, where 103 residents and Nova escapees were killed and a further 27 taken hostage alive.

V. Re'im Base

Since its completion in 2009, the Re'im Base has been the main headquarters of the Gaza Division, whose main function is to protect all of the western Negev from attacks from the Gaza Strip. Re'im Base (or 'Camp Re'im') was held to represent the IDF's most advanced technologies.[132] The senior commander of the Gaza Division present on Oct 7th was Brigadier-General Avi Rosenfeld.[133] The Re'im Base sits on a half-mile of flat land on the western side of Route 232. It is roughly 3 miles east from the Gaza border.

Due to the camp's importance, it was often the target of rockets from Gaza. Its exterior walls and pavements show the signs the impact of barrages.[134] It was a key strategic objective for Hamas, and included in the "Jericho Walls" plan that Israel obtained in 2022 (SEE Chapter 3). One of the most important objectives outlined in the document was to overrun the Israeli military base in Re'im, which had been correctly identified as home to the Gaza division responsible for protecting the region. Other bases that fell under the division's command were also listed.[135]

With the Re'im Base blind and also under attack for much of 7 October, this meant that it struggled to co-ordinate the military units in the area and that effective 'command and control' was absent. Southern Command did not receive enough up to date information from Re'im and neither did the General Staff Headquarters at the Kiriyah in Tel-Aviv.[136] At least 120 gunmen from Hamas entered Re'im Base on 7 October. Various reports cite that 19 IDF soldiers died at Re'im Base, however differences in methodology between the IDF, the media and this report has meant that only 5 names have been attributed to dying at this base.[137]

Shortly after midnight in the hours before the attacks on 7 October 2023, IDF intelligence had had several indications that something unusual was about to take place. Brigadier-General Rosenfeld decided to alert his senior commanders. These included the two regional brigade commanders, North and South; the divisional intelligence officer and the divisional engineering officer among others. These gathered at the Re'im Base and began planning to increase readiness levels along the border. The general feeling at General Staff HQ in Tel-Aviv, however, was that they were facing a small, limited, number of incursions perhaps with the aim of murdering and/or kidnapping some civilians and soldiers.[138]

The conception remained that Hamas was not interested in a full-scale war (SEE Chapter 4: Hamas Aims and Plans for more about Hamas' deception). Rosenfeld also alerted Col. Eitan Paz, commander of the Ashdod Naval Base about the suspicious activity in Gaza, along with a warning to remain alert, however he also cautioned against taking 'unusual steps' which might look as if Israel was about to attack Hamas and so unintentionally precipitate an escalation in activities.[139]

Once the fighting had started, at 06:43, Rosenfeld declared "the Philistines have invaded". This is the procedure when an enemy invades Israeli territory, upon which a division commander can assume extraordinary authority, including the employment of heavy fire inside Israeli territory, in order to block an enemy raid.[140]

The base itself came under direct attack from 07:00 when 10 armed pickup trucks arrived to attack the Gaza Division HQ.[141] Even before that, their communications had come under concerted attack. Much damage was done, with reportedly 40% of the communications infrastructure near the Gaza border was destroyed in the initial assault. This included communication sites, antenna masts and damage to relay stations. In some locations this was done by planting explosive devices near the bottom of antenna masts.[142] Regarding Camp Re'im specifically, Lt. Col. Alon Eviatar, a former officer in Unit 8200, reported that the military's communication centre near *Kibbutz* Re'im was completely destroyed, including antennas and sensor systems on the fence.[143]

But the later investigations stated that the impact of these attacks on the Gaza Division's communications capacity were only partially successful: a small portion of the masts fell but some only tilted and we know that Brig. Gen. Rosenfeld was able to get communications out through the morning and manage the command-and-control situation.

Rosenfeld managed to gather together many of his men inside the Operations Room which was soon besieged. The base was well below its normal complement as so many were on leave for the Jewish Holiday. The attack on the base meant that Brig. Gen. Rosenfeld was trying to co-ordinate a regional command-and-control defence from the operations room at the same time that a battle was taking place within the base itself just outside of the operations room.

Dozens of heavily armed men broke into the base. That it was not entirely overran can in part be credited to the actions of a team of Bedouin trackers commanded by Lt.-Colonel Munzar Sweidan ("Aramsheh") who realised earlier than anyone else that the base itself was under attack. That morning, shortly after 06:30, feeling something unusual was going on, he notified Rosenfeld that he was going out to tour the area to see what was happening. The HQ was even then struggling to form a clear picture of what was taking place due to the collapse of the field observation system. Aramsheh took 3 men with him in an armoured jeep when he received a message by radio that there were terrorists at Nahal Oz. Aramsheh began to make his way there.

He had only got as far as the first junction, however, when he came into contact with a convoy of armed Hamas men on motorcycles.[144] "I think there were 15 or 16 motorcycles and this is where the first battle took place. The gunmen began firing at me. I saw one of them get off his motorcycle and begin to prepare an RPG." At that point he realised the scale of what was happening and knew that he had to get back to divisional HQ before the attackers got there. Arriving there just ahead of his pursuers, he and one of his men, Sharif, and the two others, took cover behind a low wall from where they could see the gunmen, armed with RPGs and grenades pouring through the front gate, and even setting up a machine gun post on the roof of a nearby shelter.[145] Also alongside the trackers were Lieutenant 'A', the Division Assistant Intelligence Security Officer. He wasn't normally assigned to the base but had been attached to it to ensure that the Ops Room didn't inadvertently expose classified information. He had no combat experience and only the most basic of rifle training. He had left the Operations Room to see if anyone had been injured from the rocket barrage from Gaza and had then met Aramsheh who appraised him of the situation at the gate. He, a guard from the gate and Udi, a Human Resources officer, now joined the 4 trackers in the fighting.[146]

It is possible that others had been the first to tell Camp Re'im soldiers of the dangers outside as, either just before or just after Aramsheh's return to the base, civilians fleeing Nova Music Festival had fled to the base after taking cover in a roadside shelter from the shelling. As one of them, Noam, testified, "We hid in there with some other people, and there were explosions above us and in the fields all around us, and then we saw three people we didn't know, a fireman and two Bedouins from Rahat, a man and a woman, and they were running down from the middle of the road as if death was chasing them. They shouted at us: "Get into your cars! Get into your cars! Armed terrorists are on their way and they will kill us all!" Noam, along with his wife, the firefighter and the Bedouin cope got into his car, and along with three other cars and started to drive. At an intersection they turned left, as they saw "about 12 motorcycles with armed people carrying Kalashnikovs" coming from the right.

Noam drove at 200 km/h and after seeing Re'im Base on his left, without hesitating he drove in, as the gates were wide open. They encountered a group of soldiers who were unaware of what was happening, having just woken up and drinking their morning coffee outside. Noam explained what was happening, asked where they could hide, as they could "hear the whistle of bullets." The soldiers took them to the tracker's room, a small plaster structure. Fifteen of them lay down silently in this flimsy structure until 14:00. The room had a key and they were able to lock the door. At one point the gunmen tried to enter the room but didn't try a second time. At 03:00 on 8 October, the group were told that the area had been cleared of terrorists, that a convoy of vehicles could leave for home, and they would be escorted to Barzilai Hospital in Ashkelon.[147] As late as 07:30, some soldiers in the base were still asleep in their beds unaware that the base was under attack. Others barricaded themselves in safe rooms.[148]

The battle by the gate continued for up to an hour, with Aramsheh's group of men killing many of the attackers. After an hour, under fire, leaving two of his men at the wall, alongside Lt. A and Udi the HR officer, Aramsheh moved back so that he could get to the Ops Room and let them know what was going on outside.[149]

As this was occurring during the Jewish sabbath and also a religious holiday, the division headquarters had a very limited team that day. On weekends, a senior officer always remains on base to command the sector. By chance, on 7 October 2023, it was the division commander himself. Operations Officer, Maj. Hanan Mor was on the base as an operations branch headquarters duty officer. It was Hanan who received Aramsheh's report of the fighting at the front gate and he recalled later: "I told him [Aramsheh] to gather anyone who had a gun, and that from now on, his task was to defend the base. I was the only one in the operations room who was armed. I wanted to go with him, but the division commander said he needed me here. I gave my gun to the liaison battalion commander, Lt. Col. Sahar Makhlouf. He went out to fight the terrorists and was killed."[150] Makhlouf was the commander of the 481st Signal Battalion.

There were several women and children on the base. They were the families of men on duty during the

holiday weekend and had come to visit them.[151] There were also about 25 civilians who had fled to the base including some from the Nova party.[152] Aramsheh, knowing the scale of what they were facing ordered that they all make their way to the operations room which was the most secure position in the base. He then relayed Hanan's instruction for anyone with a gun to come to the front entrance to the base and fight.[153]

Meanwhile, inside the Ops Room itself, Brig. Gen. Rosenfeld, was managing the wider battle. At 07:14 they managed to get an Air Force UAV 'Zik' squadron to attack the Erez Crossing which, in the first hours had been overran, creating a clear road into Israel for waves of attackers. By the end of the day, the squadron will have mounted 110 attacks on around 1000 targets, most of these on targets within Israeli territory. This risked causing a 'friendly fire' incident and there was at least one very near miss.[154]

Only at 07:43 was Rosenfeld able to contact the Kiriyah in Tel-Aviv and tell them that Re'im and all the surrounding areas were under heavy attack. He could still not tell them the full scope of the attack but asked that all available forces be sent to him. This was done but, because of the lack of any detailed knowledge about the scope of the attack many of these forces were sent in unprepared.[155] The small size of the teams sent suggests that commanders still misunderstood the scale of the attack. Troops came with pistols and assault rifles, enough to face a band of infiltrators, but not to go into full-scale battle.

In contrast, Hamas and the other attacking groups had heavy machine guns, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, land mines and more, prepared to fight for days, the Israeli commandos apparently believed they would be fighting for just hours; one said he set out that morning without his night-vision goggles.[156] The expectation was still that terrorists may have come through in tunnels at various points, not that the border has been breached as many times as it had been, or that the invaders were already in control of large parts of the area.[157]

Inside the Re'im Camp, making his way back towards the front gate, Aramsheh and the 6 or 7 men he had gathered with him avoided the attackers. Every so often he would bump into one and then it was face to face combat. He noticed that many of the gunmen were wearing IDF uniforms in order to confuse the defenders.[158] By this point there were now more than 30 Hamas men inside the compound, and he was challenged by a group of 4 or 5 of them.[159] They had, it seems, heard him speaking in Arabic to his own men and assumed that he was one of them.[160] Low on ammunition and outnumbered with nowhere to take cover, he removed his outer shirt and put back his flak jacket so they wouldn't identify him as an IDF officer. He was responding to them in Arabic as he approached them. They believed him to be a fellow gunman and Aramsheh was able to get close enough to kill them all before they could respond. Ashraf Bahiri, protecting his commander from behind remembered worrying that, without his insignia and moving so close to the Hamas gunmen, other IDF forces arriving might think they were also Hamas and shoot at them instead.[161]

At 10:22 other IDF forces began arriving. A message came across the divisional headquarters communications network requesting that all soldiers stay inside the base, as responding IDF forces were about to enter the base to drive out and kill the invading terrorists.[162] The first commandos from the 'Shaldag' unit, led by Major Ido Yehoshua, seem to have arrived at about 11:00 but there were not enough of them to turn the tide of the battle.[163] They managed to kill several, but Major Ido was killed too.[164] At 13:40 a second Shaldag team arrived and the IDF began to get the upper hand. Together with the others already fighting there, they were eventually able to reconquer the base completely, with the help of an attack helicopter.[165] Shaldag managed to drive the gunmen inside the sports hall.[166] Dozens of gunmen were in the hall – just 50 feet away from the Operations Room.[167] Aramshah realised that with the gunmen barricading themselves inside, the only way forward was to get air support. He waited for the helicopter to fire a shell into the hall which killed some of them, knowing that others would run out of the hall. From the cover of that same low wall Aramsheh opened fire – this time at the terrorists as they tried to escape.[168]

One of the civilians, the wife, Ella, of a lieutenant colonel who had been serving in the Gaza Division for over 2 years, who had been visiting on base with their children, was barricaded in the operations room for the whole day. She recalled how "from around 07:00 in the morning and until the evening there were persistent exchanges of fire throughout the entire base," and that even after the arrival of Shaldag special forces and the helicopter, "the fight continued for many more hours. Around that time, more and more men and women soldiers who were trapped in rooms all over the base start filling the headquarters. 13 cooks and drivers entered, some without a shirt or only with their shirt and boxer shorts on, the same clothes they were still wearing when the rockets began at 6:30 this morning."[169]

Also spending the day alongside her in the Operations Room was Shirley and her 3 young children. Their

husbands served together and the wives had become friendly through visits on the base. Whilst Ella's husband survived, Shirley's husband was Lt. Colonel Sahar Makhlouf who had taken Major Hanan's weapon and gone out to defend his base and died in a heavy exchange of fire.[170]

According to Major Hanan, throughout the attack the "operations room functioned very well, despite fighting within the sector and that we could hear the gunfire. We locked the operations room and carried on working." Lt. Col. (Res.) Shlomo Boimiester, the Home Front representative in the division's operations room concurred that they "cross-referenced the information [from media and civilian incoming communications] and acted according to priorities. The division commander knew how bad the situation was but calmly made decisions."[171] Only at around 18:30, Aramsheh was finally able to report to Rosenfeld that the Re'im base was clear.[172] At this point, some 12 hours after the attacks began, the families and civilians who had sheltered inside the Ops Room were escorted to helicopters and evacuated.[173]

VI. Kissufim Outpost and Mars Outpost

Kissufim Outpost lies next to *Kibbutz* Kissufim, approximately 1.2 miles from Gaza, and nearby is a smaller 'Mars' Outpost. On 7 October the 51st Battalion of the Golani Brigade was stationed at the base and outpost and conducted an extensive 15-hour firefight against Hamas terrorists and fought against an attempted infiltration of the Mars Outpost. Extensive looting also occurred here after the base was breached, and between the two locations 18 soldiers were killed.

Kissufim Outpost

The battle for the base effectively began with an IDF 'Hammer' jeep which had been on a standard patrol along the Gaza border. The jeep contained 5 soldiers from the Golani Brigade.

At 06:29 when the first rockets from Gaza started landing, the 5 soldiers left the jeep and took cover behind a nearby concrete bus-stop. They then received reports that 4 bands of infiltrators were heading their way with the intention of attacking the *Kibbutz*. The soldiers returned to their Hammer and began advancing towards the infiltrators. The 5 soldiers them came under fire after leaving their jeep to engage with the attackers.[174] Three of the soldiers were wounded (including their company commander who was shot in the head) and Staff Sgt. Adi Tzur and Staff Sgt. Michael Ben Hamo, were killed but delayed the attack.[175] The 3 wounded soldiers were able to drive back to the base and inform of the infiltration and this timely warning meant that, all non-combat and civilian personnel (the families of senior commanders who were visiting the base for *Simchat Torah*) were able to be moved to the secured operations room.[176]

At 06:37, the first wave of dozens of Hamas attackers arrived outside the Kissufim base.[177] After receiving the earlier warning from the jeep unit many soldiers had taken cover in a shelter near to the base but one soldier who had only been in the army for 10 months, Tomer Nagar, ignored orders to do so and instead took up position in a small bunker situated about 150 meters in front of the base. Armed with the IDF's latest 'Negev' machine gun with a large magazine containing 675 rounds, Nagar successfully fought alone to protect his fellow soldiers in the shelter. When his body was later recovered it was found that he had literally fought until the last bullet. All 675 bullet casings were found around him, all that he had with him when he entered the bunker.[178]

Inside the base, the Field Observers had locked themselves inside the operations room from where, at first, they were able to use the 'See and Shoot' automatic system which could aim and shoot a machine gun mounted on a mast on the border fence. They fired on the convoys of motorcycles and then started firing on tenders which were also gathering at the fence but began to run out of ammunition due to the scale of the attacking force, which some estimates have placed at 200 over the course of the day. The attackers threw hand grenades over the high concrete walls surrounding the base and made for the gate. There a battle took place between the Golani soldiers and Hamas, several of the attackers were killed. However, outnumbered, the soldiers eventually were forced to fall back to a nearby shelter and to the women's quarters. Hamas terrorists also shot out all the cameras, rendering the Field Operators blind.[179]

Keren Meir was the sergeant-in-charge of the operations room that morning and testified to her experience from inside the room. At 06:00 she had stepped outside to photograph the sunrise and just minutes after she got back inside, the rocket barrage began. Everyone returned to the operations room as the Field Observers began reporting that terrorists had broken through the border fence on motorcycles, cars, tractors and even by air [on hang gliders]. Meir contacted all the various civilian liaisons telling them not to leave their reinforced

rooms and shelters as terrorists were breaking through everywhere.[180]

After the cameras were systematically shot out by sniper fire all the operations officers and field commanders who had been in their own quarters now pressed into the operations room which was reinforced against shelling. She was informed by divisional headquarters that reinforcements would be prioritized for attacked civilian locations. Meir testified that she was "shouting down the phone for the air force. Where is everyone?" and then by a "small yet gigantic miracle," one of the cameras – that protects Kissufim – came back online. She told one of the tatzpitaniot (the field observers) to key in coordinates so they could operate the UAV against those terrorists coming towards the *Kibbutz* and the IDF outposts. Meir was joined by Hadar, the other sergeant-in-charge, and together they started "to aim UAVs at the terrorists on their way to them and to innocent civilians nearby."[181]

At 07:25, a second wave of Hamas attackers entered the base and attacked the dining room where they killed 2 soldiers and wounded 13 others. There, the soldiers managed to block Hamas from advancing further and the battle lasted for 15 hours until, with reinforcement from an Egoz unit, the base was cleared of the invading forces and the IDF regained total control of the base.[182] They also attacked some soldiers who had become isolated in a bomb shelter inside the base. Just 2 of them were armed. One of these, Yaakov Vaknin, testified that the attackers threw an estimated 20 grenades towards their position. Some grenades detonated, some did not, and a few of the grenades were able to be thrown back out of the shelter. At 09:30, now injured in the leg, a large explosive device was rolled towards them and Vaknin managed to kick to the other side of the shelter wall before it exploded. He recalled that the "the smoke was so thick and dark that the shelter was filled with darkness for five minutes." He realised that the terrorists could get inside, so fired his weapon at the door. Later he managed to shoot one attacker who had taken a rest outside their position before he spotted them. Only later, in the evening, by then with a fractured leg, a bullet wound in his hand, shrapnel wounds and fractured ribs was Vaknin evacuated to a hospital.[183]

Over the course of the day the operations room became a makeshift first-aid clinic to treat wounded soldiers. Pictures of the room at the conclusion of the battle show significant blood smears over the floor. Keren Meir testified "the wounded began to pour in one by one, each in a worse state than the one before. One dead body after another."[184]

Also trapped inside the operations room with the wounded soldiers and field observers were civilian family members of the senior command leadership on the base, including an 8-month-old baby. The power to the operations room failed after 18:00 plunging the room into darkness and significantly reducing the air ventilation system. The power cut also meant that the sealed operations room doors opened. Cupboards were moved in front of them to block them and soldiers covered them with their guns.[185] Armed with an RPG launcher, the terrorists tried to enter through the roof. The soldiers fired up at them and the attempt failed.[186]

At 22:00 terrorists were still present on the base and some of the soldiers in the operations room left to provide further reinforcements, whilst a small contingent stayed to cover the doors and try to protect the civilians and female field observers.

Egoz commandos had arrived at Kissufim at about 12:00 and were fighting within the base for hours against large numbers of the enemy, clearing the base room by room. There was particularly heavy fighting around the women's quarters, and two tatzpitaniot were trapped in their own room, having failed to make it to the operations room, before they were rescued by the Egoz Commandos.[187] At 23:00, Egoz unit finally arrived at the operations room and the base was cleared. Half of their squad (3 soldiers) had been killed by a mortar.[188] As there were still terrorists in the surrounding area, the survivors were told to form up in a single column and were evacuated on foot with the soldiers providing cover.

In total 12 soldiers from the 51st Golani Battalion, 3 Egoz Unit soldiers and 2 soldiers from the Southern Brigade Gaza Division were killed as Kissufim base. On the base only 7 combat soldiers were alive by the end of the assault.

Hamas uploaded several videos showing their presence on the base to the social media site Telegram. In one video a Hamas flag is raised at the base and another video displays looted materials that were taken from the base, including intelligence documents, ammunition, guns and other military gear.[189]

Mars Outpost

Another military outpost within sight of *Kibbutz* Kissufim, the Mars output was the only IDF based attacked on 7 October to which the attackers failed to even get access.

Defended by fewer than 20 soldiers from the Golani 51st Battalion, Company Commander, Captain Yuval

Ben Shlomi, recalls that with the first shelling at 06:30 he ordered his men into the shelter. He then noticed gunmen running towards the *Kibbutz*. He took out a jeep and went to engage them, killing 2 of the 3 attackers. However, another "convoy of motorbikes and another of tenders" arrived, and was caught in an ambush. His Jeep was hit with incoming fire and an RPG." Platoon leader, Staff Sergeant Shalom Anaki testified that "minutes after the warning sirens had gone, mortars were landing all over," one of which "cut the communications to the operations room." The field observers then informed him that terrorists had crossed the fence in several places." With half their force engaged outside their outpost, about 10 remained and these decided to also go outside of the compound and engage with the infiltrators directly. Anaki added that: "We manoeuvred towards them just like in military training. They were well hidden. There were about 5 to 7 of them. We managed to get 3 or 4 of them before we got hit by an RPG." [190]

At the same time, 5 members of their company were on their own near to Kissufim. Platoon Staff sergeant, Daniel Zeltzer recalls not hesitating, and charging forward as "hand grenades were being thrown" towards them. Five of the grenades landed on the ground and did not explode. One soldier, Staff Sergeant Bar Rosenstein, was shot during this charge.

The fighters of the 51st Battalion who fought at Mars and outside of Kissufim are thought, between them, to have killed 30 of the attackers at a cost of 1 dead and 1 wounded.

VII. Urim Observation Outpost

Urim Observation Outpost also known as the Home Front Command Outpost was the furthest military location from the Gaza Strip that was attacked. Located approximately 6 miles from the border it is part of a combined territory that includes *Kibbutz* Urim on the south side of the Urim Junction and Urim Base, a signals intelligence base, on the north side of the junction. Urim Junction connects to the Re'im intersections via Route 234 and to the city of Ofakim via Route 241.

The outpost and the base, whilst next to each other are 2 entire separate units, housed in separate compounds with fences surrounding each respectively. They have zero integration due to the highly classified intelligence work that they conduct. Soldiers from the Home Front Command are stationed at the outpost, meanwhile part of Unit 8200 (the Israeli SIGINT National Unit) are stationed at the base. Urim Base was only publicly revealed in 2010[191] and is effectively the equivalent of GCHQ in the UK. Therefore, while it was the observation outpost that was attacked and not the base itself, there are high levels of classification concerning the events in the surrounding area on 7 October.

On 7 October, 13 soldiers were stationed at the observation post, which was a reduced number due to it being the Sabbath and the religious festival of *Simchat Torah*.[192] Eight soldiers, several of whom had only begun their mandatory conscription weeks earlier, were killed during the morning.

Like everywhere else across the envelope, the morning's attack began with an intense rocket barrage at 06:29 which triggered Red Alert sirens. The soldiers, 2 of whom were still in their pyjamas first ran to a small protective shelter. When there was a small break in the sirens, the soldiers then ran to the situation room as they felt it would be more secure.[193]

At 07:26 Hamas operatives on motorbikes arrived at the gate of Urim Base but turned back to attack and infiltrate the Home Front Command outpost where the perimeter was breached with an explosive charge.[194] Whilst only 10-15 Hamas terrorists directly infiltrated the observation outpost, there were approximately 100 terrorists on motorbikes and in Toyota pickup trucks who collectively took control of the Ma'on junction on Route 234. These terrorists positioned themselves across the surrounding area, including near the neighbouring *Kibbutz*.[195]

Cpl. Ofir Davidian, Cpl. Lior Levy, and Sgt. Itamar Ayash were killed whilst attempting to run from the shelter to the situation room, having initially returned to their living quarters when they believed that it was only a rocket barrage and not an infiltration.[196] The terrorists then took the phone of the deceased Sgt. Itamar Ayash, photographed his remains and sent the picture to those in his contact list, which included family members.[197] Footage recorded by the terrorists shows them wearing green headbands typical of Hamas' elite military wing and being heavily armed with guns, grenades and an RPG.[198]

For nearly an hour, 6 soldiers hid inside the situation room as terrorists attempted to break into the room using explosive charges. In CCTV footage cleared for publication from the bases, the female soldiers can be seen crouching under a table. Meanwhile their senior counterparts Capt. Alina Pravosodova and Sgt. Maj. Aharon Farash take up defensive positions and send messages to their senior commanders informing them

of the base's infiltration and requesting immediate support.[199]

At 08:15 the terrorists breached the first door near where Ahron Farash is positioned and throw a grenade into the area, killing him.[200] The CCTV footage shows Alina Pravosodova training her weapon at the door of the situation room and Sgt. Shir Shlomo is also carrying a weapon. At the same time, terrorists outside shot the cameras. At 08:17 as terrorists opened the second door and threw grenades into the room, Capt. Pravosodova sent a final message saying, "we were hit."[201] She briefly opened fire upon the terrorists trying to protect herself and her soldiers but was killed along with Sgt. Shlomo and Sgt. Danit Cohen.[202]

Two soldiers hiding in the situation room survived by playing dead for 4 hours. Sgt. Eden Ram survived being shot 12 times across her shoulder, legs and left hand partly due to the basic first aid given to her by fellow surviving soldier Sgt. Sahar Atedagi.[203] Sgt. Atedagi testified that she could "hear extensive combat raging outside" but did her "best to focus on Eden, since her left leg was absolutely saturated with blood" and made a tourniquet out of her own shirt.[204]

Shortly after the terrorists breached the situation room, Lt. Col. Sagi Baruch reached the Urim observation post and immediately engaged in a firefight, wounding at least 3 terrorists. He was then joined by soldiers from neighbouring Urim Base after terrorists had barricaded themselves inside the building which housed the situation room.[205] They engaged in battle with the terrorists, during which Sgt. Adi Gruman (of the Combat Intelligence Collection Corps' 414th Battalion) was killed after volunteering to lead the assault.[206]

The IDF troops reached the situation room shortly after 12:00 and evacuated Eden and Sahar, who only then realised that she had also been shot in the leg.[207]

By 13:00 the area around Urim Observation Post was declared to be completely free of terrorist infiltration. In the aftermath of the battle, the bodies of between 80-90 terrorists were found in the collective area of the outpost, base, *Kibbutz* and connecting roads.[208]

VIII. Sufa Outpost

The Sufa Military Outpost is situated about 1.5 miles from the Gaza border, opposite Rafah. Its purpose is to guard the border and to protect the *Kibbutz*im of Sufa, Holit and Nir Yitzhak.

