Death toll from Hamas onslaught passes 800, over 100 kidnapped, as Israel strikes Gaza

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Israel formally declared a state of war on Sunday as the death toll from an unprecedented Hamas attack a day earlier rose above 700 and was expected to rise further, with the fate of over a hundred people abducted and taken to the Gaza Strip still unclear. On Monday afternoon, the toll was updated to 800.

The Government Press Office, a body that operates under the Israeli Prime Minister’s Office, said that the number of hostages in Gaza was at over 100. Hamas and Islamic Jihad boasted Sunday night that they were holding some 130 Israeli hostages, claiming this included high-ranking army officials.

Israeli jets carried out “intense” airstrikes on targets in Gaza on Sunday afternoon, shortly after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office announced that the security cabinet had voted Saturday evening to put the country officially at war, meaning it can carry out “significant military activities.”

Battles were ongoing Sunday in at least three communities near the Gaza border overrun by Hamas gunmen a day earlier, and rocket fire continued to dog Israeli communities, as Israel girded for what was expected to be a prolonged campaign against the Gaza-based terror group.

In an assault of shocking breadth, Hamas gunmen rolled into as many as 22 locations in southern Israel on Saturday morning, including towns and smaller communities as far as 15 miles (24 kilometers) from the Gaza border. In some places, they roamed for hours, gunning down civilians and soldiers as Israel’s military scrambled to muster a response. At the same time, thousands of rockets were fired at towns in the south and center.

The scenes of chaos and suffering and the prolonged failure to gain control of the situation have shocked and outraged the nation, and sparked demands for answers on the many failures of intelligence, deployment, and policy that had enabled such a national catastrophe, with hundreds of terrorists flooding civilian communities in armed convoys.

Officials estimated Sunday that over 700 people were killed in the massive assault launched by Hamas terrorists in Israeli communities near Gaza and by the thousands of rockets fired into Israel, making it the bloodiest day in the nation’s history, according to reports.

A spokesperson for ZAKA, a volunteer group that handles human remains after terror attacks and other disasters, told Hebrew media that the death toll rose sharply, as Israeli teams managed to clear Hamas gunmen out of communities along the border and recover victims.

Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer told CNN in an interview Sunday that the death toll was “well north of 600 people,” adding: “There will probably be more hundreds, several hundred more.”

The Health Ministry said that the number of wounded in hospitals had reached 2,243, including 22 in critical condition and 343 seriously wounded.

The liberation of communities and other areas from Hamas control revealed shocking scenes of streets, fields and highways littered with bodies, abandoned vehicles and personal belongings, with many people having been slain in their own homes.

Reut Karp shared on Facebook an alarming testimony from her children about the murder of their father, Dvir Karp, and his partner Stav in Kibbutz Re’im.

“At 8:20 a.m., terrorists entered Dvir’s home, he lunged at them with an axe, tried to protect my two kids who were with him, and was murdered in front of their eyes,” she posted. “His partner Stav also tried to protect them, but was murdered as well. The terrorist calmed down my Daria and Lavi, covered them in a blanket, took lipstick and wrote on the wall: ‘The al-Qassam [Brigades] people don’t murder children.’

“For three hours, I was on the phone with Daria, calming her down, hearing her breathe heavily and in fear. She was hearing someone still inside the house and I instructed her to be silent,” said Reut Karp, who lives in Yehud. Eventually, she said, an armed civilian found and rescued the kids through the window — to avoid passing by the bodies — and took them to a safe home where they were still besieged and unable to leave the kibbutz as of Sunday.

Mor Bayder shared the story of the brutal murder of her grandmother in Kibbutz Nir Oz.

“My grandmother, my whole world, who lit up my life, a rock to me and my family, a resident of Nir Oz all her life, was viciously murdered yesterday by a terrorist in her home,” Bayder wrote on Facebook. “At 7 a.m., I saw the nightmare of my life. A terrorist broke into her home, murdered her, took her phone, photographed the horror, and posted it on her Facebook account. That’s how we found out.”

In some cases, the Hamas terrorists set buildings on fire in Nir Oz to flush out families from their hideouts, then proceeding to shoot or kidnap them.

In addition to those killed and injured, Hamas gunmen took an unknown number of civilians and soldiers captive into Gaza after overrunning several military bases and communities.

Social media was filled with horrifying videos of men, women and children being carried into the Strip, many of them appearing to have been abused. There were also videos published of dead Israelis taken, including soldiers, the bodies of some of whom were paraded in the streets.

The Israel Defense Forces said Sunday it had established a situation room to focus on putting together accurate information regarding the Israeli hostages held by the Hamas terror group in the Gaza Strip.

The IDF said the team will compile a “situational picture” for locating the captives, both soldiers and civilians.

“Amid all the complexity and uncertainty, it is necessary to issue reliable messages as quickly as possible. Some families have already received messages about their loved ones,” the IDF said.

Police and the IDF Home Front Command have also established a situation room to identify those killed in the attacks using DNA samples provided by families.

A long line of Israelis with missing relatives snaked outside a police station in central Israel to supply investigators with DNA samples and other means that could help identify their family members.

Writing on X, Opposition Chief Yair Lapid called on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to immediately appoint a coordinator for missing and captive Israelis “so that there will be someone to work with the families.”

Shortly after, Netanyahu appointed Gal Hirsch, a reservist brigadier-general who commanded the 91st Division in the 2006 Second Lebanon War, as the government’s point man on missing and kidnapped citizens.

Among the kidnapped were small children, the elderly, and foreign nationals including 11 Thais working on farms near the border. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the State Department was attempting to confirm reports that Americans had been killed or kidnapped.

In Israel, a woman posted a heartfelt plea on social media with a photograph of her 85-year-old grandmother in the hands of Hamas terrorists in Gaza.

“This is my grandmother, she was captured and taken to Gaza,” wrote Adva Adar on social media. “Her name is Yaffa Adar and she is 