The IDF in the outpost at the time, was comprised of 3 forces from the Nahal Brigade, the Sayaret company, the 'Orev' anti-tank company from the Reconnaissance Battalion (Sayeret HaNahal) and the 50th Battalion of the Nahal Brigade. It is not currently known how many soldiers from these forces were present that day, however like other military locations in the region it is likely that it was operating at a reduced capacity due to the sabbath and the festival of *Simchat Torah*.

The first regular patrol from the outpost, consisting of 6 soldiers from Sayeret Nahal, was already on patrol outside the base from 05:00. At 06:28 a rocket salvo was detected by the soldiers at the outpost before the first "Red Alert" sirens sounded at 06:30.[209] At this point rest of the outpost woke and went to the shelters within the base.

At 06:43, the deputy commander of the Sayeret Nahal Battalion, Major Ido (Israel) Shani, informed his fighters over the radio that they were at war and ordered them to defend their sector. He said: "war, I repeat, we are at war. Everyone must defend his front, kill terrorists, good luck." (SEE Chapter on Kerem Shalom Base where Major Ido first fought before making his way towards Sufa when he was killed in an engagement with terrorists on the way).[210]

The Sufa outpost was attacked by between 70-90 Hamas terrorists over the course of a 14-hour battle.[211] From the start, most of the soldiers withdrew to two positions within the compound: the cafeteria and the forward guard post of the outpost. The 50th Battalion's mortar unit had also taken up position at the guard post to the rear of the outpost but soon after withdrew with its wounded to the cafeteria.

At the time the first rockets came over, the 6 men in the Hammer jeep on dawn patrol commanded by Lt. Eyal Klein, had stopped off for a break at the Nirim (also known as 'Dangor') War Memorial which is situated between *Kibbutz* Sufa and the Sufa Outpost. The men took cover to a shelter next to the memorial. There they heard Major Shani's radio communication and also began getting reports of nearby infiltrations. Under heavy shell fire, Eyal and one of his men, Daniel Bezgodov, ran to their Hammer and brought back to the shelter, helmets and weapons.[212]

Shortly after they began hearing Arabic and saw terrorists at the entrance to their shelter. The soldiers opened fire and killed 5 of them. This however revealed their position and there now began a battle at the shelter which lasted for two hours. With their radio communications down, Eyal was using WhatsApp to

communicate with the rest of their unit (Sayeret Nahal) and called for backup several times over the next hour. All that time, around 06:50, more and more of the enemy were arriving on trucks and motorcycles, armed with grenades and RPGs.[213]

The Company Commander, Roey Chappel, was also outside the Sufa outpost in a 'David' light APC (Armoured Jeep) with his driver, Sgt. Roni and his radio man, Staff Sgt. Tomer Mizrahi. Chappell was driving from post to post in the area and arrived at the war memorial where they encountered the attackers there. A battle took place during which both Chappell and Tomer were killed. [214]

Earlier, Lt. Amir, a team commander in the 'Orev' company, and the most senior officer at the outpost at the time of the attack, had received a call from Chappell that armed men had crossed the border fence, but it wasn't clear to Amir how many had crossed nor where. He didn't know if it was at the south where he was or further away to the north. They nevertheless went onto full alert at the outpost and got communications from the Field Observers until they were told that their cameras were down. They then also got a radio communication that men had crossed the fence near Sufa and began to be hit with incoming fire. The attackers then began lobbing grenades over the walls of the outpost. Amir recalls that he suddenly saw 4 tender trucks and many motorcycles flying past them and they began to fire at these vehicles.[215]

It was not yet 07:00. At this point the situation was that they had a small force holding onto the guard post at the front gate. Here one of the men was already wounded. The mortar team holding the guard post at the outpost's rear gate was being pressed the hardest. Staff Sgt. Eshel from 50th Battalion, had immediately came under fire as he got into position at the rear gate and took a bullet to the neck, 'I fell down and began choking'. Staff Sergeant Amit's wrist was shattered by a bullet and he was also hit in the mouth and in the head.[216]

In a small room next to the rear gate, 2 army medics were treating 3 badly wounded soldiers under gunfire. At about 07:40 the attackers broke through the gate and the men from the 50th Battalion managed to withdraw to the cafeteria where they barricaded themselves inside.[217]

Staff Sgt. Shmulik from the 'Orev' company was 1 of 6 men on patrol in a 'David' APC led by reservist Staff Sgt. Matan. He recalled seeing a convoy of about 12 motorcycles and initially thought that they were civilians from the *Kibbutz* setting out on a day trip. Then he noticed that they were armed with Kalashnikovs and RPGs. These terrorists were driving towards nearby *Kibbutz* Holit and the APC overtook this convoy to try to get to Holit's front gate before they did. The convoy fired at them as they passed. A battle developed at the gate to *Kibbutz* Holit, but the men in the APC between them only had six magazines of ammunition. Staff Sgt. Matan then received a message from his company commander's (Maj. Chappell's) APC. They communicated that they needed help, after being hit by an RPG, and multiple solders wounded – including Chappell himself. The arrival of Matan's APC alleviated the soldiers at the memorial shelter by drawing the APCs alongside the shelter so that they could give each other covering fire.[218]

Klein then spread the men he now had under his command between the different APCs and the shelter and moved constantly between them. At about 08:30, he was killed by a sniper's bullet. Shortly after this their position was hit by heavy mortar fire seriously wounding many of them and killing Daniel Bezgodov.[219] By 11:00, 5 soldiers were dead and 6 wounded. The men who were still alive were now fighting from the upper floor of the war memorial itself, they were low on ammunition and water.[220]

The men fighting around the war memorial, killed dozens of the attackers throughout the day until they were finally rescued and evacuated by helicopter at 14:30.[221] This battle prevented the attackers involved from joining the offensive on the outpost and the *Kibbutz*, which saved many lives.[222]

On 7 October 2023, Staff Sgt. 'Y' - a Sayeret HaNahal soldier - was with 4 other men defending the forward guard post of the Sufa Outpost, which they held throughout the attack. At the same time, others in the Sayeret 'Orev' company, were inflicting losses on terrorists infiltrating through the broken border fence. Slowly, however, the disparity in numbers meant that 'Y' had to evacuate to the rear one of his men who had been wounded in the hand. 'Y' testified that "The rest of the team were also fighting having suffered dead and wounded and I realised that we were going to be on our own for hours."[223]

In the cafeteria, there were up to 250 soldiers under consistent attack from grenades and rockets. Two soldiers guarded the doorway. One of these, Lt. Rotem, testified that the terrorists were just a few metres away and he could hear them shouting. Every

few minutes they threw grenades in his direction that would roll towards him and stop just a metre or two from him. Whenever a grenade exploded, he forced himself to immediately respond and fire back through the gap as he expected them to charge immediately after the explosion. Rotem was finally wounded in the leg by grenade splinters (he would later lose that leg from the hip down) but, after a medic applied a tourniquet, he continued in his position at the doorway.

By 11:00 the Hamas gunmen outside called on them in Hebrew to surrender but were ignored. At 12:15 a message to IDF Command from the cafeteria was sent saying that they had many wounded and more than a few dead and requesting immediate evacuation. Fifteen minutes later they asked IDF Command that the outpost be bombed with them in it.[224] At one point the back door of the room was blown off but the soldiers fought to prevent any of the attackers from getting through that opening too. At 13:30 an IDF attack helicopter arrived in support and begin firing on those terrorists it could see trying to hide from them amongst the buildings of the outpost.

At the front gate, in the early hours of the afternoon when 'Y' and his soldiers were down to their last rounds of ammunition, reinforcements arrived. Twelve men and women from the Caracal Battalion were able to resupply his men with ammunition and then joined the fighting. This unit also then helped to rescue the soldiers who had been barricaded inside the dining room. More support came from a force of Naval Commandos ('Shayetet 13') at about 14:30 and together these forces were able over the next 3 hours to restore complete control over the outpost.[225]

Staff Sgt. 'Y' said that "the terrorists went around like drugged zombies." He and his comrades killed 15 terrorists inside the outpost. Later they found an ISIS flag which the terrorists had left behind, and graffiti sprayed on the wall of the outpost which said "*Nukhba* were here."[226]

In total Shayetet 13 and the Caracal Battalion rescued 250 besieged individuals from the base alive, eliminated 40 terrorists and took another 26 into custody.[227] The base suffered significant infrastructural damage because of the use of explosives by the terrorists and subsequent fires. Fourteen soldiers were killed at the outpost over the course of the day: 9 soldiers from the reconnaissance and anti-tank companies of Sayeret HaNahal, 4 soldiers from the 50th Battalion of the Nahal Brigade and a Bedouin-Israeli tracker from the Southern Gaza Brigade Division.

IX. Kerem Shalom Crossing, Lollim Outpost and Camp Amitai

Kerem Shalom Crossing first began operating in 2005 as a crossing point for the transfer of humanitarian aid into the Strip. When Hamas took over Gaza in 2007, Israel closed the other main commercial crossing, Karni, which meant Kerem Shalom was the only commercial crossing point between Gaza and Israel. The Crossing is situated at the junction of the Egyptian, Israeli and Gaza borders. It screens (often finding weapons smuggled within disguising items) and then transfers essential commodities, raw materials, medical equipment, food products, livestock, fuel, construction materials and other goods into the Strip. The Crossing itself spans an area of 148 acres, almost 50 acres of which are on the Palestinian side and about almost 99 acres are on the Israeli side. The Israeli side is divided into 11 outdoor units, each of which is approximately 2.5 acres, which can hold 17-25 trucks at any given time. Since 2010, Israel has expanded the Crossing to meet growing demands. The Crossing now has the capacity to process up to 1,000 trucks per day (not including fuel and gas.)[228] On 7 October 2023, the crossing was closed for the Jewish festival of *Simchat Torah*.

Kibbutz Kerem Shalom lies 0.8 miles north of the crossing. About 500 metres southeast of the *Kibbutz* lies the second IDF position, known as the '[chicken] Coop' IDF outpost, (Lollim in Hebrew). Lollim serves as a first response/protection for *Kibbutz* Kerem Shalom. Further away, is Camp Amitai which lies to the south of *Kibbutz* Holit and across road 232. Camp Amitai serves as a first response for the Philadelphi Corridor. On 7 October 2023, 5 soldiers were killed across both locations.

Kerem Shalom Crossing

On the morning of 7 October, the forces consisted of a number of female observers (Tatzpitaniot) and 25 special forces soldiers from the "Sayeret Nahal" Reconnaissance Battalion. At the time of the attack some of this battalion was already on patrol or deployed along the border fence. Others, who were asleep, would then join the fighting.

At 06:29, heavy rocket fire began along the entire border between Gaza and Israel and also in the Kerem Shalom sector. Many mortar shells were fired at the outpost as the attack began and the female observers detected terrorists approaching the fence and reported this over the communications network.

A few minutes later, terrorists broke through in large numbers under the cover of rocket fire. Video footage from body-worn cameras on Hamas terrorists show the placement and detonation of multiple explosive charges on the Israeli fences, breaking through the fences by cut holes and travelling onwards by foot and by motorcycle, as well as cars.[229] Images posted on Telegram also place the DFLP's National Resistance Brigades at the crossing.[230] This wave of attackers targeted the Sufa Outpost and Kerem Shalom base, which are both under the responsibility of Sayeret Nahal.

At 06:43, the deputy commander of the Sayeret Nahal Battalion, Major Ido (Israel) Shani, informed his fighters over the radio that they were at war and ordered them to defend their sector.[231] After Major Shani had made his announcement, Deputy Company Commander Lieutenant Yoav Levinson, in an armoured David Jeep with 2 soldiers, arrived at the perimeter road of *Kibbutz* Kerem Shalom. There they engaged with dozens of infiltrators and prevented them from entering the *Kibbutz*. Their jeep was hit by an RPG killing the soldier at the back, First Sergeant Yaron Shai.[232] The driver was seriously injured. They managed to get the jeep back to the outpost and rejoined the fight taking place there.

At 06:52 – The military situation room of Kerem Shalom Base reported to the Kerem Shalom *Kibbutz*'s *Ravshatz* that terrorists had managed to enter the Kerem Shalom sector. Major Shani first headed to *Kibbutz* Kerem Shalom where the families of the observation soldiers stationed there said his orders saved their lives. Ido then set out for *Kibbutz* Sufa. On the way he encountered a cell of terrorists, and they engaged in an exchange of fire. Ido was shot in the head and brought to the nearby Sufa outpost where he succumbed to his wounds.[233]

For 6 hours, Sayeret Nahal battled to save the outpost, at the end of which 35 of the 50 Hamas attackers had been killed. Help also came with the arrival of a partial all-female Caracal Tank Battalion which killed 10 more of the infiltrators. The Hamas survivors then retreated back into Gaza.

During the hours of combat without any possibility of evacuating the injured, the wounded became the sole responsibility of the Sayeret battalion's medic First Sergeant Dor Ashkenazi, 21, and paramedic Sergeant Almog Oren, 21. Much needed medical supplies were destroyed when the medical clinics Ze'ev (Wolf) APC was hit by an RPG. A military ambulance was in the outpost but the keys to it had been in the destroyed APC. Eventually a helicopter was able to land in a nearby orchard and with infiltrators still in the area the 2 medics were able to get the wounded to the helicopter. Whilst attending to the wounded, Dor Ashkenazi received news that his aunt and her daughter (his cousin) had been killed during the attack on *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza.[234]

Lollim Outpost

The Lollim Outpost, named after the chicken coops adjacent to it, is quite an isolated post positioned as a first response for *Kibbutz* Kerem Shalom. On the morning of 7 October, only 7 soldiers were assigned there, all from Sayeret Nahal. With just 6 present when it was attacked. These were: Sivan Shani; Raz Daher; Ayalon Gabbai; Oz Mizrahi; Itai Ashkenazi and the Commander, Tomer Shoham. The seventh soldier was the liaison officer, Omar Alfuar who that day was at the Kerem Shalom outpost and took part in the battle there.

At dawn, the soldiers noticed terrorists crossing the border fence. Capt. Tomer decided to take the group to a nearby hill from which they could better shoot at the attackers, leaving Or Mizrahi to stay at the outpost guarding the equipment. They could see dozens of Hamas men coming at them and opened fire. After a short time, Ashkenazi noticed that Tomer wasn't answering and went to check on him. He saw his commander had been shot. At that point Ashkenazi himself took a bullet to the head. It passed through his jaw and out the other side. Sivan later recalled that he thought that Ashkenazi too wouldn't be able to survive such a wound, but Ashkenazi continued to fight.

Low on ammunition they decided to pull back to the Lollim Outpost and take Tomer with them. On the way back they came across a cyclist who had been caught out in the open and they brought him with them. As they neared the outpost they saw that every hut had been "riddled with bullets" and they realised that Hamas had already infiltrated the post. They checked hut by hut and, although the attackers had gone, they found Or Mizrahi's dead body.

The attackers in groups of 3, 4 and 5 men kept advancing. The remaining 4 soldiers spread out: Sivan took up position in the shower unit, Gabbai in the kitchen, whilst Ashkenazi and Raz went to what is known as a 'Batonada', a concrete pillbox with firing slits facing out from all four sides. Raz at one point offered the cyclist a weapon so he might help them but the cyclist declined saying he didn't understand how to use it.

Raz had been phoning Omer urging him to get them reinforcements, but Omer had told him that at Kerem Shalom they too were fighting for their lives and had their own dead and wounded. Nevertheless, throughout the hours of combat he tried to get outside help for his friends at Lollim. At one point Raz heard Arabic being spoken from behind their position and realised that Hamas had now got into the post from behind them. He called Omer again stressing the urgency of the situation but was cut off the call to deal with an imminent danger.

Omer was now in contact with a helicopter gunship and guided the helicopter to Lollim, insisting that his first priority had to be Lollim over anywhere else. The helicopter fired into the adjacent chicken coop where Raz had seen a "sea of terrorists." He recalled that, "as soon as they realised there was a helicopter in the air, they simply fled… there is no doubt that without that helicopter we would be dead." The battle had lasted for 9 hours.[235]

Camp Amitai

Camp Amitai is 0.6-1.2 miles from *Kibbutz* Kerem Shalom and approximately 0.5 miles from Kerem Shalom Crossing. It is primarily used as a logistical supply line and serves to be a first line of support for the Philadelphi Corridor which is the narrow strip of land, some 100 metres wide and 14km/8.7 miles long, situated along the entirety of the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt.[236] Amitai Base and Kerem Shalom Crossing were merged to save resources and manpower.[237] The regularly stationed units there are members of the 414th Battalion – the Combat Intelligence Collection Corps – and also the 585th Bedouin Desert Reconnaissance Battalion – comprising Bedouin soldiers. Israeli Bedouins do not have mandatory conscription like Jewish Israelis but many do volunteer and choose to go into elite units.

Like elsewhere in the Gaza envelope, at 06:29, heavy rocket fire began in the Kerem Shalom sector. Including over Amitai base, providing a cover for the infiltration across the border. Major Fawz Hussein, a scout officer from the Paran Brigade who was badly wounded fighting at *Kibbutz* Holit, was summoned to the area by Paran Brigade Commander, Brigadier General Shemer Raviv. At 09:10 as he drove down the highway towards Kerem Shalom he saw that Camp Amitai had been damaged and that it was "full of dozens of terrorists."[238] The Battalion of Bedouin soldiers defended effectively, and unlike many other IDF units, no hostages alive or bodies were taken.

Hamas video footage was quickly released on 7 October showing fighters inside an outpost post, which claimed to be Camp Amitai.[239] However, geolocation places this footage nearer to the Sufa Outpost. The footage also shows at least 2 dead soldiers, but there were no fatalities at Camp Amitai. However, as this relates to ongoing investigations by the IDF further information was not verifiable as of 31 January 2025.

At the end of the fighting across these three locations, Sayeret Nahal had lost 3 soldiers, with a further soldier later succumbing to his injuries 2.5 weeks later. A soldier from the Kfir Brigade was also killed.[240] This was one of the few locations where no female observers were harmed and the defence of this outpost helped ensure the successful protection of the nearby *Kibbutz*.[241]

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Chapter 6.1 | Atrocities and Impact

7 October 2023 was the bloodiest day in Israel's history with a death toll of 1,182.[1] By 23:30 on 7 October, 1,590 wounded had been evacuated to hospital. This number would rise to 2,741, less than 24 hours later, and by 16 October over 4,000 wounded had been assessed in Israeli hospitals. At the height of the crisis, 382 were admitted in severe conditions.[2]

It was the deadliest per capita terrorist attack since the Global Terrorism Database started data collection in 1970, with just over 1 person killed per every 10,000 Israelis. The 7 October 2023 attacks are also the third deadliest terrorist attack to date, following the 11 September 2001 attack perpetrated by al Qaeda that killed nearly 3,000 people in the United States, and the Camp Speicher massacre in Iraq by the Islamic State in June 2014 that killed approximately 1,700 people.[3]

Attacks on and in the Jewish diaspora have included the 1982 Goldenberg Restaurant Attack in Paris (6 died and 22 injured), the 1994 AMIA Bombing in Buenos Aires (85 died and over 300 injured), the 2008 Mumbai Attacks (6 hostages were killed), 2012 Toulouse school shooting in France (1 teacher and 3 children died), 2015 Hypercacher Kosher supermarket attack (4 Jewish shoppers were killed in a hostage situation), as well as 3 shootings in the USA at Synagogues in Pittsburgh (11 dead), Poway, California (1 dead) and Colleyville, Texas (hostages were taken but all were rescued).

Terror attacks within Israel have occurred throughout the history of the modern State, beginning in 1948 with the Kfar Etzion Massacre (127 dead). The 1970s saw a series of deadly attacks, including the 1972 Lod Airport Massacre committed by the Japanese Red Army on behalf of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) (26 dead and 80 injured), the 1974 Ma'alot Massacre (25 hostages, including 22 children, died during a siege of a school) the 1978 Coastal Road Massacre (a bus was hijacked, leaving 38 dead including 12 children). The First Intifada (1987-3), the Oslo years (1993-2000) and the Second Intifada (2000-2005) saw many attacks, including the 1994 Dizengoff street suicide bombing (22 dead, and over 50 injured), 2001 Dolphinarium Discotheque suicide bombing on a Tel Aviv nightclub (21 teenages died) and the 2002 Passover Seder suicide bombing (30 dead). Between 2006 and September 2023, there were 5,291 documented terror attacks on Israelis that resulted in 308 deaths and 2,209 injuries.[4] By contrast, the deaths at the Nova Music Festival alone account for over 370 deaths on 7 October 2023. Moreover, the total number of 1,182 fatalities is approximately equivalent to the number of Israelis who died in the 5 years of the Second Intifada, which until the 7 October 2023 was considered the deadliest chapter in Israel's history.

Moreover, while not all of Hamas' and other attacking groups' victims were Israeli, and not all the Israeli dead were Jewish, the vast majority of those who died were Jewish, making 7 October 2023, the largest single massacre of Jewish people since the Holocaust.

The Wounded

The 7 October attack saw over 4,000 wounded people evacuated and treated at hospitals from 7 October to 16 October. On 7 October and 8 October approximately 2,000 wounded victims arrived at Emergency Departments (ED), 630 of which were hospitalised due to injury severity. Nine in ten of the casualties had penetrating gunshot wounds, while 19% suffered injuries relating to attacks from grenades and other explosive weapons. Twelve civilians and 4 soldiers were hospitalised with burns.[5]

Soroka Medical Center in Beer-Sheva, the only Level 1 trauma centre in Southern Israel, located less than 25 miles from the Gaza Strip was one of the central treatment hospitals on 7 October. At 08:00, 23 minutes after the first casualty arrived in the Emergency Department, Soroka and other area hospitals declared a Mass Casualty Event (MCI). In the 24 hours following Hamas' infiltration into Israel, 680 injured victims were treated at Soroka, 20% of whom arrived at the medical centre with 'severe' wounds.[6]

Dr Shlomi Codish, Director General of Soroka, described one of the first patients that needed emergency surgency on 7 October: a pregnant woman who was shot in the abdomen multiple times at point

blank-range. The mother survived but the baby did not (Naama Abu Rashed, an Israeli Bedouin, who was the youngest victim of 7 October). At Soroka, medical personnel treated victims under ongoing rocket fire. Eighteen rockets targeted the hospital that day.[7]

At Barzilai Medical Center in Ashkelon, a Level 2 trauma centre, 350 wounded casualties were treated, half of whom were in serious or moderate condition.[8] At Sheba Medical Center, a smaller facility located 43 miles from the Gaza envelope, assessment of CT scans of patients injured in the 7 October attack found that all patients suffered soft tissue lacerations from bullet fragments and other injuries consistent with gunshot wounds and grenade explosions. CT scans also showed that 55.9% of patients treated at Barzilai sustained an injury to the head and neck. 58.8% of wounded victims had bone fracture injuries, 32.4% of which were skull fractures.[9]

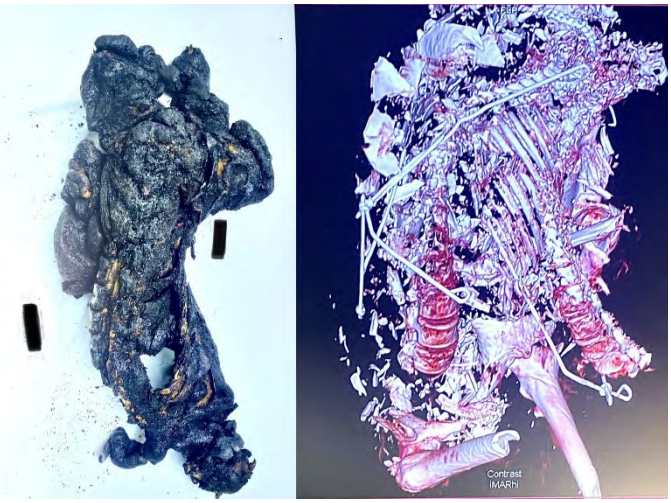
Israel's national medical and disaster emergency response service, Magen David Adom (MDA), recorded 1,612 dispatches directly related to the terror attack on 7 October. Of the 1,612 dispatches, 893 were requesting help due to injuries from rocket damage and 686 concerned injuries from gunshot wounds and other violent acts. 512 of the 1,612 dispatches were classed as severe injuries.[10]

Survivors of the 7 October attacks witnessed brutal violence, and many survivors suffered from Post Traumatic Stress and extreme trauma. In early 2024, reports began to surface of a series of suicides among Nova Festival survivors. At a Knesset Hearing in November 2024, the Israeli Health and Social Welfare Ministries reported that 30 survivors of the Nova Festival were classed as high suicide risks, with over 100 survivors currently hospitalised and getting mental health treatment.[11] A national survey run by The Lior Tsfaty Center for Suicide and Mental Pain Studies in the month after 7 October, found that rates of PTSD and depression had doubled since before the attack. The study also determined that while direct exposure to the attack made survivors 3 times as likely to suffer from PTSD and twice as likely to suffer from depression than peers who were not directly exposed to violence, the 7 October attacks affected such a significant portion of the Israeli population that it should be classified as a mass trauma event.[12]

Identifying Bodies

The aftermath of 7 October 2023 posed unprecedented challenges in identifying the victims. Recovery teams comprising of archaeologists, military personnel, forensic experts, and volunteers worked tirelessly to locate and identify remains. Two weeks after 7 October 2023, the Deputy Director of the Israel Antiques Authority[13], forensic archaeologist Moshe Ajami was called up. He and his team employed excavation techniques to sift through ash and debris, recovering human bones from burned homes, such as those in *Kibbutz* Be'eri, where over 100 were killed. Ajami noted the gruelling work of identifying "35 bodies so comprehensively burnt that others had overlooked them in the ash."[14]

At the start, forensic specialists found it easier to identify bodies that were more intact. However, the process had become painstaking as the final stretch involved sifting through charred bones, making it difficult to extract and match DNA. Other traditional means of identification, such as fingerprints or dental records, were no longer viable in many cases. Gila Kahila Bar-Gal, an expert in wildlife forensic and ancient DNA research who volunteered with' so just need to add 'who' after research explained that they "sometimes [did not] have the right bone or the right sample in order to provide an answer." She noted that identifying burned bones can take up to twice as long.[15] Most of the bodies were ordered to Shura IDF base outside of Tel Aviv, which is also home to the military rabbinate. The scale of the massacre overwhelmed traditional forensic processes, with the base only built to hold 300 bodies across 3 buildings and so portable refrigerated facilities had to be erected and ice cream trucks were co-opted to transport more bodies.[16] For the hundreds of bodies that were too burnt or decomposed to identity easily they were sent to Israel's only civilian forensic-pathology lab, the Abu Kabir Institute, for advanced



Charred remains which following a CT scan was revealed to be two individuals who had been bound together. Two spinal columns can be seen in the scan. Source: Images supplied by Dr. Qanta Ahmed on behalf of the US Shoah Foundation.

DNA and CT analysis. Some bodies were so disfigured that initial identifications had to be corrected, with body parts often mixed between victims and attackers.

Due to the overwhelming number of casualties, the likes the country had not dealt with previously, and the significant desecration of the bodies as a result of purposeful mutilation and burning, processing and identifying the bodies was a complicated and painstaking. There was also a significant time pressure due to speed being desired for the customs of Jewish burial practices and because many families were looking for answers and closure, with many not knowing what had happened to their loved ones.

People remained 'missing' for months. Dolev Yehud, 35, from *Kibbutz* Nir Oz, was initially believed to have been taken hostage, but his remains were identified within Israeli territory in June 2024.[17] The last person to be identified was Bilha Yinon, 75, from *Moshav* Netiv HaAsara in August 2024, whose body was so badly burnt all that remained were 2 teeth.[18]

Chapter 6.1 | References

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Chapter 6.2 | Deliberate Killing of Civilians

On 7 October, 1,182 individuals were killed, 41 of whose bodies were taken hostage. Of the 1,182, 839 were civilians and 65 first responders who were deliberately killed.[1] Deliberate killing of civilians took place at 26 distinct locations, such as a *Kibbutz*, *Moshav*, city or festival site, as well as along major highways (in 8 identifiable locations). This report was unable to verify the location of the deaths of 3 civilians.

The largest number of civilian victims died at the Nova Music Festival, while numerous deaths also occurred as people tried to escape, such as along Highway 232. Due to the difficulties of determining the exact location of death for some Nova attendees, this report has classified all those who originated at the Nova Festival, as within the festival's victims. This is also the case for the Psyduck Festival.

A further 8 locations were attacked but experienced no casualties. This was due to the successful efforts of the civilian *Kibbutz* Security Teams (*Kitat Konenut*), first responders such as the police and the response of the IDF. The attacks on these locations are classified as attempted deliberate killings of civilians. This is because there was evidence of the premeditation to kill civilians, such as in *Kibbutz* Sa'ad, where despite no casualties, documents were found on Hamas militants which detailed their plans. This included orders to hold hostages within the *Kibbutz* school and dining hall, including clear instructions to 'kill as many as possible.'[2] These types of documents were found across many of the impacted communities, including related to *Kibbutz* Nir Oz, *Kibbutz* Mefalsim, *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza, *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz, the city of Ofakim and related to the main highway intersections (SEE Chapter 3 Hamas Plans and Aims on 7 October 2023).

Excluding those killed by indiscriminate rocket artillery (17 civilians), the individuals deliberately killed were the following ages:

Age	Deliberately killed	Of which, body was taken hostage
0-17	29	0
18-30	392	9
31-50	231	7
51-70	144	10
Over 70	70	3
Unknown age[3]	9	1

The age group with the highest number of deaths was 18-30, primarily because the Nova Music Festival was the most affected area, with over 370 fatalities.

The oldest victim was Moshe Ridler, a 92-year-old Holocaust survivor, who was killed at *Kibbutz* Holit with Petro Boscov, his Moldovan carer, on 7 October. Ridler grew up in Romania and escaped deportation and confinement in a ghetto when he was 10 years old, was saved by a Ukrainian family, and he emigrated to Israel in 1951. The Hamas invaders fired a rocket propelled grenade at the door of his safe room, before storming the house with grenades and shooting Boscov "multiple times."[4]

Conversely, the youngest victim was Naama Abu Rashed, a Bedouin-Israeli, who died 14-hours old. At 05:30 on 7 October, her mother woke up with labour pains in her ninth month of pregnancy. Her husband Tarafi drove towards Soroka Hospital in Be'er Sheba and drove through Magen Junction where 10 terrorists were waiting across 2 vehicles. They fired at them with a machine gun and the mother was shot in the stomach. The car was also hit, forcing them to stop at Patish Junction to change a tire when they were shot at again. Upon arrival at the hospital, doctors were forced to carry out an emergency delivery. They discovered that a bullet had hit Naama's leg and while she was born alive, she succumbed to her wounds at around 22:00 that evening. Her mother survived.[5]

Mila Cohen, 9-month-old, from *Kibbutz* Be'eri was the second-youngest victim of 7 October. Three generations of the Cohen Family were killed, including Mila's grandmother 73-year-old Yona Cohen, her 43-year-old son, Mila's father, Ohad Cohen and his daughter, Mila. At approximately 12:50 militants broke into the Cohen Family safe room, shot and killed Mila Cohen who was held in her mother's arms and shot and killed her father Ohad Cohen.[6] Her mother and other siblings survived.

Hamas and other perpetrating groups executed every family member present at 5 different locations: *Kibbutz* Be'eri, *Kibbutz* Kissufim, *Kibbutz* Nir Oz, *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza and on the Highways. Sometimes, children were able to hide after the intruders killed their parents and were later rescued. This was the case for the Berdichevsky family on *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza. Hadar and Itay, both 30, were killed by terrorists whilst protecting their 10-month-old twins.[7] The babies were rescued by the IDF, 14 hours later, found crying in their cots with their parents' bodies lying in pools of blood around them.[8]

The Welfare and Social Services Ministry reported that there were 31 young people, 25 years old and younger, who had lost both of their parents. This included 18 minors and 13 young adults between the age of 18 and 25. About 250 minors lost one parent, while three had lost one, with the other still being held captive in Gaza.[9] In total, 870 people lost at least one parent on 7 October.[10]

Many foreign nationals – including dual Israeli citizens and other single nationalities – were also killed directly on 7 October. The largest number of foreign victims, 41, came from Thailand, who were in Israel working on the *Kibbutz*im and *Moshavim*. Hamas militants did not decipher between killing Israelis and foreign nationals. During Shin Bet interrogations Hamas militants said that "the mission was simply to kill...kill every single one you see."[11] *Kibbutz* Alumim housed a number of Thai workers and Nepalese work-study students. On 7 October, of the 23 civilians killed at the *Kibbutz*, 22 were Thai and Nepalese nationals. Hamas militants thew grenades into the safe room bunkers where the Nepalese students were hiding, despite their pleas, "We are Nepali, we are Nepali" and fired indiscriminately into the Thai worker residence building.[12]

Many of the foreign carers were killed alongside their elderly or unwell patients, who they refused to abandon. Amitai Ben-Zvi, 80, suffered from Parkinson's Disease and on 7 October went into the safe room with his Filipino carer, Gelienor "Jimmy" Pacheco. Upon arrival, Hamas militants forced open the safe room door and shot Ben-Zvi 3 times, killing him instantly. He was lying on the bed in his safe room. Two of the bullets also struck Pacecho who was hiding under the bed before he was discovered by the gunmen who kidnapped him to Gaza.[13] After the abduction, the militants set the house alight.

The main causes of death were by shooting, burning, asphyxiation and grenade explosions (including rocket propelled grenades). Many were shot and then burnt.

Hamas gunmen systematically infiltrated *Kibbutz*im and communities throughout the Gaza envelope, shooting at civilians indiscriminately. Often, residents were taking cover in their safe rooms before militants broke in, shooting at point-blank range.

For example, in *Kibbutz* Nir Oz, at approximately 12:30, attackers broke into the home of Camela Dan who was looking after her autistic granddaughter Noya Dan, 12. Both were shot dead in their safe room and the house was set on fire which burnt down almost completely. A few days later, their bodies were found hugging, with a large blood stain next to them.[14]

In *Kibbutz* Sufa, Bernard Cowan, a British-born immigrant from Glasgow, was killed when Hamas militants spotted him sitting in his kitchen. Bernard had decided not to hide in the safe room with his wife Margaret as he was claustrophobic, instead staying in the living room and playing with his Lego.[15] Hamas documented his death, in which there is an audible groan before Bernard collapses after 2 shots were fired in quick succession.[16]

Killing by burning/asphyxiation was also frequent throughout the impacted communities and also along the Highways. The number of fires detected in Israel on 7 October by FIRMS, a NASA satellite system, was the second-highest of any day in the past decade, surpassed only by a spate of wildfires in 2020. Most were clustered around the border with Gaza, but some reached as far as the southern suburbs of Tel Aviv.[17] In Nir Oz, 5 members of the Siman-Tov Family were killed after their house was set alight.[18] This included Yonatan, 35, his wife Tamar, 36, their twins Shahar and Arbel, 5 and their youngest Omer, 2. As the safe room started filling with smoke, Yonatan texted his sister "they're here. They're burning us. We're suffocating."[19] He then opened the metal screen on the safe room window, but the gunmen immediately fired into the room, killing both parents. The children died from being burnt alive and asphyxiating. Yonatan's mother, Carol Siman-Tov, 70, was also shot dead in another house on the *Kibbutz*, alongside her puppy Boxer.[20]

Some bodies were so badly burnt that it is unclear whether that was the primary cause of death. At Nova Festival, the youngest victim was Ruth Peretz, 17, who attended the event with her father Erik. Ruth was wheelchair-bound and suffered from cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy.[21] Her and her father's bodies were found burnt 10 days after the attack. Initially, the body was just believed to be that of Erik Peretz, however DNA confirmed that it was also Ruth. He had fled the festival carrying Ruth in his arms and their bodies had been so badly burnt that they had fused together.[22]

In some cases, forensic archaeologists were needed to find bodily remains. The Israel Antiquities Authority found remains of bodies that had otherwise been overlooked in the ash.[23] Bilha Yinon, 75, was at home with her husband Yaakov, 77, in *Moshav* Netiv HaAsara on the morning of 7 October. Their house was set alight by Hamas militants and burnt so thoroughly that the IDF could find no evidence of her death, despite concluding that her husband had been killed by the fire.[24] Archaeologists had searched the debris and after 10 months, found 2 teeth that were conclusively identified as Yinon's, alongside other circumstantial evidence.[25] She was the last person listed as missing to be identified as killed.[26]

Hamas militants also used grenade fire as a method of killing. Fleeing Nova attendees attempted to take cover in a bomb shelter near *Kibbutz* Re'im which included British-Israeli Aner Shapira. Dashcam footage shows Hamas terrorists throwing grenades into the shelter before they are thrown back out by Aner. He continues doing so between 7 and 8 times before he is killed by one that he is unable to return in time and it explodes in his hand.[27]

CCTV cameras captured the Ta'asa family interactions with Hamas militants during the home invasion on *Moshav* Netiv HaAsara. The footage shows Gil Ta'asa pushing 2 of his sons (12 and 9 years old) into the bomb shelter at the back of the house. When they are clearly inside a Hamas militant throws a grenade into its doorway. Gil fell on the grenade to take the full force of the explosion, protecting his 2 sons. The attacker checked that he is dead, shot him again in the head and ushered the 2 children, bleeding from shrapnel wounds, into the kitchen. Another of the Hamas gunmen went on the older boy's phone and into his Facebook account to post the killing of the father.[28]

Shani Gabay, 26, was the victim of 3 methods of killing. She had fled Nova Festival site following the rocket sirens and took cover in the Alumim shelter on Route 232 when terrorists shot inside and thew grenades. Two of her friends with her inside the shelter lost legs in the grenade explosion. Shani was shot in the leg and fled in a car back to the festival site and was last photographed with a makeshift torniquet on her leg. The vehicle was later attacked with an RPG and set on fire, killing everyone inside. It took 47 days to identify her body.[29]

Throughout the attack, Hamas documented the killings on body-worn cameras, their own mobile devices as well as via the devices of their victims, often posting

One of the youngest victims of the 7 October attack
Source: Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The attacked Living Quarters of Thai workers. Source: Telegram

Still from recorded footage from a Hamas gunmen desecrating a body. In the footage the attacker repeatedly shoots the individual on the ground, who is motionless and understood as deceased. He then proceeds to stand on him. Source: Hamas Telegram

the footage onto Telegram or other social media sites. In *Kibbutz* Holit, Hamas gunmen broke into the home of Adi Vital-Kaploun who was looking after her 4-year old son and 3 month old baby. After killing Kaploun, the gunmen filmed themselves putting shoes on the infant boy and rocking the baby in its crib, later posted online by Hamas.[30] They then took the children hostage and booby-trapped their mother's body.[31]

In audio captured during an attack on the Mefalsim Bend, a Hamas militant used the phone of a dead women to contact his father and tell him how many Jews he had killed. He says: "Hello Baba, I am speaking with you from Mefalsim. Open your WhatsApp, tell Wiam. Look at all the dead bodies. See how many I killed myself, Baba. Your son killed Jews! Here, I'm inside Mefalsim, Baba. I am speaking to you from a Jewish lady's phone. I killed her and I killed her husband. I killed ten myself, Baba. Ten!. Ten with my owns hands. Baba, open your WhatsApp and see how many I killed".[32] Footage captured throughout the day frequently showed Hamas militants and other attacking groups celebrating the killings.

A picture of the safe room of Adi Vital-Kaploun after it was cleared days after the attack. Her body was booby trapped, as was the entrance to the safe room. The Hebrew word for grenade is written on the wall with an arrow pointing to it. Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

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Chapter 6.3 | Hostage Taking and Abuse of Hostages

As part of the 7 October attacks Hamas abducted 251 hostages back to Gaza. Of these 210 were abducted alive and 41 had their bodies abducted after they had been killed.

Of the 210 hostages who were kidnapped alive, 176 held Israeli nationality (51 of these were dual nationals and held citizenship from 14 different countries, including 2 Britons). The remaining hostages who were kidnapped alive included Thai, Philippine, Nepalese and American nationals. Of the 210 hostages taken alive, 197 were civilians and 13 were military personnel.

In the aftermath of the assault, a manual entitled "How to take captives" was found indicating that hostage taking had always been an intended part of the battle plan for Hamas. This manual included instructions on separating different groups of hostages and methods to control them.[1] This intent was reconfirmed in statements made by senior Hamas officials on 8 October: "We planned and expected to win; enter the settlements and get what we wanted and take hostages." [2]

During the hostage taking process, several of the hostages were subject to abuse captured in video footage. The abuse included both physical assault, verbal abuse, sexual assault and humiliating and degrading treatment. Based on the testimony and medical assessments of hostages who have been released, the abuse of hostages also continued during their time in captivity. This abuse has included sunlight deprivation, starvation, binding, beatings, sexual abuse, and other degrading and humiliating treatment.[3] Further details of this however are beyond the scope of this report.

A total of 210 men, women and children were taken hostage alive from the following locations:

- *75 civilians were kidnapped alive from Kibbutz Nir Oz*
- *34 civilians were kidnapped alive from the Nova Festival* [4]
- *27 civilians were kidnapped alive from Kibbutz Be'eri*
- *20 civilians were kidnapped alive from Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
- *8 military personnel were kidnapped alive from the Nahal Oz Base*
- *7 civilians were kidnapped alive from Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
- *6 civilians were kidnapped alive from Kibbutz Holit*
- *5 civilians were kidnapped alive from Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak*
- *5 civilians and 1 military personnel were kidnapped alive from Kibbutz Nirim*
- *5 civilians were kidnapped alive from Kibbutz Re'im*
- *5 civilians were kidnapped alive from Moshav Yesha and Mivtahim*
- *3 military personnel were kidnapped alive from COGAT Base/Erez Crossing*
- *3 civilians were kidnapped alive from unknown locations and have been classified as kidnapped from the Gaza envelope*
- *2 civilians were kidnapped alive from Kibbutz Alumim*
- *1 civilian was kidnapped alive from Kibbutz Kissufim*
- *1 civilian was kidnapped alive from Kibbutz Nir Am*
- *1 civilian was kidnapped alive from Kibbutz Magen*
- *1 military personnel was kidnapped alive from the Nir Oz Outpost.*

Of those kidnapped alive, 35 were aged 0-17, with the youngest hostage taken being Kfir Bibas at 9-months-old. There were 70 hostages kidnapped alive aged 18-30, 45 were aged between 31 and 50-years-old, 26 were aged between 51 and 70-years-old, and 24 individuals were over the age of 70. The oldest hostage taken was Shlomo Mantzour, 85. The ages of 10 individuals, all foreign nationals, have not been released publicly. Of the youngest hostages some were taken without a parent or guardian. Avigail Idan was 3 years old when she was kidnapped to Gaza, after both of her parents were killed, and celebrated her 4th birthday in captivity before being released as part of the November 2023 ceasefire.[5]

Of the 210 hostages kidnapped alive, 119 were male and 91 were women. Women and children (children aged 0-17) accounted for 102 of the 210 hostages taken alive, nearly half.

Across multiple locations terrorists broke into homes within *Kibbutz* communities, killing and kidnapping multiple family members. This occurred across 7 distinct locations (*Kibbutz* Nir Oz, *Kibbutz* Holit, *Kibbutz* Be'eri,

Kibbutz Kfar Aza, *Kibbutz* Nirim, *Kibbutz* Nir Yitzhak and *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz) and impacted 44 families. Family members were often forced to witness the death of their loved ones before being taken hostage. In *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza, terrorists broke into the home of Nadav and Chen Goldstein who were hiding with their 4 children, Yam, 20, Agam, 17, Gal, 11, and Tal, 9.[6]

The gunmen immediately shot their father, Nadav and instructed the remaining family members to step over his body and exit the house. Whilst doing so, the eldest daughter, Yam, upon seeing her father, fainted. As her mother ran back in to check on her condition, she saw she had been shot in the face.[7] The intruders then abducted the mother and her 3 surviving children to Gaza. The family was released 5 weeks later in the November 2023 ceasefire.[8]

The kidnapping of individuals was captured on various CCTV cameras, as well as body-cam footage taken by Hamas terrorists and operatives from other militant groups and later uploaded to social media sites including Telegram.

In a video uploaded to the Bader12000 Telegram channel, 2 women and 2 men can be seen bound and being forced to leave an unidentified *Kibbutz*. The 4 individuals are in various states of undress and all appear to be barefoot whilst surrounded by at least 8 heavily armed individuals in military combat gear.[9] Another video examined by the Commission of Inquiry submitted to the UN Human Rights Council provides an example of verbal abuse. In the video a barefoot 57-year-old woman is taken from *Kibbutz* Be'eri and she is seen "surrounded by 4 unarmed men in civilian clothes, walking and cycling. In the video, the abductors call her "dog" while passing by another armed militant waiting on the other side of the fence."[10]

Noa Argamani was kidnapped from the Nova Festival alongside her boyfriend Avinatan Or. In a video published by Hamas, Noa can be seen being taken away on the back of a motorcycle whilst pleading "Don't kill me!" and her arms outstretched towards her boyfriend who is being marched on foot.[11] Both are surrounded by a combination of armed and unarmed men, including some wearing bulletproof vests and warning balaclavas. In footage taken later in the day, her head is being restrained and covered in a black bag.[12]

Also kidnapped from the Nova Festival was Evyatar David. In a video uploaded to the Al-Qassam Telegram channel, Evyatar can be seen shirtless with his hands tied behind his back using a plastic zip tie, whilst a Hamas operative wearing a balaclava and carrying a semi-automatic rifle restrains him around his neck and drags him away.[13] There was video footage captured of Nova escapee, American Israeli Hersh Goldberg-Polin being put in the back of a van after his left arm was blown off by a grenade that had been thrown into the Route 232 Re'im West Bomb Shelter he had been hiding inside.[14]

Other video footage captures abuse of hostages taking place during their kidnapping. In one video Yarden Bibas (who was kidnapped from *Kibbutz* Nir Oz) can be seen on the back of a motorcycle surrounded by mostly unarmed Gazan civilians, who then descend on the motorcycle and beat him, with Yarden's face and hands covered in blood.[15] Footage from earlier in the day showed his wife Shiri and their two young children Kfir and Ariel after being taken from their home in *Kibbutz* Nir Oz. Shiri is visibly distressed whilst holding onto her two young children as terrorists instruct her where to go.[16]

Amit Soussana, who was kidnapped from Kfar Aza and released during the November Ceasefire, testified that when she was kidnapped she was surrounded by terrorists armed with machetes and rifles. She also testified that she was grabbed by 4 men, one of whom punched her in the eye and split her lip, whilst another lifted up her shirt and touched her whilst choking her. She also revealed that her hands were handcuffed so tightly behind her back that her left side was nearly dislocated, whilst her legs were also tied up and she was dragged face down on the ground.[17]

The kidnapping and abuse of several Thai hostages was also captured on video uploaded to Telegram. In one example a Thai individual is seen being taken on a motorbike whilst militants and Gazan civilians gather around and hit him, with blood visible on his neck.[18] In photographs taken of hostages from *Kibbutz* Re'im, the 4 Thai hostages, Nattaphon Onkaew, Anucha Angkaew, Khomkrit Chombua, and Manee Jirachat, are pictured alongside Liam Or, who is shirtless, face down in a sandy room, with their hands bound whilst Hamas terrorists point semi-automatic rifles at them.[19]

Hamas also published videos of the kidnapping of several military hostages. Soldier Nimrod Cohen can be seen being dragged away by an armed terrorist near the Nir Oz Outpost, as the deceased body of a member of his tank unit lies on the ground.[20] All 4 members of the tank unit were kidnapped, but the other 3 soldiers were determined by the IDF to have been deceased at the point of kidnapping. At the Nahal Oz Base, 7 unarmed female soldiers from the surveillance 414th

Battalion Combat Intelligence Corps were kidnapped. One video captures Liri Albag, Agam Berger and Karina Ariev in the back of a truck wearing pyjamas, with one the girls lying down with visible blood on her face and hair.[21] Hamas also published videos which indicated abuse of military prisoners and *hors de combat.*

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Chapter 6.4 | Kidnapping of Corpses

Of the 251 hostages abducted on 7 October, 41 of these were kidnapped bodies, with the victims having been killed during the attacks and their bodies abducted to Gaza. Initially, several of these individuals were believed to have been taken alive but upon reviewing available intelligence, including self-recorded videos uploaded by Hamas and other militant groups, the IDF and military rabbinate informed the respective families that their relatives were no longer alive at the point of kidnapping.

The choice to kidnap bodies was intentional and included within specific plans drafted by Hamas relating to the taking of hostages, as bodies are also considered as part of hostage negotiations by the Israeli government.[1] Senior IDF officials have also stated that they have intelligence which indicated that Hamas operatives received money for bringing whole bodies and partial remains back to Gaza.[2] The kidnapping of bodies also increased the likelihood of corpse desecration both in terms of natural degradation and purposefully inflicted post-mortem harm and therefore could also be considered as a violation of the personal dignity of the deceased.

It also intervened in the right of the deceased and their family to engage in the rights of freedom of religion and belief of burial practices, an act of both religious significance and one that has an important impact of psychological welfare. Jewish and Islamic burial practices both prioritise swift burial and so the kidnapping of a body prevented the ability of the family to observe traditional mourning practices.[3] Even in cases when the military rabbinate has declared that the individual is deceased and given permission for the family to conduct burial rites and enter the mourning period, several families have stated they were unwilling to do so without a physical body.[4]

Of the 41 kidnapped bodies, 29 were civilians, 11 were military personnel, one was a first responder. Of these individuals 9 were dual Israeli nationals and 4 were foreign nationals from Mexico, Tanzania and Thailand respectively.[5] They have been classified as kidnapped from the following locations:

- *9 civilians from the Nova Festival (the majority of these were not kidnapped from the festival site but have been classified as Nova victims in the report's methodology)*
- *7 civilians from Kibbutz Nir Oz*
- *6 civilians from Kibbutz Be'eri*
- *3 military from Kibbutz Nirim*
- *3 military from the Nir Oz Military Outpost*
- *3 civilians from Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak*
- *3 civilians and 2 military from the Highway*
- *2 military from the Nahal Oz Base*
- *1 first responder from Kibbutz Alumim*
- *1 civilian and 1 military from Kibbutz Nahal Oz.*

The evidence relating the kidnapping of bodies was drawn from self-recorded Hamas footage later uploaded to social media sites including Telegram. These images and videos also showed instances of desecration to the bodies and humiliating behaviour that violated the personal dignity of the deceased.

In one example images showed an unidentified body tied to the back of a motorcycle, with the same body later pictured inside Gaza with Gazan civilians celebrating around it. The images were uploaded to Telegram with the caption "This is Abu Fulan, he brought the body of a settler to feed to his dogs."[6] Also uploaded to Telegram was the video of an unidentified Israeli individual on the back of a golf cart with visible blood on the upper body, which is unresponsive, surrounded by armed and unarmed individuals.[7]

In a series of video and photos uploaded to the Telegram channel "Resistance News Network" with the caption "Resistance fighters return to #Gaza with the bodies of IDF soldiers after infiltrating settlements" the body of an Israeli soldier is shown with visible gunshot wounds to the head and blood on his uniform being pulled from a car before a large crowd of armed militants and unarmed civilians surround and kick the body.[8]

In images from *Kibbutz* Be'eri, the body of Nova Festival attendee Yonatan Samareno can be seen being carried away by two individuals, one of whom is armed.[9] It was later revealed that one of the individuals moving his body was an UNRWA social worker, Faisal Ali Mussalem al-Naami.[10]

The kidnapping of Shani Louk's body from the Nova Festival was captured in videos that were amongst the first to achieve virality, gaining increasing awareness after freelance photographers sold images to the Associated Press.[11] In videos Louk is face-down and partially clothed in the back of a truck underneath the legs of armed militants. Her body is unresponsive, and her leg is at an unnatural angle. Armed Hamas operatives are seen holding onto her dreadlocks, which appear blood-matted indicating a severe head injury which matches the discovery of skull fragments that were found in Israel, as civilians spit on her body as it arrives in Gaza.[12]

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Chapter 6.5 | Killing of Hors de Combat and Abuse of Military Prisoners

The attacks on 7 October 2023 also involved incidents directed specifically on Israeli military bases and personnel in southern Israel. Notably, of the 210 abducted hostages taken alive on 7 October, 13 were IDF military personnel taken from the Erez Crossing/COGAT Base, Nahal Oz Outpost, Nir Oz Outpost and *Kibbutz* Nirim. The IDF hostages include Israeli nationals and dual nationals from the USA, South Africa and Argentina. An additional 11 IDF soldiers' bodies were also taken directly from IDF bases into Gaza.

Extensive evidence was captured by CCTV footage, as well as by the terrorists themselves using body cameras as they captured hostages, including those on IDF bases. This footage was later uploaded to the terrorists' individual media sites, Telegram channels, and other social media outlets.

At Erez Crossing and the nearby COGAT base, most of the soldiers present on the base and crossing were not combat soldiers, and did not carry weapons or have any specialised combat training other than what is learned in IDF basic training.[1] In the footage captured by Hamas' Al-Qassam Brigades at Erez Crossing, 3 non-combat soldiers – Nik Beizer, Tamir Nimrodi, and Ron Scherman – were filmed being taken hostage. In the footage, collected from the SerajSat channel, all three soldiers are not in uniform, are beaten on the head and kicked, and led out of the base by force walking barefoot.[2]

At the Nahal Oz Base, a total of 8 military prisoners were taken alive – Liri Albag, Matan Angrest, Karina Ariev, Agam Berger, Daniella Gilboa, Naama Levy, Noa Marchiano, and Daniel Perez.

In a video uploaded to Telegram channel Katiba Al-Qassam, Nahal Oz base was shown being breached by Hamas Al-Qassam fighters, bodies of IDF soldiers were shown, and the last 30 seconds featured most of the female soldiers taken hostage.[3] The soldiers showed signs of abuse, with the women stood facing a wall with their hands bound with zip ties. They had visible blood on their faces and clothes whilst heavily armed terrorists told them "They're beautiful". The 5 girls were also shown being forced into an IDF jeep to be taken to Gaza, with one being carried and another hopping on an injured leg.[4] In other videos soldier Naama Levy was seen being dragged by her hair into a van with blood on her trousers in the crotch area, indicating potential sexual violence had occurred.[5]

Moreover, footage revealed that most female soldiers at the Nahal Oz base and at Urim Observation outpost were unarmed and dressed in civilian clothes, including pyjamas, and/or showing signs that they could not defend themselves during the attack.

At Nahal Oz base, videos recovered from the body cameras of the gunmen show 3 armed militants enter an office where a wounded, unarmed woman in white pyjamas hides under a desk, visibly bleeding. After discussing the presence of three women, one militant shoots the woman under the desk. The second video continues, capturing additional gunfire, screaming, and the silence after another gunshot. The woman in pyjamas is seen dead, alongside another body in camouflage. A militant remarks, "There is a fourth one that we did not kill," before the video ends.[6]

In the attack at Urim Observation Outpost, the majority of female soldiers who were killed in the situation room were unarmed and in their pyjamas. In CCTV footage and body camera footage from the terrorists, taken from the attack on Urim, the female soldiers can be seen hiding under tables.[7]

At Nir Oz Outpost, 4 IDF soldiers were taken hostage – Nimrod Cohen, Shaked Dahan, Oz Daniel, and Omer Neutra – of which only Nimrod Cohen was captured alive. In footage uploaded to the Hamas Al-Qassam Brigades Telegram channel, terrorists breached the border fence, detonated explosives, and swarm an Israeli tank. At the start of the footage at least 2 soldiers are seen alive emerging from the tank, however, at the end, Nimrod Cohen is seen being dragged away from his

tank, with 2 other soldiers presumably dead next to him. None of the soldiers appear to be armed in the footage.[8] The terrorists then moved onto *Kibbutz* Nir Oz nearby after destroying the tank, looting it, and setting it on fire.[9]

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Chapter 6.6 | Conflict Related Sexual Violence

On 7 October 2023, members of Palestinian armed groups crossed the Israeli border and committed acts of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). These include acts of rape, gang rape, forced mutilation, sexualised torture, forced nudity, and posting sexualised images of victims on social media without consent. The exact number of victims of CRSV, both living and dead, has not been released to the public as it is the subject of ongoing (as of January 2025) investigations undertaken by Israel's Chief Prosecutor Amit Eiseman.

Official independent reports conducted by the Office of the Representative to the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten (the Patten Report), and United Nation's Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI), on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem, and Israel, regarding the 7 October attacks, both found reasonable grounds to conclude that CRSV occurred on 7 October 2023.

The Patten Report found that there was a pattern across the various locations of the 7 October attacks, of "several fully naked or partially naked bodies from the waist down [that] were recovered – mostly women – with hands tied and shot multiple times, often in the head." Such "a pattern of undressing and restraining of victims may be indicative of some forms of sexual violence."[1] In the medicolegal assessment undertaken by the mission team, photos and videos of crimes scenes showed "a few corpses with conspicuously spread legs were observed. These postures could not be adequately explained by, for instance, postmortem pugilistic posturing due to burn damage. The reviewed photos and videos further revealed a minimum of 20 corpses with partially or fully exposed intimate body parts such as breasts and genitalia, resulting from the absence, displacement, or tearing of clothing. Also, at least 10 distinct corpses displayed indications of bound wrists and/or tied legs."[2] The Patten Report's mission team used the applicable standard of proof, one of "reasonable grounds to believe," consistent with the practice of investigative bodies, including those established by the UN Security Council and Human Rights Council.[3]

In relation to the standard of proof applied by the COI Report, to cases of sexual violence, it also "found the standard of 'reasonable grounds to conclude' [were] met when information has been corroborated by one or several witnesses interviewed by the Commission, and supported by digital evidence that demonstrates similar patterns and descriptions to those identified by witnesses."[4]

Phrasebooks found on the bodies of Hamas militants included translations for ""Take your clothes off!' "Spread your legs!' "Get down!"[5] which could have been used for the planning of committing CRSV.

The evidential picture that has emerged to date in Israel has followed a familiar course from previous violent conflicts where sexual violence was present.[6] There have been many civil organisations, including the Israel Women's Network (IWN) and the Women & War Research and Documentation Collective[7] and the Dinah Project[8] who independent of the Israeli Government have mapped, analysed, and studied open-source information related to the CRSV that occurred on 7 October.

Collecting evidence and assessing sexual and gender-based violence is already a complicated and extensive process in a standard criminal investigation. However, work on CRSV is arguably more sensitive and complicated and specifically the chaos of the 7 October 2023 attacks has meant gaining a picture of the scale of the CRSV even more challenging. Dr Cochav Elkayam-Levy, Chair of The Civil Commission on Oct. 7th Crimes Against Women and Children, has said "We'll never know everything that has happened to them. We know that most women who were raped and who were sexually assaulted were also murdered."[9]

There was not an existent Israeli policy or understanding of how to respond to sexual and gender-based violence when part of a terror attack. Moreover, the involvement of civilians and non-professionals in the collection of bodies, and identification has meant the distinct and separate processes for assessing sexual violence were not always available or prioritised.

Further complications to compiling evidence came from the desecration and boobytrapping of dead bodies, burning bodies beyond recognition, and recovering victims under fire. The details of these challenges have been chronicled in 2 reports. One by the Israel Women's Network and the War and Women Collective[10] and one by Prof. Yifat Bitton, Adv. Shir Bukra, Adv. Vardit Avidan, and Hodaya Shaked.[11]

Nova Festival & Route 232

At the Nova Music Festival, multiple murdered victims, mainly women, were found partially or fully naked, some bound to trees or poles. Crimes took place at the festival location and along escape routes. Statements from eyewitnesses confirmed multiple incidents of rape and gang rape, and the rape of corpses of women.[12] Eyewitness testimony also recounted the abuse of female victims who were passed between multiple attackers. While victims fled missile fire and attack, militants chased and actively hunted victims. Victims were found naked from the waist down or totally naked, many with their hands tied behind their backs or tied to trees or poles around the festival site, others also sustained gunshot wounds to the back of the head.[13]

The first eyewitness of CRSV came from an incident at the Nova Festival and was first published by the Israeli police at a foreign press conference on the subject matter in November 2023, and further presented to the United Nations in December 2023. The testimony was from a women named Sapir, who has chosen to keep her name private in the press. At 08:00 on 7 October, Sapir was hiding alongside Yura Karol, a security consultant. They were hiding under dry grass underneath a tamarisk tree 4 miles southwest of the Nova site. Sapir had been shot in the back and supplied photographs of her wounds and hiding place, in which Karol appears. Sapir recalls that 15 metres from their hiding place, motorcycles, cars and trucks pulled up and an estimated 100 Hamas attackers mostly dressed in military uniforms, but some in dark coloured civilian clothing, exited their vehicles and congregated along the road. The men exchanged spare assault rifles, grenades, small missiles, and captured women. The first victim Sapir saw had copper-coloured hair and blood running down her back. An assailant pulled her by the hair, forced her to bend over and penetrated her. Every time she flinched; her assailant plunged a knife into her back. Sapir described another victim as "shredded to pieces," and was mutilated by an attacker who raped her and sliced off her breast with a box cutter, "One continues to rape her, and the other throws her breast to someone else, and they play with it, throw it, and it falls on the road." Sapir testified that the men sliced her face before the woman fell out of her view. She witnessed the rape of 3 additional women as well.[14]

The COI Report took testimony from a witness who described seeing the body of a male victim. The witness testified that the victim, who appeared to be in his 20s, had multiple gunshot wounds on his head and back and found with his pants pulled down and a gun inserted into his anus.[15]

When Hamas began the attack, Yoni Saadon, 39, a father of 4 and a shift manager at a foundry hid under the festival stage and smeared the blood of a victim on himself so he would appear dead. After an hour of hiding under the stage, he looked out and told The Sunday Times, "I saw this beautiful woman with the face of an angel and 8 or 10 fighters beating and raping her. She was screaming 'Stop it – already I'm going to die anyway from what you are doing, just kill me! When they finished, they were laughing and the last one shot her in the head." Saadon later fled from his hiding place under the stage and found refuge in bushes near the festival site. From this hiding spot, he saw 2 Hamas fighters attacking a female victim, "They had caught a young woman near a car, and she was fighting back, not allowing them to strip her. They threw her to the ground and one of the terrorists took a shovel and beheaded her and her head rolled along the ground."[16]

Tali Biner, a surgical nurse who survived the Nova Festival by hiding in a caravan for 7 hours during the attack. Biner has given consistent testimony to multiple sources describing listening to the screams of women being raped outside the caravan. She also heard a man begging the attackers to leave a woman alone. Biner has described later leaving the caravan and seeing visual confirmation of what she had heard, including seeing women with their legs spread, underwear pushed aside, and the shirts ripped from their bodies. Biner has also testified to the rape and sexual abuse of male victims at the Nova Festival.[17] When asked how she knew that she was hearing sexual violence outside the caravan, Biner said, "There's no way that women will scream that loud for so long if it's not asking for help because someone is doing something sexually to her. So, when I hear, like, someone scream and then silence, I knew that it's probably someone got shot, and… But when you hear this chaos for like 20 minutes or 15 minutes you understand that something much worse is happening right over there and it's not… it doesn't stop."[18]

Gad Liebersohn, another festival survivor, fled the party in his vehicle but had to quickly run into the nearby forest to hide from oncoming Hamas attackers.[19] Liebersohn testified to the Association of Rape Crisis Center Israel (ARCCI) that he could also hear abuse from his hiding place. He said, "I hear shots, gunfire, bursts over our heads, and I hear girls speaking in English: 'Help.' 'No,' 'Please.' The girls were crying. It sounded like they were being raped. They take them to the pickup trucks, they cry, they scream. They shoot them. I heard men's voices screaming, and when I heard shots, they immediately stopped screaming. I heard the girls for a long time."[20]

Ron Freger, a Nova Festival attendee who hid from Hamas attackers in a dried-up riverbed for 4 and a half hours, provided testimony on his experience to The Open University. Freger, recalled hearing girls screaming from nearby bushes, "they are raping me, help me!" Freger testified that a moment after the girl's rape, she was shot in the head. [21]

Rami Shmuel, the CEO of UNITY Festival Israel and one of the organisers of the Nova Festival, told CNN "What we found, in the area, on the field outside the safe zone, there is not a doubt about what our girls went through. The terrorists… we found naked women, stripped out, without any clothes. Their legs were spread out and some of them were butchered."[22]

Elad Avraham, a Security Supervisor at the Festival fought against Hamas alongside 10 policemen and 3 security guards, using a fallen policeman's firearm. He managed to escape the area with 4 partygoers in a car, dropped them at a nearby *Kibbutz* and returned to save more people. Avraham found a unit from the Israel Prison Service and got a gun from them. They formed an 8-person team and fought against 30 Hamas attackers for an hour and a half.[23] Avraham describes what he saw that day, "Bodies of girls whose clothes were ripped. In some position, you know, where she's lying on her back and her legs are spread. There was one on the bumper of a car, bent over with her pants down. You see the body of a girl with her clothes torn and body parts mutilated and ripped off. So, you say to yourself, "they raped her, slaughtered her, and also mutilated her, what more can you do to someone?"[24]

Lt. Col. (res) Eran Masas, from Kiryat Ata, who retired from the army in 2020, woke up the morning of 7 October to a phone call from his brother Avi, telling him to get up "we've lost the country." Maas saw the picture of Hamas' pickup truck in Sderot, prompting him to get his personal weapon and phone and drive south and stop the infiltration. On his way to Sderot, he saw hundreds of Nova Festival attendees near *Moshav* Patish. He instructed them to go into the *Moshav* and began collecting bodies using an abandoned pickup truck, when he found the body of a female victim who was almost entirely naked. He apologised to her body for seeing her in that state and having to move her.[25] Masas continued to the Nova Festival site and filmed his arrival, while looking for survivors, but continued to find partially naked bodies. Speaking about one victim, he said "Her face was on the ground and when I turned the body to the other side the shirt was down and her tights, that she wore tights, was all covered blood."[26]

A member of the Nova Festival production team, Yinon Rivlin, lost 2 brothers in the attack,[27] but managed to survive by hiding in a ditch. After evading killers, he got out of the ditch and tried to flee towards the festival eastern parking lot along Route 232. Rivlin told The New York Times that he found the body of a woman near the highway, lying on her stomach. The victim wasn't wearing any pants or underwear, and Rivlin stated that her vaginal area had been sliced open "as if someone tore her apart."[28]

Rescue and emergency response teams that removed bodies from the Nova Festival site, described recovering the bodies of partially clothed and naked victims, many of which displayed heavy pelvic bleeding and genital mutilation.[29]

As Hamas militants arrived at the Nova site, festival attendees attempted to escape North and South along Route 232, Route 234, as well as East into the fields on the other side of the road. Along Route 232, bodies were found with gunshot wounds, severe burn damage, genital injuries and injuries to other body parts.

In a different location along Route 232, roughly one mile southwest of the festival site, Raz Cohen was hiding with Shoam Gueta. Cohen had recently returned from the Democratic Republic of the Congo where he was training Congolese soldiers. Gueta is a fashion designer. Cohen has provided consistent testimony to multiple media outlets and both Cohen and Gueta testified to ARCCI. After fleeing the festival site, the two were hiding in a dried-up streambed.[30] Speaking with Sheryl Sandberg for her documentary Screams Before Silence, Cohen recalled, "A pickup truck came and stopped 40 meters south of the bushes. Some terrorists got out and grabbed a girl there. I remember that there was a kind of semi-circle around her, and one of them raped her." He elaborated, "When you see someone being raped, you know it's rape. It isn't… They did whatever they wanted. They just did whatever

they wanted, they didn't… there were no rules. Shoham, who was next to me, said, "He's stabbing her, he's slaughtering her," or something like that, and I didn't want to look. And when I went back, when I looked again, she was already dead. She wasn't… and he was still at it. He was still raping her after he had slaughtered her."[31]

Rami Davidian, a fuel distributor from *Moshav* Patish, heard about the attack and drove his car towards the Nova Music Festival. He was sent to rescue a friend's son, but quickly grasped the scale of Hamas assault. Through the course of the day, Davidian rescued over 700 Nova attendees and evacuated them to *Moshav* Patish, located roughly 10 miles from the Gaza border.[32] Davidian drove back and forth to the festival site, leaving his car hidden and hiding in bushes and behind trees to covertly rescue kids sheltering from Hamas. At one point, Davidian came face to face with 6 Hamas attackers who had found Amit Parizer, a female Nova attendee hiding. Davidian spoke to the Hamas militants in Arabic and convinced them he was a Yemenite Muslim who had come to warn them that the Israeli Army was closing in and that they should leave the girl and run. He successfully saved Parizer's life.[33]

When Davidian finished evacuating civilians, he made it to the festival site and began helping match body parts, cover indecent corpses and move bodies out of the way of arriving IDF tanks. Davidian recited the Shema prayer over each body that he found.[34] During an interview with Sheryl Sandberg, Davidian returned to the Nova Festival site. Davidian brought Sandberg to the Re'im forest, where he recounted "I saw girls tied up with their hands behind them to every tree here. Someone murdered them, raped them, and abused them, here on these trees. Their legs were spread. Everyone who sees this, knows right away that the girls were abused. Someone stripped them, someone raped them. They inserted all kinds of things into their intimate organs, like wooden boards, iron rods. Over 30 girls were murdered and raped here. I had to close their legs and cover their bodies, so no one else would see what I saw. No one. No one can see those kinds of things." [35]

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory took testimony from a witness who described finding the body of a woman in her 20s along Route 232. The woman was naked from the waist down, had blood on her genital area and gunshot wounds in her back. The woman's clothes were found near her body.[36]

Kibbutz Re'im

While some of the Nova Festival attendees fled south and sheltered in and around *Kibbutz* Re'im, located approximately 1.2 miles from the Nova Music Festival site, the *Kibbutz* suffered heavy attack as well. The Patten Report concluded that "there are reasonable grounds to believe that sexual violence occurred in *Kibbutz* Re'im, including rape. This included the rape of a woman outside of a bomb shelter at the entrance of *Kibbutz* Re'im, which was corroborated by witness testimonies and digital material. Within the *Kibbutz* itself, in one area close to the entrance, the bodies of at least two women were found inside a home, on the floor and naked, with gunshot wounds to their heads."[37]

Kibbutz Kfar Aza and Be'eri

Eight medical first responders and 2 Israeli soldiers reported to The New York Times a total of 24 bodies of women and girls, some mutilated and recovered in varying states of undress, across 6 different homes on *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza and *Kibbutz* Be'eri.[38]

The COI Report received testimony from a witness at Kfar Aza, who found the bodies of 2 female victims in a safe room. One of the women was in her early 20s, was found lying face down on a bed, naked from the waist down, with her knees on the ground and her upper body bent over the bed, with blood pooling around the body. The Independent International Commission also reviewed video footage of a female victim found outside Kfar Aza, along Route 232. The victim was found with her clothing pulled up; legs spread apart. The victim wasn't wearing underwear, and her genitals were exposed. An evaluation from an independent forensic pathologist assessed the victim, who had burns covering 45% of her body, and determined that her attackers had used an accelerant to burn her following assault.[39]

Following the 7 October attack, reports emerged of victims' bodies recovered from their homes naked, bound, and gagged.[40] The Association of Rape Crisis Centres Israel (ARCCI) received testimony from several first responders who collected the remains of female victims. In Kfar Aza, Nira Shpak, a resident of the *Kibbutz* who helped to identify the bodies of *Kibbutz* residents killed in the attack, provided testimony detailing several bodies that were recovered with their clothes torn apart and intimate areas exposed.[41]

In *Kibbutz* Be'eri, responders reported recovering the bodies of girls and women who were found in varying states of undress, in their bedrooms, with clear signs

they had been raped. Testimony included detailing that women and girls were found stripped of their underwear, semen was present on bodies, and there was at least one case of something that was thought to be a small knife, or a nail, inserted into a woman's genital area.[42] Pictures of the latter have been seen by researchers on this report, as well as representatives from the Dinah Project and the Israel Women's Network.

Military Bases

Due to the sensitivity around attacks on 7 October 2023 on Israeli military bases, testimony has not been reported as widely. As such the information available to this report is limited. At Nahal Oz, the Patten Report viewed reports of rape and genital mutilation, but further corroboration could not be established. However, in Hamas' self-recorded footage released in May 2024, of the 7 female soldiers that were taken hostage from Nahal Oz Base, the attackers can be heard saying "These are the girls are Sabaya" - the word in Arabic refers to female captives, who become sex slaves – and another gunman says "you are so beautiful.".[43] Hamas also uploaded footage of one of the female hostage, Cpl. Naama Levy, 19, being transported into a different car inside Gaza. She is barefoot, with her hands tied behind her back and has a large bloodstain around her lower bottom, and genital area, indicating potential CRSV.[44] The Patten Report "reviewed reports concerning a case of rape" at the base but were unable to verify them at the point of publication.[45]

Lt. Tamar Bar Shimon, who was stationed at Erez military crossing, testified that "4 terrorists entered my room. They tried to make me take off my uniform over and over again. I couldn't move, I was paralyzed with fear. One of the terrorists tried to approach me. I was shaking." A loud explosion then occurred, which caused the attackers to flee.[46]

Medical Testimony

Bodies of victims of the 7 October attack were taken to Shura Military Base for identification and preparation for burial. Bodies arrived at Shura Base in varying conditions; many arrived partially or entirely naked, with exposed genitals, while other bodies showed evidence of sexual mutilation and burning of the genital area.

The COI corroborated witness testimony with digital evidence and confirmed that the bodies of 4 victims were recovered naked from the waist down, and the bodies of 4 other victims were recovered partially undressed with signs of sexual mistreatment. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the OPT was further able to corroborate that sexual violence was present in the 7 October attack through reports from the Shura Base. One witness who received victims' bodies described a girl around 13-years-old, who arrived naked with signs of violence to the stomach area and both legs broken. Bodies of men and women who arrived at Shura also arrived with precise burnings to their genital area. Forensic analysis showed indications that gasoline was used to set victims' genitals on fire, which was corroborated by a video of a female victim who was set on fire with gasoline from the waist down.[47]

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Chapter 6.7 | Desecration of Corpses

Part of the reason why the victims' count for the 7 October attack took so long to determine was due to the condition of many of the bodies that arrived at the Shura military rabbinate base, which was responsible for identifying, processing and preparing the bodies for burial. A significant portion of the bodies had been completely burnt, as both a cause of death and as a result of post-mortem action such as properties being set on fire.[1] This greatly hindered the ability to collect DNA evidence and fingerprints from bodies, and in some cases, there was too little left of the body to even make an identification using dental x-rays.[2]

For other individuals, after they were killed their bodies continued to be attacked and desecrated with post-mortem burning, shooting, stabbing, stamping, kicking, and beheadings. This meant that when some bodies arrived at the Shura Base, they arrived in several pieces. Those in the most challenging conditions were moved to the Abu Kabir National Institute of Forensic Sciences where they were examined by archaeologists and medical specialists alongside more advanced imaging equipment.[3] Scans of bodies examined at the centre showed individuals who had been bound, crushed or with decapitated limbs, bodies fused together as a result of burning, and death by thermobaric grenades which can burn close to 3,000 degrees Celsius leaving only ash and teeth.[4] All of this meant that the burial process was hindered which not only increased the emotional distress for the victims' families who did not know what had happened to their relations but it also impeded the ability to honour religious practices.[5]

These actions therefore violated the deceased's right to personal dignity and prohibitions of mutilation of the dead which demand that the bodies of the deceased be preserved out of respect for their families and protected for investigations.

Examples of desecration of bodies were published by Hamas and other militant groups on social media sites such as Telegram. The family of Eitan Levy, whose body was kidnapped after he was killed on Route 232, identified him in a video uploaded to Telegram which showed Mr Levy lying in the street in only his underwear as a large crowd gathering around and repeatedly kicked and stamped on his body and face.[6] Another video uploaded to the "Palestine Resist" Telegram Channel shows a similar situation, in which a deceased male soldier's body is dragged from a car after which a large crowd gathers around the body and repeatedly kick the body.[7]

One of the most brutal examples of mutilation of a corpse relates to the experience of Tanzanian agricultural-student Joshua Mollel, who was initially kidnapped from *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz but then killed just outside the south-west fence of the *Kibbutz*. After killing him his attackers decided to take his body hostage. In the first video at least 7 armed militants, including an individual wearing the yellow headband of the Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, surround Mr Mollel, shove him back and forth, and scream at him whilst he has blood on his face.[8] In a second video Mr Mollel is seen lying deceased on the ground with stab wounds on his abdomen. The gunmen stand on his body and then shoot him in the head 8 times post-mortem.[9] Other videos relating to Mr Mollel which were verified by the Human Rights Watch NGO show attackers standing on his head and in later videos he has been stripped to his underwear.[10]

Repeated gunshots to the head are a pattern that emerged and was noted by both United Nations SRSG-SVC Patten Report and testimony the report collected from an individual who worked at the Shura military base. The Patten Report examined pictures of soldiers killed at the Nahal Oz Outpost and noticed a "discernible pattern" of "apparent, often multiple, gunshot wounds to the head."[11] The mission team also collected testimony from individuals describing finding, at the Nova music festival, the bodies of partially naked women, bound, and with gunshot wounds to the head.[12]

Shari Mendes, a reservist within the military rabbinate and part of a team specifically responsible for the preparation of female soldiers for burial, was called up for duty for 107 days on a rotating basis, after 7

October. For the first 2-3 weeks she was physically at the Shura Base. The responsibilities of Shari Mendes and the team responsible for preparing the bodies of female soldiers for burial is not medical and not related to the identification process. They are there to maintain the modesty and dignity of the individual, to carry on any non-medical touching and because in accordance with Jewish Law a deceased body should never be left unattended. This unit was created by the IDF after the increase of women in combat-roles and frontline service. She testified that herself and her team saw many bodies who had been subject to gratuitous violence, such as post-mortem shooting into the breasts and vagina, and that a pattern emerged of multiple headshots which "seemed like a purposeful effort to erase their female faces."[13] She also testified that they looked after bodies with missing limbs, missing facial features or faces with significant disfigurement, and that none of the bodies were in a condition which would be acceptable to show to their families.[14]

Further examples of desecration can be found in acts relating to the "booby trapping" of bodies. This act violates the prohibition on the mutilation of bodies but also is a deliberate act to cause further harm to anyone attempting to evacuate the body or prepare it for burial. It also shows that the attackers made no attempt to distinguish between civilians and military personnel, as they would not have known at the times of setting traps who would come across the body first. The Patten report noted the impact of both booby trapping corpses and post-mortem mutilation on hindering the ability of investigators to collect forensic evidence.[15]

Maj. Gen. Mickey Edelstein, the IDF's lead investigator in its *Kibbutz* Be'eri probe, testified that terrorists "put booby-traps or IED's in front of the doors or behind a bush next to the house so that when the IDF came to evacuate the people they would activate." He also stated that "on some of the bodies they put hand grenades."[16] Further evidence of this was found in *Moshav* Pri Gan and *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza, when entrances to safe rooms were boobytrapped with grenades whilst families were still hiding inside, preventing them from leaving and slowing their evacuation.[17] The relatives of at least two victims testified that there were struggles to evacuate and identify the body as a result of boobytraps. The body of Itai Hadar, a victim from the Psyduck Festival, was apparently boobytrapped with grenades and consequently his body was not identified till 11 October.[18]

In *Kibbutz* Holit, the family of Adi Vital-Kaploun was informed by the military that her body had been "shoved under Negev's [her son's] bed and booby-trapped so it would explode whenever someone tried to pull her out."[19] Further traps were placed across the house further hindering the retrieval of her body by the military. As a result her body was not found until 10 October and her status was not confirmed to her family until 11 October 2023. Issues related to booby traps persisted after bodies were evacuated to Shura military base, with all those working inside the facility forced to be evacuated on a least one occasion when an explosive threat was found inside a body.[20]

Burning was both a cause of death during the 7 October attacks and a post-mortem act, United Hazlacha volunteer Moshe Weizmann was a first responder on 7 October and ferried wounded out of Sderot and later in the day along Route 232. In the days after he was involved in helping to collect bodies too. He testified that people hid in the trees alongside Route 232, but were shot and burnt, as when their bodies were found, they had "bones with bullet holes," which he could see because their flesh was burnt. He saw a "minimum of 20 to 30 burned bodies".[21] Moreover, in a press conference held by the Abu Kabir centre in the aftermath of the attack, they shared images of completely charred remains, that once scanned using computed topography were identified as two spinal cords—one adult and one belonging to someone smaller, maybe a child, who were bound together by metal wires in a final embrace before being set alight. Victims were identifiable as being burnt alive if there was soot in their trachea, their throats—meaning they were still breathing when set on fire.[22]

Decapitations and attempted decapitations were uploaded to social media for a least three victims. In *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz, a Gazan civilian uploaded a video of himself attempting to decapitate the head of a Thai worker using a garden hoe. In the video the individual can be seen repeatedly bringing down the blade of the implement onto the exposed neck of the Thai worker, who is still visibly alive but wounded and unable to move.[23] At the COGAT base next to the Erez Crossing, Sgt. Adir Tahar was beheaded post-mortem and his decapitated head was taken to Gaza. Images in which individuals are seen standing on his decapitated body were uploaded to Telegram.[24] The body of another soldier next to him appears to have been subject to facial mutilation, with the soldier's left eye partially out of the socket, his nose crushed and significant blood around his head.[25]

Israeli medical authorities concluded that given the circumstances it is difficult to ascertain whether they were decapitated before or after death, as well as how they were beheaded, "whether cut off by knife or blown off by RPG."[26] Aviad Edri from *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza was shot

and then decapitated. It is not known if this occurred pre or post-mortem, however when the family originally buried him, they were not informed that he had been beheaded and were not asked to provide a personal identification for the body because of its condition. They were unaware of the beheading as the body had been presented to them with a mannequin's head positioned in place to not cause further psychological distress. However, they learnt of the decapitation when the head was discovered weeks later, and the body had to be exhumed so all parts could be buried together.[27]

Based on testimony from first responders and medical forensics it is likely that more beheadings occurred – including post-mortem – but due to lack of public information from attempts to protect the families, and the priority being placed on expediated burial, it has not been possible to connect many victims with descriptions of beheaded individuals.

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Chapter 6.8 | Torture

Members of armed groups who participated in the 7 October attack perpetrated severe torture on victims in several instances. Testimony from first responders and personnel who prepared victim bodies for burial, as well as photo and video evidence, shows multiple incidents of torture on 7 October, including beatings, other forms of physical and psychological torture, and sexualised torture. Due to the damage inflicted on victims of the attack, it is often not clear whether victims were tortured while alive or whether their bodies were desecrated post-mortem. Many victims of torture on 7 October were subsequently killed, accounting for the lack of first-hand testimony.

One such incident of torture occurred at *Kibbutz* Nir Oz and was verified by video evidence, which was broadcast live on Facebook. In *Kibbutz* Nir Oz, 19 Thai nationals who worked with the *Kibbutz* agricultural program were killed in their living quarters. While still alive, attackers attempted to use a garden hoe to hack at the upper body extremities of a Thai worker before trying to decapitate him.[1] Video footage recovered from one of the attackers shows a foreign worker in a yellow t-shirt lying on the ground, with blood pooling around his abdomen, being repeatedly beaten by an assailant. The victim is then kicked in the head before he raises his arms in defence, trying to guard his face and head against assault. Attackers are then seen in the video using a large gardening hoe to try and dismember and decapitate the victim at the shoulders and neck.[2]

In another incident, members of Al-Qassam and Al-Quds Brigades broke into the home of the Arava – Elkayim Family in *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz. Militants shot Noam Elkayim, 46, in the leg and took his smartphone to start a livestream on Facebook interrogating Noam, his girlfriend Dikla Arava, 51, his two daughters Dafna, 15, and Ela, 8, and Dikla's son Tomer Arava Eliaz, 17.[3] Later, the militants forced Tomer at gunpoint to knock on neighbours' doors to try and lure them outside while still livestreaming.[4] Tomer was later killed by Al-Qassam militants; his body was recovered outside the *Kibbutz*.[5]

Another incident from *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz involved 21-year-old Tanzanian student Joshua Molle. Molle was beaten by members of Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and National Resistance Brigades before being later killed.[6] Video footage of the incident shows Molle with his hands raised, with blood on his face, surrounded by at least 6 attackers who are tormenting, beating, and shouting at Molle.[7] A later video of Molle, captured by an attacker's Go-Pro, shows Molle lying on the ground, with stab wounds in his abdomen, while an assailant stands above him brandishing a bloody knife. Another militant puts his foot on Molle's chest while an additional attacker films the incident with his phone. Attackers then shoot Molle several times, shouting Allahu Akbar.[8]

There were several instances of torture that took place along Route 232. In footage recovered from Al-Qassam Brigades Go-Pro cameras, militants are seen discovering an Arab Israeli hiding in a bomb shelter near Re'im. The attackers shout at the man to leave the bomb shelter, firing a warning shot at the back wall when he doesn't move quickly enough. The assailants then drag him from the shelter, calling him a dog, kicking and hitting him, and shouting at him to tell them where Re'im is located.[9] Later in the video, at least 10 Al-Qassem militants are seen assaulting a Bedouin man who they found hiding in his car. In the video, they force the man from his vehicle while he begs for mercy. A minute later, militants taunt and continue to beat him, and at 04:46, he is kicked twice in the head and forced onto the ground by an attacker. At 06:21, the victim is seen lying face down on the road, shirtless, with his hands zip-tied behind his back. At 06:59, another attacker kicks him in the shoulder while he is still bound and lying shirtless on the road.[10]

At the Sha'ar Negev junction, Dr Tarek Abu Arar was on his way to a shift at the Barzilai Hospital Emergency Department when he found an injured person on the side of the road. He got out of his vehicle to help what he thought was someone injured in a routine car accident. He quickly saw someone who appeared to be an IDF soldier in uniform. Still, when he approached them, they shot him in the chest into a bulletproof vest he was wearing at the time.[11] Suddenly, around 10 attackers emerged from nearby bushes, took off Dr Arar's bulletproof vest and tied him to a traffic signpost. They realised he was Muslim and began interrogating him on his knowledge of Islam before deciding to hold him as a hostage.[12] Dr Arar witnessed 17 drivers killed at the Shaar Negev junction. Two hours later, the army arrived, and a shootout between the Hamas attackers

and the Israeli military began. One of the attackers shot Dr Arar in the leg while Israeli forces were retreating. They would return to rescue Dr Arar roughly 45 minutes later.[13]

There were significant reports of torture at the Nova Music Festival, including sexualised torture (SEE Chapter 6.6). Additional forms of torture were also reported, such as the hunting of victims. Video footage showed militants chasing festivalgoers who were running from the attack. The footage also showed attackers forcing victims to be their human shields at gunpoint.[14] Other Nova Festival victims were found burned to death in their cars.[15]

There were several instances confirmed via imagery where victims of the 7 October attack were subjected to torture after being tied up with zip ties and home electrical items. Dr Qanta Ahmed, who independently reviewed forensic pathology photography of victims, testified that "[victims] were restrained with electrical cords from their own homes, wrapped in a lethal knot at each wrist." Scans of bodies examined at the Abu Kabir National Institute of Forensic Sciences and reviewed by Dr Ahmed show victims who were bound, had limbs crushed or dismembered.[16] A CT scan from the Abu Kabir Forensic Institute shows a parent and child bound together with metal wire and burned alive by their assailants.[17]

Another photo from a forensic examination showed another victim who was bound at the wrists with metal wire. The photo clearly showed that the metal wire broke through the victim's skin.[18] A video from the South First Responders telegram channel showed first responders recovering the body of a female victim from rubble. The video showed a first responder trying to remove part of a mattress from the wreckage of a house before realising it was attached to the female victim's body with metal wire. Part of the female victim's lower body and leg appeared in the video, and metal wiring was visible around the victim's leg.[19]

Many hostages were subjected to psychological torture during their abductions. Hostages, including children, were taken captive after witnessing friends, family, or parents murdered. Hostages were then taken to Gaza in open vehicles or paraded in the streets. Videos of hostages arriving in Gaza show that hostages were beaten, humiliated, shouted at, and endured physical violence at the hands of their kidnappers and civilians.[20] One such video shows a group of Israeli hostages in the back of a pickup truck. The video shows a male Israeli hostage repeatedly beaten and hit with the butt of a rifle.[21] Reports that have emerged since the attack also state that hostages were denied medical treatment for injuries sustained during the 7 October attack. Other hostages were treated for injuries from the 7 October attack without anaesthesia.[22]

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Chapter 6.9 | Pillaging, Looting and Destruction of Property

Throughout the 7 October attack, terrorists infiltrated various *Kibbutz*im, communities and military bases throughout the Gaza envelope. During the assault, evidence was found of pillaging, looting and destruction of property across the majority of locations. It is important to note that the locations listed have video-captured and testimonial evidence of looting, although it is believed to be widespread across all areas. They are: *Kibbutz* Be'eri, *Kibbutz* Ein HaShlosha, *Kibbutz* Holit, *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz, *Kibbutz* Nir Oz, *Kibbutz* Nir Yitzhak, *Kibbutz* Nirim, *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza, *Moshav* Netiv HaAsara, Mosha Yesha, Mosha Mivtahim, along Route 232 at Magen junction, Kerem Shalom Crossing, Nahal Oz Base, Erez Crossing, Re'im Base, Kissufim Outpost and Paga Outpost.

Damage to critical infrastructure

Many of the Israeli military outposts in the Gaza envelope protect the pipes and infrastructure that support humanitarian needs in Gaza. Israel supplies Gaza with gasoline, water and electricity.[1] At Nahal Oz Base, not only were the computers destroyed that were responsible for regulating the irrigation network which sustained both the military base and nearby agricultural activities in the *Kibbutz*, there was also damage to the pipe under the base which supplies gasoline to Gaza.[2] Three major water pipes which are situated beneath, Erez Crossing, Paga Outpost and between *Kibbutz*im Nirim and Nir Oz, were damaged. In the days following 7 October, this sabotaged the immediate provision of clean water, which normally flows from Israel into the Gaza Strip. They were then repaired by Israel.[3]

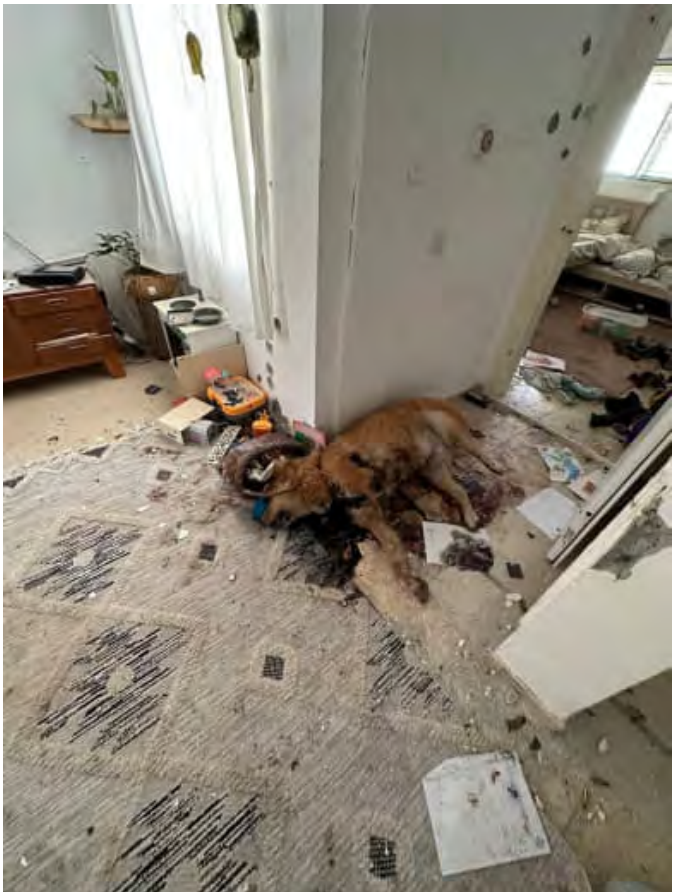
The Kibbutzim and Moshavim

On 7 October, following the initial first and second waves of the Hamas, PIJ and other attacking groups, the third wave of attackers consisted largely of Gazan civilians who took advantage of the breaches in the border fence. In several cases, arrested Palestinian civilian infiltrators admitted that they had been encouraged to loot and destroy property, although some participated in the killing of civilians and the taking and abuse of hostages.[4]

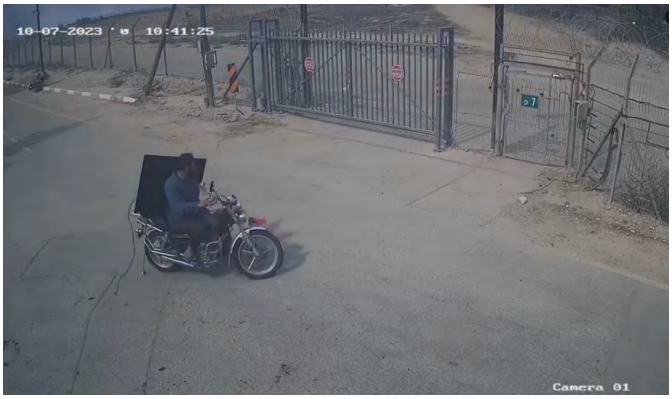
The looters caused significant material damage throughout the Gaza envelope. In many of the infiltrated *Kibbutz*im, looters stole and damaged agricultural equipment.[5] In *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz, the impact was significant. The looters stole 9 tractors, and the $1.4 million dairy barn was severely damaged. A quarter of the *Kibbutz*'s cows were affected, some were killed or injured but many others were so traumatised that they stopped yielding milk.[6] The attack on the *Kibbutz* dairy industry resulted in damages totalling $400,000.[7] The attackers deliberately targeted, infrastructure, farmland, livestock and crops as they moved through the western Negev, a region responsible for approximately 70% of the country's vegetables, 20% of its fruit, and 6% of its milk production. The attack destroyed 40,000 hectares of farmland, resulting in $500 million in losses from farmer income and infrastructure destruction. In *Kibbutz* Alumim alone, $5 million of farming equipment and 11 hectares of greenhouses were destroyed.[8]

A *Kibbutz* member who was working towards creating an inventory of stolen equipment stated that "The attack was designed to destroy agricultural production intentionally, but more than that, it was meant to destroy the identity of the region, to break the community."[9] Similarly, *Kibbutz* Nir Oz's industrial enterprises included Nirlat, Israel's largest paint producer. However, the factory was burned down during the attacks, impacting production lines and storage facilities crucial to Nirlat's operation. Although it has since been gradually reopened, full restoration is expected to take years.[10]

Some CCTV footage and testimony shows that both women and children 'as young as 10' were also amongst the civilians who took part in looting. Natali Yohanan, a resident of *Kibbutz* Nir Oz, gave testimony that while hiding in her safe room alongside her family, she heard a group of Gazans, including a woman, make themselves comfortable in her home after looting the house and killing the family dog. She heard the intruders "switching Netflix to Arabic", intermittently



The terrorists were indiscriminate in their killing and killed family pets as well. Source: Palestine Resist Telegram



Civilians from Gaza entering Kibbutz Be'eri, many of whom engaged in looting. Those involved included the young and the elderly. One man pictured is walking with the aid of crutches. In the second image a man takes a stolen TV on the back of his bike.
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

Damage to a house in Kibbutz Holit from fire
Source: KAN 7.10.23 Digital Memorial Project

trying to get the family to leave the safe room by shooting at its door.[11]

Often, militants entered and ransacked homes while the owners were hiding in their safe rooms. Many residents reported that their personal property including clothing, food, jewellery and valuables, passports, children's toys and vehicles were stolen.[12] Much of the destruction was aimed at objects of sentimental value, including family photos and mementos.[13] Jacqueline Glicksman, a Holocaust survivor from *Kibbutz* Ein HaShlosha, was found in her safe room by an attacker. The man signalled for her to be quiet while he looked for money and electronic devices which he stole.[14] Shortly afterwards, 3 more men entered but after realising she had nothing of value left, before another group poured petrol on the floor outside the safe room and set it alight, forcing Glicksman to flee.[15] The killing of family pets was also documented in several locations, oftentimes in the presence of their owners.[16] On *Kibbutz* Be'eri, deputy squad commander Ilan Weiss was shot dead along with his dog while his wife Shiri and daughter Noga were kidnapped and taken to Gaza after their house was set alight.[17]

Attackers routinely looted property before killing or abducting the residents. In *Kibbutz* Nir Yitzhak, gunmen broke into the safe room of Moshe,72, and Diana ,75, Rosen.[18] After ransacking their fridge and looting the house, the abductors walked them 3.1 miles towards the Gaza border before the proximity of an IDF helicopter thwarted their effort.[19] Throughout the day, CCTV captured Gazan civilians returning to the Strip in possession of their looted items. In *Kibbutz* Be'eri, a civilian was seen stealing a large flat-screen television on the back of his motorbike.[20] Looters from Kfar Aza returned to Gaza on tractors they had stolen. In some cases, terrorists abducted residents to Gaza, using stolen vehicles. This included British Israeli hostage, Emily Damari, who was taken from her home in Kfar Aza to Gaza in her own car. In, *Kibbutz* Nir Oz, civilian looters broke into the home of Nili Margalit, setting

it on fire to force her out of her safe room.[21] After capturing her, they transported her to Gaza using a looted golf cart before transferring her into a car.[22]

Looting was sometimes followed by arson attacks. Although this was part of a wider tactic to force residents out of their safe rooms, the material damage of the conflagration has been substantial.[23] In Kfar Aza, nearly half of the village's houses were destroyed or severely damaged by the attack.[24] The worst affected area was the young adults, neighbourhood, where all the houses were wrecked by gunfire and most of them burned.

Of the 24 communities within the Gaza envelope, 8 of them require long-term reconstruction plans, constituting government plans to pay for residents' housing which include Kfar Aza, Be'eri and Nir Oz with the longest expected reconstruction times after sustaining the worst infrastructural damage.[25] In *Kibbutz* Nir Oz, only 6 homes were undamaged.[26]

Military Bases

Looting and pillaging also occurred at the attacked military locations. Footage documented by terrorists shows that they systematically seized weapons, ammunition and other military supplies stored within various military bases. At Nahal Oz Base, they targeted buildings in the compound which were deliberately damaged or set on fire, rendering much of the infrastructure inoperative. Dormitories, administrative offices and storage areas were ransacked, with equipment smashed, documents destroyed, and furniture overturned or burned.[27] This also including the looting of the military gear off the bodies of dead soldiers.[28] At Kissufim Base, terrorists stole equipment which included intelligence documents and maps, ammunition, guns and military equipment.[29]

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Chapter 6.10 | Indiscriminate Attacks On Civilian Areas By Rocket Artillery

The attacks on the 7 October occurred against the backdrop of an intense indiscriminate rocket barrage that made no attempt to distinguish between civilian and military locations. These rockets provided cover for the border breaches and ground invasion but also caused deaths, serious injuries and significant property damage across the country in and of themselves.

On 7 October Hamas fired 3,873 rockets and mortars into Israel, followed up by a further 428 and 559 on 8 and 9 October respectively.[1] These attacks triggered 4,845 "Tseva Adom" rocket warning alarms across 498 Israeli towns across the 3 days, an area which encompasses 75% of Israel's population, equating to 7.3 million Israeli citizens under the direct threat of rocket fire.[2] Due to the inaccuracy of terrorist rocket artillery, this attack also placed a significant proportion of Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the West Bank under threat as well.

Every civilian location discussed in Chapter 5 was targeted by rockets, and these locations accounted for approximately 1,039 of the rocket alarms triggered over the first 3 days.[3] The majority, 75%, of all rockets targeted the south of Israel, which includes cities like Ashkelon, Be'er Sheba, and Dimona, whilst 24% targeted the centre of Israel (includes Tel Aviv-Yafo and Jerusalem) and 1% targeted the North of Israel.[4] Whilst rocket fire, particularly in the Gaza Envelope, had been a persistent factor of daily life since Israel unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005, the scale of the barrage of 7 October was far beyond previous levels.

At least 18 individuals were killed by rocket fire between 7-9 October, 17 of whom were civilians in civilian locations. This occurred at the following places: Abu Gosh, Alba-at, *Moshav* Amioz, Ar'ara, Ashkelon, Kfar Aviv, *Kibbutz* Holit, and Netivot. Seven of these civilians are classified as children (under 17-years-old) and 5 are "older persons", as per the definition used by the UNHCR (over 60-years-old).

In Alba-at, the 6 civilians killed came from 2 separate Bedouin families- 4 children from the Alkar'an family ranging in age from 11-15 and a grandmother and her granddaughter from the Abu Sabeeh family.[5] In the Bedouin township of Arara the death by rocket fire of 5-years-old Yakan Zakaria Abu-Jama was witnessed by a neighbour who described Yazan as "blown into parts."[6]

Some of the earliest footage that circulated on the day, shows the sky filled with missiles and iron-dome anti-missile defence interceptions and was taken by civilians who would be killed or taken hostage over the course of the day. This includes pictures taken by Roi Idan, who was killed during the attack on *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza, and Gilad Kfir, killed during the attack on *Moshav* Netiv HaAsara.[7] Judith Weinstein-Haggai and her husband Gadi filmed the rocket fire whilst hiding in a field, having left home for a morning walk.[8]

Other footage taken over the day and posted to Telegram shows the destruction of residential buildings and substantial fires and smoke plumes in the aftermath of the artillery barrage in Tel Aviv-Yafo, Ashkelon and Kfar Aviv.[9] In Tel Aviv-Yafo 2 buildings were hit in the rocket barrage, injuring 4 people.[10]

In the Gaza envelope itself, one of the many buildings damaged by rocket fire was a Holocaust memorial museum commemorating the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in *Kibbutz* Yad Mordechai.[11]

Ashkelon was heavily targeted by rocket artillery with 197 alarms triggered across the city's 4 districts on 7 October alone, followed by 21 alarms on 8 October and 24 alarms on 9 October.[12] The Barzilai Medical Centre in Ashkelon was struck on 8 October and 12 October. There were no casualties on the 8th, the hospital had evacuated the high-risk pregnancy ward to a reinforced underground complex, minutes before it was hit. It had already cancelled all appointments at the Child development Centre due to the threat of rockets for the 12th.[13] An administrative building in the hospital

was hit by a rocket a few days later.[14] In the initial days after 7 October the hospital had a far higher number of patients than usual, as it is one of 3 main hospitals in the south of Israel, which were treating the majority of those wounded during the attacks.

During the 7 October attacks both Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the two main groups responsible for the rocket barrage, took ownership of the assault. Mohammed Deif, commander of Hamas' military wing announced on Al-Aqsa TV that "the first strike, which targeted enemy positions, airports, and military fortifications, exceeded 5,000 missiles and shells."[15]

Palestinian Islamic Jihad published a statement on their Telegram channel on 9 October stating "As part of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, Saraya Al-Quds fighters are now carrying out a massive rocket attack on the city of Netivot. Badr-3 rockets are being used in the shelling."[16] In a letter to the Human Rights Watch NGO written in April 2024, Hamas acknowledged that "the incursions began after a cover fire with multi-range rocket shells."[17]

The UN Independent Commission of Inquiry verified a video by Al-Qassam Brigades which claimed responsibility for firing 150 missiles towards Tel Aviv and later published a video of the destruction caused by the rocket attack. Hamas made similar announcements about rockets fired at Ashkelon and Beersheba and published videos showing the damage to residential buildings following the strikes." The commission also noted that due to the inherent inaccuracy of the rockets fired because of their lack of precision guidance systems "their accuracy in distinguishing between military and civilian targets remains limited."[18]

The continued threat of indiscriminate rocket artillery to civilian areas was one of the main factors in evacuating residents of the Gaza envelope, even from communities which did not sustain significant property destruction on 7 October.

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Chapter 6.11 | Social Media Use on 7 October

The social media posts associated with the 7 October attacks suggest a strategic and organised online campaign alongside the land-based attack. In the months leading up to the attack, Hamas posted little-to-no content. However, content posted to Hamas-affiliated social media platforms in the immediate aftermath included professionally edited training videos and posts promoting and celebrating Hamas' successful invasion. Subsequent content also featured graphic atrocities committed by armed groups. Following the announcement of Al-Aqsa Flood on the morning of 7 October, these posts began appearing across official social media channels associated with Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other related or pro-Palestinian platforms. The graphic content, sometimes livestreamed or sent directly to victims' family members,[1] is terroristic in nature and designed to inflict suffering on the victims' families and communities.

As the largest contingent of, and organiser of, the attacking force Al-Qassam Brigades were the most active group in terms of their online content. The clothing and coloured headbands associated with the group can be seen across videos and photos in at least 14 locations. The videos, filmed mostly in the morning, show Al-Qassam fighters killing civilians, abducting hostages and setting fire to homes in the attacked communities.[2] The absence of footage from a location, does not disprove Hamas' involvement in attacks on other sites; eyewitness testimony places their forces at even more locations across the attacks.

Hamas' Online Build Up

Historically, Hamas has relied on state-affiliated media platforms, such as television and radio stations based in Gaza, to emphasise its legitimacy as a governing organisation, while its use of social media has been limited. Websites affiliated with Hamas also focus on propaganda efforts, disseminating Hamas ideology through webpages about its history and mission and promoting a culture of martyrdom.[3] Following Operation Guardian of the Walls in May 2021, Hamas shifted its strategy and began conducting a cognitive campaign against the Israeli state, in which the group subtly attempted to curate an image of itself as a powerful militant group and leader in the global Palestinian struggle.[4] Hamas' embrace of social media aligns with the growing influence of platforms like X and TikTok in shaping the global narrative. Young Palestinians in Gaza use these platforms to post content and amplify their voices, much like their Western contemporaries.[5]

The Telegram platform has also become a preferred network for Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Telegram's strict privacy and encryption rules make it a preferable platform for many militant groups, as communications stay private, and the platform has less stringent content moderation compared to platforms like X and Facebook.

7 October 2023

In the months leading up to the 7 October attack, several Hamas-affiliated Telegram channels stopped posting. One of Hamas' affiliated telegram channels, titled 'Hamas Hamas Palestine Gaza' stopped posting 4 July 2023 and did not resume until the morning of 7 October, when the channel posted a statement from Muhammad Al-Deif announcing the start of the Al-Aqsa Flood Operation.[6] Another Telegram channel, belonging to the Military Spokesman for Al-Qassam Brigades stopped posting 6 July 2023 and resumed posting around 08:20 the morning of 7 October.[7] Following the initial assault on 7 October, Hamas-affiliated Telegram channels began posting professionally-produced videos of trainings conducted over the summer months of 2023.[8]

Shortly after Hamas launched its invasion into Israel, several of its websites were disrupted by denial-of-service attacks. The source of disruption remains unknown but taking down Hamas' websites drove the group to increase posting activity on Telegram.[9] On Hamas' central Telegram channel, the same message from Muhammad Al-Deif was posted announcing the invasion on 7 October. This was the first post of the day, and 1,144 additional messages were posted on the channel by the end of the day. On Palestinian Islamic

Jihad (PIJ) main Telegram channel, 974 messages were posted on 7 October.[10]

A programme of propaganda began, including professionally produced content of training for the attack, speeches by Hamas spokesmen, and videos of the initial phases of the attack. These posts also featured photosets of Al-Qassam Brigades fighters posing with Israeli victims of the initial attack. From October 7 – 9, the Al-Qassam Brigades official Telegram channel predominantly posted curated messages and updates on the success of Hamas' infiltration into Israel, alongside graphic photo and video arrays of Israeli military and civilian victims.[11]

Terroristic Content

Footage of the 7 October attack was captured on security cameras, CCTV footage, dashcam footage, and from GoPro body cameras worn by attacking forces. In several locations of the 7 October attack, attackers livestreamed their assault using body cameras or mobile phones, in some cases they used the mobile phones of victims.

Kibbutz Nahal Oz

Several livestreamed broadcasts were posted from *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz. In the Arava-Elkayim home, members of the Al-Qassam and Al-Quds Brigades broke in, shot Noam Elkayim, 46, in the leg and used his phone to start livestreaming an interrogation of the family. Noam, his girlfriend Dikla Arava, 51, his two daughters Dafna, 15, and Ela, 8, and Dikla's son Tomer Arava Eliaz, 17, were all seen on camera during the live stream, which was initially uploaded to Facebook.[12] Later in the day, militants forced Tomer at gunpoint to knock on neighbours' doors to try and lure them outside while still livestreaming.[13] Tomer was later killed by Al-Qassam militants; his body was recovered outside the *Kibbutz*.[14]

Nadav Tzabari, a 34-year-old former soldier turned teacher on the *Kibbutz* and a veteran of the 2014 war, recalled sheltering in his safe room during the 7 October attack when he began scanning Facebook for information. Tzabari realised that militants had managed to infiltrate his neighbours' safe rooms because they had begun posting footage on Facebook live.[15]

Facebook, which has strict content moderation policies, removed the livestreamed broadcasts of the *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz attack. However, clips from two livestreams were preserved and were reportedly recirculated on social media.[16]

Kibbutz Nir Oz

There were several cases of using social media to broadcast Hamas' attack at *Kibbutz* Nir Oz. One of the first videos posted to Al-Quds Brigades Telegram channels the morning of 7 October was titled "Scenes of the Al-Quds Brigades storming a number of military sites and settlements around the Gaza Strip as part of the battle Al-Aqsa Flood". The video, edited from various clips, depicted armed militants arriving in *Kibbutz* Nir Oz on motorbikes and infiltrating the community through the southern yellow gate and the western vineyard gate.[17]

One video, filmed by an unidentified journalist on the front lawn of former hostage Ada Sagi's home, was streamed on multiple Palestinian news websites. In the video, the journalist says, "After an hour or more of walking, we were able to enter a *Kibbutz*; the most important *Kibbutz* of the occupation. Here is a scene from the heart of the settlement."[18]

A Gazan journalist affiliated with the Saudi Al-Hadath news channel, livestreamed the 7 October attack on *Kibbutz* Nir Oz and filmed the abductions of multiple Nir Oz residents, as confirmed by the Al-Hadath watermark present in his videos.[19] In one video, livestreamed from *Kibbutz* Nir Oz, the journalist can be seen encouraging and instructing militants. In the opening moments of the video, the journalist is shown telling a man holding a box cutter to use it to break through closed windows of *Kibbutz* homes.

The UN Independent Commission of Inquiry confirmed footage of the same journalist also accompanied militants who attacked and kidnapped Argentinian-Israeli Shiri Bibas, 32, and her 2 children, Ariel, 4 and Kfir, 9-months-old at the time of his abduction and accompanied the abducted family back to Gaza.[20] Footage of 34-year-old Yarden Bibas', abduction and his arrival in Gaza on the back of a motorcycle was also posted online.[21] In the video, Gazan civilians can be seen taking selfies with a restrained Bibas.[22]

At *Kibbutz* Nir Oz, militants broke into 74-year-old Bracha Levinson's home. Family members who had been communicating with Levinson over text message were alerted to her death by a Facebook post from Levinson's account. The post was a video of Levinson lying on her living room floor, in a pool of blood surrounded by men with guns who were shouting in the video. The video had been posted to her account by her killers.[23] The kidnapping of Adva Adar, 85, was also posted to social media platforms between 09:00 and 09:45 on 7 October. The video shows Adar sitting in a

golf cart being taken to Gaza by 2 abductors. The man driving the golf cart wore civilian clothing. The other kidnapper was identified as a member of Al-Qassam Brigades by his green headband.[24]

On 8 October, Al-Quds Brigades published another video of the attack on *Kibbutz* Nir Oz. In the video, 3 PIJ militants break into Yair Yaakov's home and blast the saferoom door open with a hand grenade. Attackers then pull Yair Yaakov, 59, and his partner Meirav Tal, out of the saferoom. In the video from 8 October, both Yaakov and Tal appear uninjured while exiting their saferoom. However, a propaganda video posted by the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades at 12:35 on 7 October, showed Yaakov being transported into a car, exhibiting head and body burns.[25] Yaakov was initially thought to have been taken hostage alongside his partner and sons Or, 16, and Yagil, 12, all of whom were released during the November truce agreements. In February 2024, *Kibbutz* Nir Oz announced that Yaakov had been killed on 7 October, his body was captive in Gaza.[26]

A video widely circulated by the perpetrators on social media showed the abduction of 12-year-old Erez Kalderon from Nir Oz. The video was shared right after the incident, and it was through this footage that his mother and older siblings learned that he had been taken hostage.[27]

Several other incidents were posted online from *Kibbutz* Nir Oz, including videos of other families and residents being abducted to Gaza. Other videos showed Thai foreign workers who worked with the *Kibbutz* agricultural team being killed in their living quarters.[28]

Kibbutz Holit

At *Kibbutz* Holit, Israeli-Canadian Adi Vital-Kaploun, 33, was shot in her family home in front of her sons Negev, 4, and Eshel, 4-months-old. Before her death Vital-Kaploun managed to text her father and husband, warning them not to come to her home. She also reportedly managed to convince Al-Qassam Brigades militants who killed her to spare her children and take them to her neighbour, Avital Aladjem's home. In the video, a member of Al-Qassam Brigades, identified by his green headband holds the two children in his arms and says "look at the mercy in our hearts. Here are the children, we didn't kill them." The video subsequently appeared on official channel of Hamas' military wing as propaganda regarding their ethics. [29] It is important to clarify, as detailed in this report, that many children were killed on 7 October and kidnapped into Gaza.

Posting of Sexualised Images Without Consent

Shani Louk, 22, a German-Israeli tattoo artist and attendee of the Nova Music Festival, was taken hostage to Gaza. A video showing her partially naked body in the back of a Hamas pickup truck became a widely circulated image of the attack. The footage raised questions about the circumstances surrounding Louk's death. It was also unclear whether Louk's clothes were removed or displaced. The image also exemplified Hamas nonconsensual posting of sexualized and partially nude imagery online.[30]

Hostages

Many hostages were filmed being taken from their homes to the Gaza Strip, footage of which was posted on social media in several instances. Members of the Cunio family from *Kibbutz* Nir Oz were kidnapped to Gaza on 7 October. Members of their extended family discovered they were kidnapped after Hamas posted the footage on social media.[31] While outside the scope of this report, it should be noted that captors holding Israeli prisoners' hostage in Gaza have posted several propaganda videos of hostages on social media since 7 October 2023.

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Chapter 7 | The British Victims

Bernard Cowan, 57

Bernard Cowan, 57, was from Newton Mearns, a small town near Glasgow. He moved to Israel at the age of 19, drawn to the *Kibbutz* lifestyle. In his early twenties he settled in *Kibbutz* Sufa.[1] Cowan made a living working in a bromide chemical factory and as a gardener, tending to mango and banana trees.

Cowan built a home at the *Kibbutz* with his wife, Margaret, whom he met on the *Kibbutz*, raising 3 children and 2 grandchildren together in the close-knit community. On 7 October, during the Hamas assault on *Kibbutz* Sufa, Cowan was killed in his home. His brother later explained that Cowan, who was claustrophobic, had left his safe room and entered the kitchen when he was spotted and fatally shot by 2 attackers. "There are no windows in the safe room for obvious reasons. He went out into his kitchen, and 2 terrorists walked by and saw him there and shot him dead."[2] Bernard Cowan was the only Scottish national to be killed in the attacks.

Nadav Popplewell, 51

Nadav Popplewell, 51, originally from Wakefield, West Yorkshire, was living in *Kibbutz* Nirim when the Hamas attack took place on 7 October 2023. On that day, his brother, Roi, was killed outside his home, while Nadav and their mother, Channa Peri, were taken hostage by the terrorists.

Nadav's sister, Ayelet Svatitzky, recalled trying to contact her brother the morning of the attack: "I called Nadav... I heard men's voices inside his house. I hung up." She added, "I then heard men in the house speaking English with an Arabic accent."[3] A few minutes later, Ayelet received 2 photos on Whatsapp from her mother's phone of her mother and brother in their pajamas and barefoot. The sender of the message added a caption with one word, written in English: "Hamas". A third picture was then uploaded to her mother's Facebook story, something Svatitzky knew her mother couldn't have done herself. "That picture showed my mom and my brother in the living room and an armed man in the corner with a Kalashnikov [rifle]. That was the last I saw of them."[4] Channa was released from Gaza during the hostage ceasefire negotiations on 24 November 2023.

Dr. Zvi Henry Solow, who witnessed the events in the *Kibbutz* described the moments before the abduction: "We heard shooting. We saw the terrorists running around between our house, through a small window in the house, and one of the houses next door."[5]

On 3 June 2024, *Kibbutz* Nirim announced that hostage Nadav Popplewell, 51, was killed while in Hamas captivity and later recovered by IDF troops on 19 August 2024. However the date of his death remains blank on his gravestone.[6]

Roi Popplewell, 54

Roi Popplewell, known by his friends as 'Pepe', originally from Wakefield, West Yorkshire, was killed at his home in *Kibbutz* Nirim on 7 October during the Hamas attack. On that day, Roi was shot in the back of the head outside his home. His mother, 79-year-old Channah Peri, and brother, 51-year-old Nadav Popplewell, were both taken hostage by the terrorists.[7] In the aftermath of the attack, Roi's family could not lay him to rest immediately, as they were focused on the overwhelming task of bringing his mother and brother back from Gaza. As Ayelet recalled, "We couldn't even mourn because we were concentrating on getting my mom and brother back".[8]

It wasn't until after Nadav's remains were recovered in August 2024 that Roi was laid to rest in his final resting place alongside his brother at *Kibbutz* Nirim.

Sgt. Nathanel Young, 20

Nathanel Young, 20, a dual UK-Israeli citizen from North London, attended JFS school in Kenton. His brother Elliot described Nathanel as someone who "always had strong Jewish pride."[9] He officially made *aliyah* (moved to Israel) in April 2023 and started his mandatory military conscription in the IDF soon after.

On 7 October, he was stationed at Yiftach Outpost near *Kibbutz* Zikim, just a few miles from the Gaza Strip. Early in the morning, reports came in that a female soldier was in danger at the base entrance. Nathanel and 7 fellow soldiers rushed to her aid and encountered Hamas terrorists who had infiltrated

the base. Despite being outnumbered, they fought fiercely for over an hour, preventing further damage and saving the lives of others in the base. Nathanel was killed in the confrontation. Nathanel's sister, Gaby shared that the family "understood from a few people that he saved lives, that he saved a *Kibbutz* from being infiltrated by terrorists. That is a heroic action."[10]

Danny Darlington, 34

Danny Darlington, 34, was a photographer from Manchester. Living in Berlin at the time, Danny was in Israel on vacation to visit his half-brother Lior.

On 7 October, while staying at *Kibbutz* Nir Oz with his friend Caroline Bohl, Danny was killed by Hamas terrorists. His last message to Lior read, "S**t, big balagan [chaos] in the *Kibbutz*."[11] Danny and Caroline entered a saferoom that did not lock from the outside and were discovered by Hamas operatives. Danny's body was found alongside Caroline's body. They had both been shot dead.

Jake Aaron Marlowe, 26

Jake Marlowe, 26, a dual UK-Israeli citizen was killed at the Nova Music Festival. Marlowe, originally from Potters Bar in Hertfordshire where his family still live, was a bassist who had toured globally with the UK band 'Desolated.' He finished school at JFS before moving to Israel in November 2021. He was working security at the Nova Music Festival when Hamas terrorists attacked.

His lifelong friend Daniel Aboudy received a WhatsApp voice note from Marlowe early on 7 October. Marlowe said, "Things are going on around Gaza, they're coming in from there, we're trying to evacuate everyone, I'm on an ATV [a quad bike] and we are telling everyone to get out." His body was found on 11 October, but due to having been shot 9 times his father had to identify him from tattoos on his calves.[12]

Aner Shapira, 22

Aner Shapira, 22, a dual UK-Israeli citizen was on holiday and attending the Nova Music Festival in Israel on 7 October 2023, when terrorists attacked the event. As the chaos unfolded, Shapira, alongside his friend Hersh Goldberg-Polin, sought refuge in a bomb shelter along Route 232, with other festival attendees. However, the attackers threw grenades into the shelter. Shapira stood at the entrance and threw 7 live grenades back at the assailants, saving the lives of those hiding inside. The eighth grenade exploded in his hands, killing him instantly.[13] Shapira's actions were captured in a video that later emerged, showing him throwing the grenades to protect others. Shapira's heroism was credited with saving at least 7 lives in the shelter.[14] Itamar Shapira (no relation), a survivor of the attack who was in the shelter with Aner recalled how Aner "spotted the grenade straight away and threw it out quickly, in less than three seconds...it's the most courageous thing I've ever seen anyone do in my life."[15]

Shapira was still in his conscripted military service, a sergeant in the Nahal Brigade, but was off duty, in civilian clothing, on 7 October 2023.

Sgt. Maj. Dvorah 'Debbie' Abraham, 40

Sgt. Maj. Dvora "Debbie" Abraham, 40, a dual UK-Israeli citizen, lived in the small southern *Moshav* of Talmei Yosef.

Debbie was a dedicated police officer from the Ofakim Station who was killed on 7 October at the Nova Music Festival where she was on duty with police security. Once the rocket fire began, the police tried to evacuate the civilians and set up roadblocks to confront the attackers on the Highway, as reports came through of their imminent arrival.

Her friend and fellow officer, Bat Mishael, recalled the scenes they faced during the attack describing the chaos that unfolded, as they fought off armed terrorists while trying to evacuate civilians. She recounted how the period of fighting "went on for hours and hours, hours where their ammo never run out."[16] Abraham maintained her post even after learning that terrorists had breached the police blockade and were closing in on the festival grounds. She refused to abandon her position when offered to escape in vehicles heading east. She was killed at her post.

Yonatan Rapoport, 41

Yonatan "Yoni" Rapoport, 41, a dual UK-Israeli citizen, was killed during the 7 October attack on *Kibbutz* Be'eri. Born on the Isle of Wight, Yonatan moved to Israel at a young age but retained his love for Manchester United.[17] He worked as a gardener on the *Kibbutz* after taking horticulture courses.

On the morning of the attack, his home was broken into by terrorists. As the situation escalated, he

instructed his young children, Yosef, 9, and Aluma, 6, to hide under the bed in the safe room.[18] His children survived the event, with Yonatan sacrificing his life to protect them.[19]

Lianne Clair Brisley [Sharabi], 48. Noiya Sharabi, 16. Yahel Sharabi, 13.

Lianne Sharabi was born in Bristol, moved to Israel when she was 19 and began volunteering on a *Kibbutz*. She met and married her husband Eli in 2000 and worked as a dental nurse on the *Kibbutz*.[20]

Yahel, 13, was described by her grandmother, Gill, as someone who "never sat still."[21] On the *Kibbutz*, Yahel was often seen riding her bike or filming TikTok dance videos with her friends and family. At 16, Noiya was described as quieter. Gill recalled her dedication to volunteering, saying she spent much of her time helping disabled children and adults, aspiring to a future career in social work.

On 7 October 2023 Lianne and her daughters were all killed in *Kibbutz* Be'eri. As the rocket alert sirens went off, Lianne sent a message in her family WhatsApp group chat that she could hear gun fire and shouting in Arabic. The last message from Lianne was sent at around 12:30. Lianne's sister-in-law received a message from Lianne at 11:00 that read, "I can hear them. They are here at our house. They are shooting and shouting ''Die Israel''. Please call for help."[22] Hamas terrorists broke into their home, shot the family dog, and forced the door of the safe room open, before taking the family out and setting fire to the house.[23] Lianne and her daughter's bodies were identified a week later.

Eli Sharabi's remains were not recovered from his home and it was confirmed, from eyewitness testimony, that he was taken captive by Hamas.[24]

Maj. Benjamin "Benji" Trakeniski, 32

Benjamin, known to his friends as family as "Benji" was born in Israel, to a British mother and an Israeli father, and held dual UK-Israeli citizenship. He was engaged to Rotem Simone, with whom he shared an apartment in Tel Aviv. On the morning of 7 October, he awoke to rocket sirens and, along with friends, drove first to his northern base before heading south to *Kibbutz* Be'eri.[25] Benji's force was one of the first to respond, rescuing nearly 50 wounded civilians. He was killed on a return trip into the *Kibbutz* to rescue more civilians.[26]

Yannai Hetzroni-Heller, 12. Liel Hetzroni-Heller, 12.

Twelve-year-old UK-Israeli twins, Yannai and Liel Hetzroni, were raised in *Kibbutz* Be'eri by their grandparents, Aviya and Eva Hetzroni, and their great-aunt, Ayala Hetzroni. This arrangement was made after their mother was left paralysed due to complications during childbirth, and their father moved to the UK for work to support the family.[27 28]

Liel and Yannai Hetzroni were described as 2 vibrant children, and as twins were known to have shared a unique bond.[29]

On 7 October, the twins' grandfather, Aviya Hetzroni, was killed earlier in the attack on *Kibbutz* Be'eri. Ayala was taken with the twins into *Kibbutz* resident Pessi Cohen's home, which had been used by the attackers to gather 15 hostages. As the day developed a hostage stand-off developed with the Israeli police and army trying to negotiate with the attackers inside. When the attackers refused to surrender an intense firefight broke out. All but 2 hostages present were killed.[30] In the violence, the twins and their great aunt were all killed. It took weeks for the bodies to be discovered, and for forensics to identify them due to the explosions from the attack.[31]

The twins are survived by their mother and father. Their mother was unable to attend their funeral due to her physical disabilities.[32]

Rotem Kalderon, 66

Rotem Kalderon, 66, was a lifelong resident of *Kibbutz* Be'eri and a beloved educator, counsellor, and volunteer. She was a dual UK-Israeli citizen.[33] Rotem dedicated decades to education, first teaching physical education and later serving as the director of Be'eri's early childhood education programme. After retiring, she volunteered at a centre for victims of sexual assault and an organisation supporting IDF veterans with PTSD.[34]

She was killed on 7 October, during the attack on the *Kibbutz*. Rotem was alone in her home when the assault began and messaged family and friends while attempting to hold the door to her safe room closed for hours. For 2 weeks after the attack, she was considered missing until her body was found and identified.[35]

Sgt. 1st Class Joseph (Yosef) Malachi Guedalia, 22

Joseph (Yosef) Malachi Guedalia, 22, dual UK-Israeli citizen, was an athlete with a passion for sports and outdoor activities, often playing basketball and hiking with his family and friends.[36] He was a great-grandson of Holocaust survivors, and born in Israel to a family with strong ties to both the UK and Israel. His grandfather moved to Manchester after World War II, and his mother was born and grew up in the UK before moving to Israel.[37]

He was serving as a soldier in the IDF within an anti-terror unit which was deployed to confront Hamas gunmen at *Kibbutz* Kfar Aza on 7 October. He headed south with his unit after 08:00. He made four trips back to the *Kibbutz*, each time under heavy fire, to rescue hostages and evacuate the injured. On his fourth return, his vehicle was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade, and while fleeing, he was shot.[38] Hamas terrorists attempted to take Guedalia's body into Gaza for use as a hostage. However, members of his unit refused to leave the battlefield and remained with his body until it could be retrieved, allowing Yosef's family to give him a proper burial with dignity.[39]

Dor Hanan Shafir, 30

Dor Hanan Shafir, 30, was born in Israel to a British mother and grew up in Modi'in. Dor was engaged to his fiancée, Savyon Hen Kipper, with whom he attended the Psyduck music festival near Nirim on 7 October. According to reports, Dor and Savyon were among the first to react to the attack. After hearing a rocket strike, they immediately ran to their car and drove off. At 07:03, Savyon sent a text to a friend stating that they had found shelter just 2 minutes into their drive. It is unclear exactly how they died, but both bodies were identified by 11 October.[40]

Emily Damari, 28

Released in a ceasefire hostage exchange in January 2025, after 15 months in captivity.

Emily Damari, a UK-Israeli dual citizen, was the last known British citizen held hostage in Gaza. Her mother Mandy, a British citizen who grew up in Beckenham, south-east London, moved to Kfar Aza 30 years ago. Emily has been a part of the Kfar Aza *Kibbutz* community her entire life.

On the morning of the attack Emily was at her home in the young neighbourhood part of the *Kibbutz* which is near the security fence, and one of the infiltration points of the attackers. She was last in contact with her brothers at 10:24 while hiding in her safe room with her friend Gali Berman. During the abduction, she was shot in the hand, possibly while holding her dog, Chooca, who was later found dead in her room. She also sustained shrapnel wounds to her leg. Witnesses reported seeing her car, driven by a terrorist, leaving the area around 10:45-11:00, at which point she, along with the Berman twins, were taken to Gaza. Her injuries were later confirmed by released hostages who saw her in Gaza's tunnels.[41]

Dafna Elyakim, a former hostage, recalled that whilst she was being held in Hamas' underground tunnels in Gaza, she met "5 other female hostages who haven't yet returned", which included Emily Damari.[42] Former hostages reported how in the tunnels Emily "helped hold everyone together even in the worst times."[43] Further reports from released hostages highlight Emily's courage and bravery when she confronted her captors, denouncing the sexual assault of her fellow hostages.[44] Emily marked her 28th birthday while in captivity.

Mandy Damari, her mother, hid in her own home as Hamas operatives broke in. She was saved from capture or death when a bullet became lodged in the lock of the safe room where she had taken shelter.[45] Mandy tirelessly campaigned for her daughter's release, engaging with the UK, US and Qatari governments, the United Nations (UN), and the Red Cross, seeking signs of life and a pathway to bring Emily home. After 15 months in captivity, Emily was reunited with her family during the January 2025 ceasefire hostage exchange.

While these individuals are not UK citizens themselves, they have strong connections to the UK through family members who are citizens.

Eli and Yossi Sharabi. Eli is the husband, and father, of the deceased UK-Israeli citizens, Lianne, 48, and Noiya, 16, and Yahel, 13, who were killed in *Kibbutz* Be'eri. Eli was taken as a hostage into Gaza, as was his brother, Yossi Sharabi, 53. Yossi's home was also invaded and the family marched out, he was then forced into a vehicle and taken to Gaza.

Oded Lifshitz, 84, was taken hostage from *Kibbutz* Nir Oz on the morning of 7 October, alongside his wife, Yocheved. Both were founding members of the *Kibbutz* and peace activists who helped transport patients from Gaza to receive medical treatment in Israeli hospitals. While Yocheved was released later in October 2023, Oded was kept in captivity and was killed. His daughter, Sharone, a British citizen resides in London.

Avinatan Or, 31, was taken hostage from the Nova Music Festival on 7 October, along with his girlfriend, Noa Argamani. His mother, Ditza, is British. After hiding for several hours and trying to call for rescue, Avinatan and Noa were eventually separated and taken to Gaza by Hamas terrorists.

Tsachi Idan, 50, was taken hostage from his home in *Kibbutz* Nahal Oz on 7 October. Tsachi and his family were in their home's safe room when terrorists entered. With the help of his 18-year-old daughter, Maayan, Tsachi tried to hold the door shut, but the Hamas operative shot through it, killing Maayan before breaking into the room. The family was marched out of their house, and Tsachi was taken hostage to Gaza. His cousin, Adam Ma'anit, lives in Brighton.

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In Memoriam

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Cmdr Sgt. Abagil, Meir, 55, *Sderot*
Abargel, Oded, 26, *Nova*
Master Sgt. Abargil, Eliran, 29, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Sgt. Abarjil, Matan, 19, *Kibbutz Nir Am*
Abasov, Shmil, 33, *Nova*
Abdulayev, Eden, 22, *Nova*
Abdush, Gal, 34, *Nova*
Abdush, Nagi, 35, *Nova*
Abir, Lotan, 24, *Nova*
Sgt. Maj. Abraham, Dvora "Debbie", 40, *Nova*
Abramov, Lior, 20, *Nova*
Cpl. Abramovich, Noam, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Abu Amer Razeem, Suhaib, 22, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Abu Asa, Osamah, 36, *Nova*
Abu Jama, Yazan Zakaria, 5, *Ar'ara (Bedouin Village)*
Abu Madiam, Dalia, 30, *Moshav Mivtahim*
Abu Madiam, Osamah, 28, *Moshav Mivtahim*
Abu Rashad, Naama, 0, *Highway*
Abu Sabeeh, Faizah, 57, *Alba-at (Bedouin Village)*
Abu Sabeeh, Mai Zuhair, 13, *Alba-at (Bedouin Village)*
Abu Sabila Odeh, Amer, 25, *Sderot*
Abu Saliba, Musa, 41, *Kibbutz Re'im*
Maj. Abudi, Adir, 23, *Zikim Base*
Cmdr Sgt. Maj. Abuharon, Roni, 39, *Ofakim*
Abuhatzira, Orel, 25, *Nova*
Adam, Mapal, 25, *Nova*
Capt. Adani, Eily, 21, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Adar, Gili, 24, *Nova*
Admoni, Guy, 25, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Admoni, Michal, 51, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Staff Sgt. Agmon, Adam, 21, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Aguirre, Angelyn, 32, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Staff Sgt. Aharon, Yogev, 20, *Kissufim Outpost*
Ahrak, Omri, 26, *Nova*
Aivas, Niv, 25, *Gaza Envelope*
Akuni, Aryeh, 68, *Netiv HaAsara*
Akuni, Or, 54, *Netiv HaAsara*
Akuni, Ruti, 62, *Netiv HaAsara*
Alacre, Loreta, 49, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Al-Atar, Suliman, Highway
Staff Sgt. Alem, Maro, 20, *Kibbutz Nirim*
Alfasi, Shlomo, 52, *Nova*
al-JarJawi, Sammi, 52, *Highway*
Alkra'an, Amin Akal, 11, *Alba-at (Bedouin Village)*
Alkra'an, Jawad Ibrahim, 15, *Alba-at (Bedouin Village)*
Alkra'an, Mahmoud Diab, 15, *Alba-at (Bedouin Village)*
Alkra'an, Malek Ibrahim, 14, *Alba-at (Bedouin Village)*
Almagor, Marina, 76, *Netiv HaAsara*
Al-Masri, Khoury, Highway
Sgt. Maj. (res.) Almonsnino, Liran, 41, *Kibbutz Holit*
Sgt. 1st Class Alon, Orel, 23, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Staff Sgt. Alon-Levy, Eden, 19, *Zikim Base*
Altlakat, Fatima, 35, *Highway*
1st Sgt. Alton, Dror, 29, *Highway*
Alziadna, Abed Al-Rahman Atef, 26, *Zikim Beach*
Ch. Supt. Amar, Avi, 55, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Amar, Hanan, 38, *Nova*
Amar, Mercedes, 34, *Nova*
Capt. Amar, Nitay, 22, *Re'im Base*
Staff Sgt. Amar, Regev, 20, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Cpl. Amar, Shirat Yam, 18, *Nahal Oz Base*
Sgt. 1st Class Amer, Jawad, 23, *Lebanon Border*
Amikam, Nadav, 39, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Amin, Shani, 18, *Nova*
Amir, Mordechai, 67, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Staff Sgt. Amitay, Nehorai Levi, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
Staff Sgt. Amouyal, Dolev, 21, *Paga Post*
Master Sgt. (res.) Amsalem, Avichai, 30, *Highway*
Aptalon, Yossi, 77, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Arad, Nevo, 25, *Nova*
Arad, Uri, 22, *Nova*
Arazi, Ofek, 28, *Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak*
Arbiv, Ofek, 21, *Highway*
Ariel, Dan, 22, *Nova*
Arnin, Ayelet, 22, *Nova*
Arunthit, Kraisorn, 29, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Asayag, Liav, 24, *Nova*
Sgt. Ashram, Shai, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Ashuan, Sahar, 22, *Nova*
Aslanov, Josh, 71, *Zikim Beach*
Asraf, Chaim, 68, *Sderot*
Sgt. Asraf, Sivan, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
Sgt. Assayag, Ravit Haan, 19, *Moshav Yakhini*
Assulin, Dan, 38, *Moshav Mivtahim*
Asulin, Lior, 43, *Nova*
Asulin, Liraz, 38, *Nova*
Atias, Dorin, 24, *Nova*
Atun, Lior, 25, *Nova*
Atun, Ofek, 24, *Nova*
Avdalimov, Semion, 66, *Sderot*
Aviani, Shachar, 56, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Avital, Gil, 56, *Moshav Mivtahim*
Sgt. Avital, Or, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
Avitan, Dor, 26, *Nova*
Aviv, Noy, 29, *Nova*
Avni, Gil, 25, *Nova*
Avni, Haggi, 50, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Avraham, Boaz, 61, *Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak*
Avraham, Ilan, 57, *Nova*
1st Sgt. Avraham, Uriel, 29, *Kibbutz Re'im*
Avramov, Michael, 55, *Sderot*
Avrava, Dikala, 51, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Avrava, Tomer, 17, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Sgt. Ayash, Itamar, 19, *Urim Base*
Azar, Guy, 23, *Nova*
Cpl. Azar, Ilay, 18, *Re'im Base*
Sgt. Azizov, Lior, 20, *Paga Post*
Azulay, Gabi, 44, *Nova*
Azulay, Yohai, 28, *Nova*
Azulay, Yonatan, 23, *Nova*
Bachar, Carmel, 15, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Bachar, Dana, 48, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Bachar, Geula, 80, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Bachar, Mazi, 63, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Bachar, Yehuda, 24, *Nova*
Baharav, Adi, 62, *Netiv HaAsara*
Bahat, Dror, 30, *Nova*
Balti, Itzhak (Itzik), 53, *Ofakim*
Capt. Balui, Idan, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
Bancha, Dachtuyawat, 29, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Banjo, Itay, 30, *Nova*
Bar, Dean Nehorai, 27, *Nova*
Col. (res.) Bar, Leon, 53, *Highway*
Bar, Ma'ayan, 65, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Bar, Shoham, 21, *Nova*
Bar, Yuval, 65, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Bar Am, Ilai, 27, *Nova*
Sgt. Maj. Barad, Alon, 38, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Barak, Tomer, 20, *Paga Post*
Baram, Aviv, 33, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Staff Sgt. Bar-Am, Neta, 21, *Nahal Oz Base*
Staff Sgt. Baranes, Shalev, 20, *Paga Post*
Barawi, Hashem, *Highway*
Barazani, Stav, 22, *Nova*
Barda, Liron, 26, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Bareket, Roi, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
Barima, Adam, 47, *Sderot*
Bar-On, Yuval, 25, *Nova*
Sgt. Bar-Sadeh, Illai, 19, *Yiftach Outpost*
Bar-Sinai, Yoram, 75, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Bartal, Nadav, 23, *Nova*
Bartik, Tal, 48, *Nova*
Baruch, Edan, 20, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Sgt. Barzilay, Osher Simcha, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Bausi, Itai Yehuda, 22, *Nova*
Bavani, Gidon, 66, *Kibbutz Nirim*
Sgt. Bazak, Guy, 19, *Kissufim Outpost*
Beilin, Oron, 24, *Nova*
Beilin, Zinaida, 60, *Sderot*
Staff Sgt. Belay, Benyamin, 20, *Kissufim Outpost*
Cmdr Sgt. Maj. Belinki, Denis, 47, *Sderot*
Master Sgt. (res.) Belkin, Omri, 25, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Ben Artzi, Hana, 63, *Kfar Aviv*
Ben Avi, Chen, 23, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Ben Chemo, Michael, 21, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Ben-Ami, Hava, 78, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Ben-Ami, Shani, 27, *Nova*
Ben-Avida, Amit, 19, *Nova*
Ben-Ayun, Ortal Bubtas, 24, *Nova*
Capt. Ben-Basat, Yotam, 24, *Kibbutz Re'im*
Ben-Cohen, Binyamin, 27, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Ben-David, Barak, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Ben-David, Maya, 48, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Staff Sgt. Ben-David, Neria, 22, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Ben-David Nagar, Celine, 32, *Nova*
Benhamou, Dan, 27, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Ben-Harush, Shoham Moshe, 20, *Kerem Shalom Crossing*
Ben-Hemo, Or Chaim, 19, *Nova*
Ben-Horin, Rivka, 74, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Maj. Ben-Moshe, Ariel, 27, *Kibbutz Re'im*
Sgt. Ben-Muha, Ilay Noam, 20, *Kissufim Outpost*
Bennaim, Chaimi, 56, *Netiv HaAsara*
Ben-Naim, Shahar, 43, *Nova*
Ben-Porat, Elyasif, 21, *Highway*
Ben-Porat, Moshe, 58, *Ofakim*
Ben-Rubi, Eden, 23, *Nova*
Ben-Senyor, Danielle, 34, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Ben-Shitrit, Shimon Elroy, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
Lt. Ben-Simon, Adar, 20, *Zikim Base*
Ben-Yaakov, Lior, 34, *Moshav Mivtahim*
Staff Sgt. Ben-Yaakov, Yuval, 21, *Yiftach Outpost*
Staff Sgt. Ben-Yakov, Ya'ad, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
Ben-Yehuda, Gilad, 28, *Psyduck*
Staff Sgt. Ben-Yehuda, Itamar, 21, *Paga Post*
Ben-Yehuda, Yuval, 26, *Psyduck*
Ben-Zechariah, Yohai, 23, *Nova*
Ben-Zino, Ido, 26, *Nova*
Ben-Zvi, Amitai, 80, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Ben-Zvi, Sagiv Baylin, 24, *Nova*
Beredichesky, Hadar, 30, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Beredichesky, Itay, 30, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Berger, Nurit, 59, *Netiv HaAsara*
Bergman, Eldad, 26, *Nova*
Bergstein, Shachaf, 33, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Bernstein, Ben, 23, *Nova*
Bernstein, Eliyahu Ya'akov, 20, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Bezgodov, Daniel, 22, *Sufa Base*
Bhandari, Prabesh, 24, *Kibbutz Alumim*
Maj. Bibi, Uriel, 30, *Highway*
Bikhar, Naomie, 23, *Nova*
Bilmes, Sapir, 24, *Nova*
Bilya, Ariel (Arik), 28, *Ofakim*
Sgt. Binenstock, Ido, 19, *Paga Post*
Bira, Oron, 54, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Bira, Tahel, 15, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Bira, Tair, 22, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Bira, Tal, 62, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Bira, Yasmin, 51, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Bista, Dipesh Raj, 24, *Kibbutz Alumim*
Biton, Ariel Ben-Mordechai, 22, *Nova*
Biton, Benayahu, 23, *Nova*
Biton, Nadav, 20, *Nova*
Sgt. Biton, Shir, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Bitton, Maya, 22, *Nova*
Ch. Supt. Blich, Vadim, 39, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Sgt. Maj. Blochman, Yakir, 33, *Kibbutz Re'im*
Staff Sgt. Bogla, Adir Ishti, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
Bohl, Carolin, 22, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Bokovza, Raz, 23, *Nova*
Boldes, Doron, 34, *Nova*
Bongart, Sofia, 21, *Nova*
Cpl. Boni, Naama, 19, *Yiftach Outpost*
Sgt. Maj. Borodovsky, Alexy, 39, *Kibbutz Re'im*
Bosco, Petro, 35, *Kibbutz Holit*
Boyum, Gil, 55, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Boyum, Inbar, 22, *Highway*
Boyum, Yuval, 21, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Braslavsky, Daniel, 30, *Nova*
Sgt. Brief, Yona Betzakel, 23, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Brodash, Shiraz, 23, *Highway*
Maj. Bronshtein, Ben, 24, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Brosh, Shoshana, 75, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Staff Sgt. Bruchim, Yosef Itamar, 20, *Sderot*
Sgt. Buchnik, Lavie, 20, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Maj. Buchris, Chen, 26, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Burstein, Matias, 41, *Nova*
Buskila, Yarden, 25, *Nova*
Master Sgt. Buzaglo, Avi, 26, *Ofakim*
Cmdr. Buzukashvili, Itzik, 43, *Highway*
Cabrera, Grace, 45, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Casarotti-Kalfa, Keshet, 21, *Nova*
Castelvi, Paul Vincent, 42, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Master Sgt. (res.) Castiel, Daniel, 24, *Zikim Base*
Chaben, Yulia, 23, *Zikim Beach*
Champasim, Saksit, *Kibbutz* Alumim
Chana, Israel, 30, *Ofakim*
Maj. Chapell, Roey, 25, *Sufa Base*
Chatdumee, Jaroon, 40, *Kibbutz Alumim*
Chaudhary, Ashish, 25, *Kibbutz Alumim*
Cohen, Amit, 25, *Nova*
Cohen, Amit Haim, 23, *Nova*
Cohen, Aviad Gad, 44, *Moshav Pri Gan*
Cohen, Daniel Asher, 32, *Psyduck*
Cohen, Danielle, 25, *Nova*
Sgt. Cohen, Danit, 19, *Urim Base*
Cpl. Cohen, Hadar Miriam, 18, *Nahal Oz Base*
Sgt. Cohen, Itamar, 19, *Paga Post*
Capt. Cohen, Itay, 22, *Kibbutz Alumim*
Cohen, Mila, 0, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Cohen, Mor, 24, *Nova*
Cohen, Ohad, 43, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Sgt. Cohen, Ohad Bodi, 20, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Cohen, Pesi, 68, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Capt. Cohen, Shilo, 24, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Maj. Cohen, Tal, 30, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Cohen, Yona, 73, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Sgt. Maj. Cohen, Yorai Eliyahu, 29, *Highway*
Cohen Maguri, Libby, 22, *Nova*
Cowan, Bernard, 57, *Kibbutz Sufa*
Dadon, Avi, 44, *Nova*
Dafni, Lin, 22, *Nova*

Dagan, Adi, 68, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Staff Sgt. Dagan, Shalev, 20, *Kibbutz Nirim*
Dahan, Yitzhak, 48, *Nova*
Damri, Dan, 21, *Nova*
Damti, Kim, 22, *Nova*
Dan, Carmela Sara, 80, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Dan, Noya, 12, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Danguri, Gal, 23, *Nova*
Sgt. Maj. Danilov, Boris, 34, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Staff Sgt. Danino, Daniel Moshe, 21, *COGAT Base/Erez Checkpoint*
Darawshe, Awad, 23, *Nova*
Darlington, Danny, 34, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
David, Amit, 23, *Nova*
David, Hodaya, 27, *Nova*
David, Tair, 24, *Nova*
Davidi, Barak, 28, *Nova*
Cmdr. Davidov, Jayar, 43, *Highway*
Davidov, Karina, 30, *Nova*
Davidovitch, Shlomi, 50, *Highway*
Cpl. Davidyan, Ofir, 18, *Urim Base*
Davitashvili, Shon, 25, *Nova*
Cmdr Sgt. Maj. Dayan, David Ben, 58, *Sderot*
Cmdr Sgt. Maj. Dayan, Yaron Morris, 52, *Sderot*
Dedo, Tzafir, 45, *Nova*
Deitschman, Ronen, 49, *Nova*
Sgt. Dekel, Nahman, 20, *Sufa Base*
Demidova, Natalia, 39, *Sderot*
Dgani, Naomi, 80, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Diawthaisong, Jakkapan, 37, *Kibbutz Alumim*
Master Sgt. (res.) Dolev, Tomer, 34, *Netiv HaAsara*
Dor, Idan, 25, *Nova*
Dove, Rachel, 25, *Nova*
Dukarker, Kim, 22, *Nova*
Lt. Dukhan, Yohai, 26, *Nahal Oz Base*
Staff Sgt. Dushi, Rotem, 20, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Eckstein, Matan, 23, *Nova*
Edberg, Asaf, 23, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Eden, Haim Meir, 20, *Paga Post*
Edri, Aviad Avraham, 31, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Edri, Idan, 36, *Nova*
Edri, Ido, 24, *Nova*
Efraim, Noam Liel, 24, *Nova*
Efraim, Yarin Moshe, 24, *Nova*
Capt. Eilat, Shir, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
Eilon, Tal, 46, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Sgt. 1st Class (res.) Eisler, Matanya, 22, *Lebanon Border*
Master Sgt. El Knafo, Shai, 30, *Nova*
Elazari, Yonatan, 19, *Ofakim*
Elfassi, Oran, 22, *Kibbutz Nirim*
Elfrahin, Khaled, 57, *Nova*
Elharar, Liz, 45, *Kibbutz Holit*
Elharar, Meir, 58, *Kibbutz Holit*
Sgt. Eliyahu, Ariel, 19, *Nova*
Eliyahu, Aviv, 38, *Nova*
Eliyahu, Romi Brandt, 38, *Nova*
Eliyahu, Yehonatan, 21, *Nova*
Eliyahu Alshich, Shlomo, 28, *Nova*
Elkabets, Sivan, 23, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Elkabtaz, Moti, 40, *Psyduck*
Elkayam-Levy, Einav, 32, *Nova*
Elmalem, Matan, 42, *Nova*
Elyakim, Noam, 47, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Englander, Noa, 23, *Nova*
Epstein, Bilha, 81, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Epstein, Neta, 22, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Sgt. Erez, Ariel, 19, *COGAT Base/Erez Checkpoint*
Erez, Ofir, 57, *Kibbutz Sufa*
Sgt. Eshel, Roni, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Staff Sgt. Esto, Or, 21, *Kissufim Outpost*
Even, Alon, 16, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Even, Chen, 46, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Even, Ido, 14, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Even, Rinat, 44, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Sgt. Eyal, Amir, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Eylon, Shira, 23, *Nova*
Ezra, Oz Moshe, 23, *Nova*
Faber, Asaf, 23, *Kibbutz Re'im*
Fahimi, Refael, 63, *Netivot*
Farage, Noa, 22, *Nova*
Sgt. Maj. Faresh, Aharon, 36, *Urim Base*
Staff Sgt. Fierstein, Omri Niv, 20, *Zikim Base*
Fiorentino, Ilan, 38, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Sgt. Maj. Fisher, Amir, 22, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Fishman, Ben, 21, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Fitussi, Yishai, 21, *Nahal Oz Base*
Flash, Cynthia Tamar, 67, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Flash, Igal, 66, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Fleisher, Avraham, 63, *Magen*
Forti, Nir, 30, *Nova*
Freilich, Marcelle, 64, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Frenkel, Ziv, 22, *Nova*
Fricker, Yona, 69, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Friedman, Valerie, 60, *Sderot*
Furman, Lyudmila, 78, *Sderot*
Gabay, Amit, 17, *Kibbutz Re'im*
Gabay, Mor, 30, *Sderot*
Gabay, Shani, 26, *Nova*
Gal, Shalev, 23, *Nova*
Gallon, Liam, 26, *Nova*
Sgt. Galsky, Evgeny, 34, *Highway*
Staff Sgt. Gamzo, Ilay, 20, *Yad Mordechai*
Gandlin, Isabella, 27, *Nova*
Ganon, Shiran, 38, *Nova*
Ganot, Avia, 22, *Nova*
Supt. Ganot, Dan, 42, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Lt. Gaori, Adir, 20, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Staff Sgt. Garcia, Brandon David Flores, 21, *Kissufim Outpost*
Garcovich, Dafna, 47, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Gat, Kineret, 68, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Gavara, Omer, 24, *Sderot*
Cmdr Sgt. Maj. Gendel, Roman, 47, *Kibbutz Nir Am*
Genis, Sefi (Yossef), 30, *Nova*
Genish, Benyamin (Benny), 70, *Zikim Beach*
Georgie, Shir, 22, *Nova*
Geta, Stav, 30, *Nova*
Gez, Eden, 31, *Nova*
Ghanem, Zayed, Highway
Gherafi, Liel, 18, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Ghnassia, Valentin, 21, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Giler, Lilya, 61, *Sderot*
Giler, Yaroslav, 25, *Nova*
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Lt. Col. Ginsberg, Eli, 42, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Glasberg, Noa, 43, *Kibbutz Ein HaShlosha*
Staff Sgt. Glass, Yam, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
Staff Sgt. Glisko, Itay, 20, *Paga Post*
Godard, Ayelet, 63, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Godo, Tom, 52, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Maj. Golan, Sagi, 30, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Staff Sgt. Golan, Yonatan, 21, *Nahal Oz Base*
Goldenberg, Nitzan, 28, *Nova*
Goldenberg, Tamar, 23, *Nova*
Goldstein, Nadav, 46, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Goldstein-Almog, Yam, 20, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Goltman, Daniel, 24, *Nova*
Gordani, Sharon, 25, *Nova*
Goren, Aran, 33, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Goren, Avner, 56, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Goren, Tova, 66, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Gorlov, Victoria, 23, *Nova*
Capt.(res.) Gorny, Yiftach, 51, *Highway*
Graziani, Maor, 22, *Nova*
Gredeskul, Sergey, 81, *Ofakim*
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Gross, Yossef, 75, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Sgt. Grunman, Adir, 19, *Urim Base*
Maj. Grushka, Tal, 25, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Sgt. 1st Class Guedalia, Yosef Malachi, 22, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Sgt. Gueta, Amit, 21, *Highway*
Cmdr Sgt. Maj. Gulima, Shmuel, 48, *Sderot*
Gurevich, Lilia, 38, *Nova*
Guri, Ariel- Refael, 30, *Ofakim*
Guri, Roi- Haim, 21, *Ofakim*
Guryonov, Anton, 37, *Nova*
Gusak, Margarita, 21, *Nova*
Lt. Gutin, Yonatan, 20, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Gutman, Tamar, 27, *Nova*
Habani, Shaked, 21, *Nova*
Hadad, Eitan, 43, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Hadad Atias, Lior, 36, *Nova*
Hadar, Itay Houston, 27, *Psyduck*
Hagos Berhe, Wolderaphael 'Tiger', 40, *Sderot*
Haim, Maya, 22, *Nova*
Haimov, Aharon, 25, *Ofakim*
Sgt. Hajaj, Aviv, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Hajbi, Elitzur Tzuriel, 60, *Moshav Yakhini*
Hajbi, Izhar, 60, *Moshav Yakhini*
Hajbi, Ziv, 24, *Nova*
Halevi, Aviad, 29, *Nova*
Halifa, Gaya, 24, *Nova*
Capt.(res.) Halivni, Yuval, 30, *Highway*
Hamoi, Ella, 26, *Nova*
Hananel Hindi, Avraham, 37, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Hand, Narkis, 54, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Hanom, Hezi, 31, *Nova*
Haramati, Varda, 81, *Kibbutz Re'im*
Haramaty, Idan, 22, *Nova*
Haran, Avshalom, 66, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Maj. Har-Even, Shilo, 25, *Nahal Oz Base*
Master Sgt. Harush, Eliyahu Michael, 28, *Sderot*
Staff Sgt. Harush, Ido, 21, *Yiftach Outpost*
Hasday, Avi, 53, *Zikim Beach*
Hasid, Shraga, 77, *Ashkelon*
Hassid, Ben Ben-Zion, 23, *Nova*
Hassidim, Naor, 23, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Hatab, Yehoshua, 67, *Ashkelon*
Hativ, Tarek, 44, *Ofakim*
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Heker, Ze'ev, 72, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
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Hen Burstein, Einav, 39, *Nova*
Supt. Henkin, Avraham, 39, *Highway*
Herman, Idan, 26, *Nova*
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Hiel, Gidi, 24, *Nova*
Hiel, Noa, 27, *Nova*
Sgt. Hillel, Yotam, 19, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Hirssch, Sharon, 45, *Nova*
Homsorn, Settha, 36, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Hoshen, Hadar, 28, *Nova*
Maj. Hovelashvili, Avraham, 26, *Highway*
Hubara, Ido, 36, *Kibbutz Sufa*
Hulati, Menuha, 75, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Ibrahim, Majed, 19, *Abu Gosh*
Idan, Maayan, 18, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Idan, Roee, 43, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Idan, Smadar, 38, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Ilaev, Adam, 22, *Nova*
Cmdr Sgt. Maj. Iloz, Yigal, 56, *Ofakim*
Iluz, Eliya, 27, *Nova*
Ilyaguyev, Solomon, 28, *Sderot*
Ishay Barel, Gabriel, 22, *Nova*
Itah, Liel, 22, *Nova*
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Itamari, Lili, 63, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
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Jantharasena, Jakkaphong, 28, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
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Jembkov, Andrei, 38, *Ofakim*
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Kalihman, Maayan, 22, *Nova*
Capt.(res.) Kalmanson, Elhanan Meir, 41, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Capt. Kamah, Hadar, 24, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Lt. Kaminka, Yanai, 20, *Zikim Base*
Kaploun Vital, Adi, 33, *Kibbutz Holit*
Kaplun, Dror, 68, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Kapshetar, Aline, 8, *Highway*
Kapshetar, Dina, 34, *Highway*
Kapshetar, Ethan, 4, *Highway*
Kapshetar, Evgeni, 36, *Highway*
Karasanti, Shoshana, 86, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Sgt. Maj. Karasik, Vitaly, 38, *Nova*
Sgt. Maj. Karim, Malik, 34, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Karmi, Ori, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
Karol, David, 72, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Karp, Dvir, 46, *Kibbutz Re'im*
Kasavchuck, Daniel, 21, *Nova*
Master Sgt. (res.) Kaslasi, Ido, 23, *Zikim Base*
Katabi, Tehila, 33, *Kibbutz Holit*
Katz, Efrat, 68, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Katz, Tal, 49, *Nova*
Katzir, Avraham (Rami), 79, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Katzir, David (Kachko), 72, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Katzman, Hayim, 32, *Kibbutz Holit*
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Cmdr Sgt. Maj. Kedar, Yehuda, 50, *Highway*
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Keinan, Linor, 23, *Nova*
Keisman, Lily, 62, *Kibbutz Holit*
Ken-Dror, Jonathan Meir, 28, *Nova*
Keren, Tal, 17, *Zikim Beach*
Kfir, Gilad, 48, *Netiv HaAsara*
W.O. Kharuba, Ibrahim, 39, *Nahal Oz Base*
Khotmee, Saksit, Gaza Envelope
Khunsri, Pongsathorn, 25, *Kibbutz Re'im*
Sgt. Kiean, Habib, 19, *Paga Post*
Kimchi, Ofek, 23, *Nova*
Kimenfeld, Denil, 65, *Zikim Beach*
Kimhi, Stav, 35, *Kibbutz Re'im*
Kipnis, Eviatar (Tari), 65, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Kipnis, Lilach, 60, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Kipper, Savyon Chen, 30, *Psyduck*
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Klangsuwan, Theerapong, 38, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Capt. Klein, Eyal, 22, *Sufa Base*
Klein, Hila, 41, *Nova*
Konderov, Irit, 27, *Nova*
Korin, Avraham Gabriel, 56, *Kibbutz Holit*
Kortzov, Igor, 73, *Sderot*
Kosovsky, Zlata, 28, *Psyduck*
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Sgt. Kotzro, Nativ, 22, *Gaza envelope*
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1st Sgt. Krasniansky, Yakov Shlomo, 23, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Kraunik, Arik, 54, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Krief, Shahaf, 17, *Zikim Beach*
Kritzman, Hana, 88, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Kupervaser, Shani, 27, *Nova*
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Kusaram, Phongthep, 26, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
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Kutz, Rotem, 18, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Kutz, Yiftach, 14, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Kutz, Yonatan, 16, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Ch. Supt. Kuzmickas, Martin, 46, *Sderot*
Lahav, Amit, 23, *Nova*
Lamai, Yulia, 29, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Landman, Adi, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Lapidot, Tiferet, 23, *Nova*
Sgt. Lavi, Amir, 19, *Sufa Base*
Lavi, Omri, 25, *Nova*
Lt. Lax, Nave Elazar, 21, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Staff Sgt. Lazimi, Dor, 21, *Nahal Oz Base*
Master Sgt. Leibovitz, Sharon, 42, *Nova*
Sgt. Leibovitz, Tomer, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Sgt. Leibushor, Yael, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
Staff Sgt. Lev, Benyamin, 23, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Levi, Rotem Rachel, 22, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Levi, Tal, 21, *Sufa Base*
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Levy, Itzhak, 26, *Nova*
Levy, Lidor, 28, *Nova*
Cpl. Levy, Lior, 19, *Urim Base*
Levy, Livnat, 27, *Nova*
Levy, Naor, 28, *Nova*
Levy, Nissim, 30, *Nova*
Col. Levy, Roey Yosef, 44, *Kibbutz Re'im*
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Staff Sgt. Levy, Yakir, 21, *Paga Post*
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Master Sgt. Lizmi, Michael, 28, *Ofakim*
Sgt. Locker, Uri, 19, *Netiv HaAsara*
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Supt. Lugasi, Nisim, 30, *Ofakim*
Sgt. Lugasi, Shimon, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
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Luzovski, Leonid, 51, *Sderot*
Sgt. Lyard, Natan Chai, 20, *Kerem Shalom Crossing*
Lt. Col. Machaluf, Sahar Zion, 36, *Re'im Base*
Macias Montano, Antonio, 28, *Nova*
Madar, Shahak Yosef, 26, *Nova*
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Madmoni, Shalev, 24, *Nova*
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Maizel, Adi Rivka, 21, *Nova*
Majzner-Carbone, Galit, 66, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
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Cpl. Makayes, Lidor, 19, *COGAT Base/Erez Checkpoint*
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Malka, Dor, 29, *Nova*
Sgt. Malka, Matan, 19, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
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Staff Sgt. Malka, Or, 21, *COGAT Base/Erez Checkpoint*
Sgt. 1st Class Malkamu, Aviel, 21, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Malkemo, Edna, 45, *Ofakim*
Maman, Tal, 38, *Moshav Mivtahim*
Sgt. 1st Class Mangadi, Dor, 24, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Mann, Amit, 22, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Manzur, Shahar, 28, *Nova*
Manzuri, Norelle, 25, *Nova*
Manzuri, Roya, 22, *Nova*
Maodi, Noi, 29, *Psyduck*
Capt. Maor, Itay, 23, *Netiv HaAsara*
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1st Sgt. Maj. Marciano, Arik Yehuda, 50, *Sderot*
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Sgt. Maj. Marei, Salman Eben, 41, *Sufa Base*
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Marnasky, Silvia, 80, *Kibbutz Ein HaShlosha*
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Sgt. Meir-Batito, Re'em, 19, *Kissufim Outpost*
Meiri, Zohar, 55, *Sderot*
Lt. Meliev, Yoav, 19, *Yiftach Outpost*
Staff Sgt. Melman, Ofir, 21, *Sufa Base*
Mesika, Addir, 23, *Nova*
Sgt. Maj. Michaeli, Omri, 35, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Staff Sgt. Midani, Sahar, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
Miles, Albert Avlom, 80, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Mishaiev, Ana, 65, *Ofakim*
Sgt. Mittleman, David, 20, *Kissufim Outpost*
Staff Sgt. Mizrachi, Or, 21, *Kerem Shalom Crossing*
Mizrahi, Ben Menashe, 22, *Nova*
Mizrahi, Eliran, 23, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Mizrahi, Or, 20, *COGAT Base/Erez Checkpoint*
Mizrahi, Raz, 21, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Mizrahi, Tomer Yaakov, 21, *Sufa Base*
Moalem, Naama, 28, *Nova*
Molcho, Ayelet Nir, 68, *Netiv HaAsara*
Master Sgt. (res.) Molcho, Gilad, 33, *Lebanon Border*
Molcho, Shlomi, 32, *Netiv HaAsara*
Sgt. 1st Class Mologota, Gadif, 29, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
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Sgt. Mor, Shirel, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
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Mortov, Yaakov, 66, *Sderot*
Capt. Moses, Or, 22, *Zikim Base*
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Moshe, Michael Ben, 26, *Kibbutz Zikim*
Staff Sgt. Moshe, Orel, 21, *Yiftach Outpost*
Sgt. Maj. Moshe, Roei, 36, *Highway*
Moshe, Said David, 75, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Supt. Moshe-El, Shlomo, 34, *Highway*
Staff Sgt. Most, Amit, 20, *Sufa Base*
Mtenga, Clemence, 22, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
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Sgt. Nagar, Tomer, 20, *Kissufim Outpost*
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Sgt. Maj. Nahmias, Chen, 43, *Sderot*
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Cpl. Negri, Neriya Aaron, 18, *Zikim Base*
Maj.(res.) Negri, Roee, 28, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Nepali, Ganesh Kumar, 24, *Kibbutz Alumim*
Neriya Cohen, Avraham, 20, *Nova*
Neta, Adrienne, 66, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Neumann, Rotem, 25, *Nova*
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Newman, David Yair Shalom, 25, *Nova*
Sgt. Nidam, Shoham Shlomo, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Nidejelski Glazder, Hanani, 23, *Nova*
Capt. Nimri, Eden, 22, *Nahal Oz Base*
Nisenboim Carmelli, Jenny, 32, *Nova*
Nissan, Liraz, 20, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Nissani, Shahaf, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
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Sgt. Ohana, Ariel, 19, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Ohana, Daniel, 24, *Nova*
Supt. Ohanadov, Amin, 36, *Nova*
Ohayon, Eden, 24, *Nova*
Ohayon, Eliad, 23, *Ofakim*
Staff Sgt. Ohayon, Evyatar, 22, *Kissufim Outpost*
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Sgt. 1st Class Ostapenko, Aliona, 25, *Nova*
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Ovitz, Ziva, 77, *Amioz*
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Patee, Kiattisak, 35, *Kibbutz Re'im*
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Sgt. 1st Class Peled, Amit , 21, *Kissufim Outpost*
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Sgt. Peri, Roey, 19, *Paga Post*
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Postel, Evgeni, 25, *Nova*
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Sgt. Maj. Pozniakov, Alec, 38, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Prais, Noa, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
Prakotwong, Thanakrit, 35, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Capt. Pravosudova, Alina, 23, *Urim Base*
Prince, Hadar, 21, *Nova*
Pritika, Karina, 23, *Nova*
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Maj. Ran, Or Yossef, 29, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
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Staff Sgt. Rashad, Daniel, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Staff Sgt. Ratner, David, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
Capt. Rauchberger, Shilo, 23, *Yesha Outpost*
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Raviv, Moriya, 23, *Nova*
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Staff Sgt. Raz, Idan, 20, *Paga Post*
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Staff Sgt. Reshetnikov, Shlomo, 20, *Yesha Outpost*
Sgt. Resler, Dvir Haim, 21, *Yesha Outpost*
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Staff Sgt. Maj. Rosenthal, Ido, 45, *Kibbutz Alumim*
Rotenberg, Noam Elimelech, 24, *Nova*
Sgt. 1st Class Rouisso, Ofek, 21, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
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Staff Sgt. Rozental, Afik, 20, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
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Sgt. Rubin, Amichay Shimon, 23, *Yesha Outpost*
Staff Sgt. Rubinstein, Benyamin (Benny), 20, *Sderot*
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Staff Sgt. Saadon, Hallel Shmuel, 21, *Sufa Base*
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Capt. Saudin, Sahar, 21, *Gaza Envelope*
Sgt. 1st Class Savitsky, Yonatan, 21, *Kissufim Outpost*
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Sgt. Schwartz, Segev, 20, *Sufa Base*
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Capt. Shlomi, Rom, 23, *Re'im Base*
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Staff Sgt. Shperber, Daniel, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
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Staff Sgt. Siboni, Naor, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
Silberman, Margit, 63, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Silberman, Yosef José Luis, 67, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Silver, Vivian, 74, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Siman-Tov, Arbel, 5.5, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Siman-Tov, Carol, 80, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Siman-Tov, Omer, 2.5, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Siman-Tov, Shachar, 5.5, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Siman-Tov, Tamar Kedem, 35, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Siman-Tov, Yonatan, 36, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Simhi, Guy, 20, *Nova*
Singh, Dhami Lokendra, 24, *Kibbutz Alumim*
Siton, Hannah, 73, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Siton, Tal, 49, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Siton, Yitzhak, 76, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Sgt. Maj. Sivan, Bar, 33, *Highway*
Sividia, Shlomi, 37, *Nova*
Skariszewski, Rodolfo Fabián, 57, *Highway*
Sgt. 1st Class Skipkavich, Vitaly, 21, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Maj. Skoury, Amir, 31, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Sgt. Maj. (res.) Slotki, Noam, 31, *Kibbutz Alumim*
Master Sgt. Slotki, Yishai, 24, *Kibbutz Alumim*
Smiatich, Gina, 90, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Snir, Eitan, 21, *Nova*
Sochman, Tamar, 76, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Soloman, Hilly, 26, *Nova*
Solomon, Yaakov, 60, *Nova*
Solomon, Yuval, 29, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Sophakun, Anucha, 28, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Sorokin, Dimitri, 51, *Highway*
Spravchikov, Nadejda, 79, *Sderot*
Col. Steinberg, Yonatan, 43, *Highway*
Stelzer Mendes, Karla, 42, *Nova*
Stern, Oren, 49, *Netiv HaAsara*
Strosta, Tomer, 23, *Nova*
Suchart, Pongpat, *Moshav* Mivtahim
Sueid, Bechor Chai, 32, *Highway*
Capt. Suissa, Dekel, 23, *Paga Post*
Sulan, Ronit, 55, *Kibbutz Holit*
Sultan, Roland, 68, *Kibbutz Holit*
Surakhai, Sakda, 31, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Svirksy, Orit, 70, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Svirksy, Rafi, 71, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Swarnakar, Rajesh Kumar, 25, *Kibbutz Alumim*
Swisa, Dolev, 34, *Sderot*
Swisa, Odaya, 33, *Sderot*
Swissa, Moriah Or, 23, *Nova*
Ta'asa, Gil, 46, *Netiv HaAsara*
Ta'asa, Or, 17, *Zikim Beach*
Tabegan, Katarina, 26, *Nova*
Sgt. Tahar, Adir, 19, *COGAT Base/Erez Checkpoint*
Tahar, Yossi, 39, *Highway*
Lt. Tal, Sahar, 20, *Yiftach Outpost*
Tamam, Adir, 40, *Nova*
Tamam, Shiraz-Shiran, 38, *Nova*
Tamkang, Parinya, 37, *Kibbutz Holit*
Tanbora, Amir, 20, *Sderot*
Tarshansky, Lior, 16, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Staff Sgt. Tashgar, Benjamin Taka, 21, *Kissufim Outpost*
Tayeb, Nadav Yossi Hai, 17, *Zikim Beach*
Tchernichovsky, Ori, 29, *Nova*
Sgt. Testa, Ofir, 21, *Nova*
Thanapim, Pirun, 34, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Thapa, Padam, 20, *Kibbutz Alumim*
Tholaeng, Phitak, 54, *Moshav Yesha*
Tiberg, Avraham Gilad, 24, *Nova*
Tkach, Lior, 26, *Nova*
Toar, Dror, 27, *Nova*
Toledano, Alon Amram, 54, *Sderot*
Tomayev, Natalia, 71, *Sderot*
Tomer, Bar, 26, *Nova*
Tou, Cae Lee, 38, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Trabelsi, Mor, 27, *Nova*
Maj. Trakeniski, Benjamin, 32, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Troen-Mathias, Shachar Deborah, 50, *Kibbutz Holit*
Trufanov, Vitaly, 50, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Tumyoma, Kraisorn, 29, *Kibbutz Alumim*
Turgeman, Avidan, 26, *Nova*
Turgeman, David (Dudi), 26, *Nova*
Turgeman, Shoham Lia, 23, *Nova*
Twig, Yiftach, 27, *Nova*
Twitto, Adiel, 32, *Nova*
Dep Ch. Insp. Tzaban, Shalom, 60, *Sderot*
Tzfati, Haim (Hai), 26, *Nova*
Supt. Tzidon, Avi, 50, *Moshav Pri Gan*
Staff Sgt. Tzioni, Ofir, 21, *Zikim Base*
Staff Sgt. Tzur, Adi, 20, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Capt. Tzur, Amir, 23, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Sgt. Tzur, Amit, 19, *Netiv HaAsara*
Tzur, Niv Tel, 22, *Nova*
Lt. Col. Tzur, Yonatan, 33, *Highway*
Udi, Ofer, 41, *Nova*
Uri, Ben, 31, *Nova*
Uzan, Aryeh, 68, *Zikim Beach*
Uzan, Eliyahu (Eli), 42, *Zikim Beach*
Vadei, Daniel, 27, *Nova*
Vahav, Yossef, 65, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Vainshtein, Liel, 19, *Nova*
Vaknin, Michael, 35, *Nova*
Vaknin, Osher, 35, *Nova*
Vaknin Permuter, Limor, 49, *Nova*
Valeanu, Bruna, 24, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Vaninu, Amichai Yaakov, 22, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Vardi, Laurie, 24, *Nova*
Vernikov, Karin, 22, *Nova*
Vigdergaus, Simon, 21, *Nova*
Cpl. Villalobo Polo, Maya, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Wachs, Amit, 48, *Netiv HaAsara*
Wachs, Yigal, 52, *Netiv HaAsara*
Wahadi, Moshe, 37, *Nova*
Waldman, Danielle, 24, *Nova*
Sgt. Maj. Waxer, Yulia, 37, *Nova*
Weinberg, Ron, 24, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Weiser, Roey, 21, *COGAT Base/ Erez Checkpoint*
Weisman, Reuven, 56, *Ofakim*
Weiss, Amir, 69, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Weiss, Matti, 69, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Weiss, Shmulik, 65, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Weissberg, Alina, 17, *Zikim Beach*
Weizman, Lior, 32, *Highway*
Wen, Zhishun, 36, *Sderot*
Werber, Alon, 26, *Nova*
Werthheim, Aviv, 57, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Werthheim, Dorit, 54, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Winner, Yahav, 37, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Wisetdonwai, Wuttipat, 25, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Capt. Wolf, Omer, 22, *Kibbutz Nirim*
Woveck, Dani, 45, *Netiv HaAsara*
Yaakov, Ilan Moshe, 29, *Nova*
Yaakov, San Amnon, 22, *Nova*
Yaakov, Shuval, 27, *Nova*
Yaakov Gherafi, Shenhav, 26, *Nova*
Yaakov Gherafi, Shoham, 28, *Nova*
Staff Sgt. Yachi, Dor, 21, *Nahal Oz Base*
Yadgarov, Rosa, 81, *Ofakim*
Yadgarov, Yuri, 76, *Ofakim*
Yakhangilov, Maria, 61, *Ofakim*
Yakhangilov, Yiftach, 66, *Ofakim*
Sgt. Yancolov, Bar, 19, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Yaron, Ofir Mordechai, 51, *Highway*
Yaron, Shir, 21, *Nova*
Capt. Yavetz, Yiftach, 23, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Yedidia Raziel, Moshe, 31, *Kibbutz Kerem Shalom*
Maj. Yehoshua, Ido, 27, *Re'im Base*
Master Sgt. (res.) Yehoshua, Itay, 36, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Yehoud, Dolev, 35, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Yehudai, Ron, 24, *Nova*
Cmdr Sgt. Maj.Yenin, Sivan, 49, *Nova*
Sgt. Yeruchin, Ofir, 19, *COGAT Base/Erez Checkpoint*
1st Sgt. Yifarah, Elior, 34, *Nova*
Yinon, Bilha, 76, *Netiv HaAsara*
Yinon, Yaacobi, 78, *Netiv HaAsara*
Yisrael Witzen, Amichai, 32, *Kibbutz Kerem Shalom*
Yitzhaki, Mai, 25, *Nova*
Yitzhaki, Yehudit, 76, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Yoav, Michael, 46, *Nova*
Yodthongdee, Thianchai, 32, *Kibbutz Alumim*
Lt. Yoffe, Yuval, 21, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Sgt. Yoggev, Boaz Menashe, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Sgt. Yona, Benyamin Gabriel, 19, *Gaza Envelope*
Yongkai, Cao, 47, *Sderot*
Sgt. Young, Nathanel, 20, *Yiftach Outpost*
Za'arur-Fischbein, Tchelet/Celeste, 18, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Zadikevitch, Omer, 50, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Zafraani, Itai, 36, *Nova*
Zafraani, Noi, 27, *Psyduck*
Zagdon, Rinat Hodia, 23, *Nova*
Zahavi-Hajbi, Yonatan, 18, *Moshav Yakhini*
Zak, Etti, 50, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Zak, Itai, 53, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Zak, Sagi, 14, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Staff Sgt. Zakai, Dvir, 20, *Nahal Oz Base*
Zakoto, Avi, 53, *Ofakim*
Zalmanovich, Hillel, 60, *Gaza Envelope*
Maj. Zalof, Yair, 32, *Gaza envelope*
Zander, Noa, 22, *Nova*
Zarfati, Ron, 22, *Nova*
Zemach, Shachara, 39, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Zenati, Matan, 23, *Nova*
Zhenhong, Shi, 47, *Sderot*
Maj. Ziering, Aryeh Shlomo, 27, *Yiftach Outpost*
Zini, Nirel, 31, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Maj. Zisser, Ilay, 27, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Ziv, Eitan, 74, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Ziv, Or, 23, *Nova*
Zohar, Bar, 23, *Nova*
Zohar, Haim, 72, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Zohar, Keshet, 20, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Zohar, Tchelet, 18, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Zohar, Yaniv, 54, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Sgt. Zohar, Yaron, 19, *Kibbutz Nir Am*
Zohar, Yasmin, 49, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Zoherman, Motti, 73, *Nova*
Zomer, Dan, 27, *Psyduck*
Zourno, Karin, 23, *Nova*
Zrabailov, Michal, 60, *Sderot*
Zukov, Vladimir, 64, *Zikim Beach*
Zuo, Deli, 35, *Sderot*

The following are the names of the 251 Hostages forcibly taken into Gaza on 7 October 2023

Adar, Tamir, 38, *Kibbutz Nir Oz,* Body Taken hostage
Adar, Yafa, 85, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Staff Sgt. Ahimas, Tomer Yaakov, 20, *Kibbutz Nirim,* Body Taken hostage
Sgt. Maj. Al-Atrash, Mohammad, 39, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz,* Body Taken hostage
(Rank classified) Albag, Liri, 18, *Nahal Oz Base*
(Rank classified) Alexander, Edan, 19, *Kibbutz Nirim*
Aloni, Emilia, 5, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Aloni, Danielle, 45, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Aloni-Conio, Sharon, 34, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Al-Qadi, Qaid Farhan, 53, *Magen*
Alziadana, Aisha, 17, *Kibbutz Holit*
Alziadana, Bilal, 18, *Kibbutz Holit*
Alziadana, Hamza, 22, *Kibbutz Holit*
Alziadana, Yosef Hamis, 53, *Kibbutz Holit*
Angkaew, Anucha, 28, *Kibbutz Re'im*
Sgt. Angrest, Matan, 21, *Nahal Oz Base*
Argamani, Noa, 26, *Nova*
(Rank classified) Ariev, Karina, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Atzili, Aviv, 49, *Kibbutz Nir Oz, Body Taken hostage*
Atzili, Liat, 49, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Avigdori, Noam, 12, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Avigdori, Sharon, 52, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Avraham, Elma, 84, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Baruch, Sahar, 25, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Baruch, Uriel, 35, *Nova*
Cpl. Beizer, Nik, 19, *COGAT Base/Erez Checkpoint*
Ben Ami, Ohad, 57, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Ben Ami, Raz, 57, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Benjamin, Ron, 53, *Highway,* Body Taken hostage
(Rank classified) Berger, Agam, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Berman, Gali, 26, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Berman, Ziv, 26, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Bibas, Kfir, 0, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Bibas, Ariel, 4, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Bibas, Shiri, 32, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Bibas, Yarden, 34, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Bobadila, Norlin Aguji, 60, *Kibbutz Nirim*
Bohbot, Elkana, 34, *Nova*
Boonphrom, Santi, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Braslavski, Rom, 19, *Nova*
Sgt. Brodski, Kiril, 19, *Kibbutz Nirim, Body Taken hostage*
Brodutch, Oria, 4, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Brodutch, Yuval, 8, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Brodutch, Ofry, 10, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Brodutch, Hagar, 40, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Buchstab, Yagev, 34, *Kibbutz Nirim*
Buchstab, Rimon Kirsht, 36, *Kibbutz Nirim*
Buskila, Amit, 27, *Nova,* Body Taken hostage
Chaimi, Tal, 41, *Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak,* Body Taken hostage

Sgt. Chen, Itay, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*, Body Taken hostage
Chombua, Khomkrit, 29, *Kibbutz Re'im*
Cohen, Eliya, 26, *Nova*
Cohen, Sapir, 29, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
(Rank classified) Cohen, Nimrod, 19, *Nir Oz Outpost*
Cooper, Nurit, 79, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Cooper, Amiram, 84, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Cunio, Emma, 3, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Cunio, Yuly, 3, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Cunio, Ariel, 26, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Cunio, David, 33, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
W.O. Dado, Ziv, 37, *Highway*, Body Taken hostage
Sgt. Dahan, Shaked, 19, *Nir Oz Outpost*, Body Taken hostage
Damari, Emily, 26, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Dancyg, Alexander, 75, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Sgt. Daniel, Oz, 19, *Nir Oz Outpost*, Body Taken hostage
Danino, Ori, 25, *Nova*
David, Evyatar, 23, *Nova*
Dekel-Chen, Sagui, 35, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Elgarat, Itzhak, 68, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Elyakim, Ella, 8, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Elyakim, Dafna, 15, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Engel, Yuval, 11, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Engel, Ofir, 18, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Engel, Mika, 18, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Engel, Ronen, 54, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*, Body Taken hostage
Engel-Bert, Karina, 51, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Gat, Carmel, 39, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Gelerenter, Itzhak, 56, *Nova*, Body Taken hostage
(Rank classified) Gilboa, Daniella, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Gilboa-Dalal, Guy, 23, *Nova*
Godard, Meni, 73, *Kibbutz Be'eri*, Body Taken hostage
Goldberg-Polin, Hersh, 23, *Nova*
Goldin, Oren, 33, *Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak*, Body Taken hostage
Goldstein-Almog, Tal, 9, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Goldstein-Almog, Gal, 11, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Goldstein-Almog, Agam, 17, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Goldstein-Almog, Chen, 48, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Gonen, Romi, 23, *Nova*
Goren, Shani, 29, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Goren, Maya, 56, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Gritzewsky, Ilana, 30, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Sgt. Maj. Gvili, Ran, 24, *Kibbutz Alumim*, Body Taken hostage
Haggai, Gadi, 73, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*, Body Taken hostage
Haim, Yotam, 28, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Haiman, Inbar, 27, *Nova*
Col. Hamami, Asaf, 41, *Kibbutz Nirim*, Body Taken hostage
Hand, Emily, 8, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Har, Louis, 70, *Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak*
Haran, Shoshan, 67, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Heiman, Ditza, 84, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Herkin, Maxim, 35, *Nova*
Hernandez Radoux, Orion, 30, *Nova*, Body Taken hostage
Horn, Eitan, 37, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Horn, Yair, 45, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Idan, Avigail, 3, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Idan, Tsachi, 49, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Illouz, Guy, 26, *Nova*
Jirachat, Manee, 29, *Kibbutz Re'im*
Joshi, Bipin, 23, *Kibbutz Alumim*
Kalapat, Wichai, 28, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Kalderon, Erez, 12, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Kalderon, Sahar, 16, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Kalderon, Ofer, 53, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Kalfon, Segev, 25, *Nova*
Katz, Ravid, 51, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*, Body Taken hostage
Katz Asher, Aviv, 2, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Katz Asher, Raz, 4, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Katz Asher, Doron, 34, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Katzir, Elad, 47, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Katzir, Hanna, 77, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Keidar, Ofra, 70, *Kibbutz Be'eri*, Body Taken hostage
Kesungneon, Surin, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Kongmanee, Bancha, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Kozlov, Andrey, 27, *Nova*
Krivoi, Roni, 25, *Nova*
Kupershtein, Bar, 21, *Nova*
Lamnau, Surasak, 31, *Moshav Yesha*
Leimberg, Mia, 17, *Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak*
Leimberg, Gabriela, 59, *Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak*
Sgt. Levinson, Shay, 19, *Highway*, Body Taken hostage
Levy, Eitan, 53, *Highway*, Body Taken hostage
Levy, Or, 33, *Nova*
(Rank classified) Levy, Naama, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Lifshitz, Oded, 83, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Lifshitz, Yocheved, 85, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Lobanov, Alex, 32, *Nova*
Louk, Shani, 23, *Nova*, Body Taken hostage
Mantzour, Shlomo, 85, *Kibbutz Kissufim*
Cpl. Marciano, Noa, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Margalit, Nili, 41, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Margalit, Eliyahu, 76, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Marman, Fernado, 60, *Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak*
Marman, Clara Rose, 63, *Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak*
Cpl. Megidish, Ori, 19, *Nahal Oz Base*
Meir Jan, Almog, 21, *Nova*
Metzger, Tamar, 78, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Metzger, Yoram, 80, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Miran, Omri, 46, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Mollel, Joshua, 21, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*, Body Taken hostage
Mor, Eitan, 24, *Nova*
Moses, Margalit Berta, 77, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Moses, Gadi Moshe, 79, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Moshe, Adina, 72, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Munder, Keren, 54, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Munder, Avraham, 78, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Munder, Ruti, 78, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Munder-Zachri, Ohad, 9, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Munkan, Nutthawaree, 35, *Moshav Yesha*
Cpt. Neutra, Omer, 22, *Nir Oz Outpost*, Body Taken hostage
(Rank classified) Nimrodi, Tamir, 19, *COGAT Base/Erez Checkpoint*
Nissenbaum, Michel, 59, *Highway*, Body Taken hostage
Oakkhasri, Sonthaya, 31, *Kibbutz Be'eri*, Body Taken hostage
Ohana, Yosef-Haim, 23, *Nova*
Ohel, Alon, 22, *Nova*
Onkaew, Nattaphon, 26, *Kibbutz Re'im*
Or, Alma, 13, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Or, Noam, 17, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Or, Liam, 18, *Kibbutz Re'im*
Or, Avinathan, 30, *Nova*
Or, Dror, 48, *Kibbutz Be'eri*, Body Taken hostage
Pacheco, Gelienor (Jimmy), 33, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Capt. Perez, Daniel, 22, *Nahal Oz Base*, Body Taken hostage
Peri, Chaim, 79, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Peri, Channa, 79, *Kibbutz Nirim*
Phajuabboon, Mongkhol, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Phankong, Boonthom, 45, *Moshav Yesha*
Phumee, Withoon, 33, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Pinakalo, Phonsawan, 29, *Kibbutz Alumim*
Pinta, Nattapong, 35, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Popplewell, Nadav, 51, *Kibbutz Nirim*
Raanan, Natalie, 17, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Raanan, Judith, 59, *Kibbutz Nahal Oz*
Rattanil, Paiboon, *Gaza Envelope*
Regev, Itay, 18, *Nova*
Regev, Maya, 21, *Nova*
Rinthalak, Sudthisak, *Kibbutz Be'eri*, Body Taken hostage
Roitman, Ophelia, 77, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Roman-Gat, Yarden, 36, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Rotem, Raaya, 54, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Rudaeff, Lior, 61, *Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak*, Body Taken hostage
Saelao, Kong, 26, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Saengboon, Buddee, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Saengkaew, Chalermchai, *Gaza Envelope*
Sagi, Ada, 75, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Sahatan, Banawat, 28, *Moshav Yesha*
Samareno, Yonatan, 21, *Nova*, Body Taken hostage
Sangnuan, Uthai, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Sarusi, Almog, 27, *Nova*
Schem, Mia, 21, *Nova*
Sgt. Scherman, Ron, 19, *COGAT Base/Erez Checkpoint*
Shamriz, Alon Lulu, 26, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Shani, Amit, 16, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Sharabi, Eli, 51, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Sharabi, Yosi, 53, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Shem Tov, Omer, 21, *Nova*
Shoham, Yael Gani, 3, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Shoham, Nave, 8, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Shoham, Adi, 38, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Shoham, Tal, 38, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Shoshani-Rotem, Hila, 13, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Shtivi, Idan, 28, *Nova*, Body Taken hostage
Siegel, Adrienne, 62, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Siegel, Keith Samuel, 64, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Sikena, Chakraphan, *Gaza Envelope*
Soussana, Amit, 40, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Sriaoun, Watchara, 33, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Steinbrecher, Doron, 30, *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*
Stian, Swanakham, 34, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Suriyasri, Owat, 40, *Kibbutz Holit*
Svirsky, Itai, 38, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
Tal, Meirav, 53, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Talalka, Samar Fouad, 24, *Kibbutz Nir Am*
Tanna, Pongsak, 37, *Moshav Yesha*
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Trufanov, Yelena, 50, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
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Weiss, Shiri, 53, *Kibbutz Be'eri*
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Yaakov, Yagel, 13, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
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Yehoud, Arbel, 28, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
Yerushalmi, Eden, 24, *Nova*
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Zangauker, Matan, 24, *Kibbutz Nir Oz*
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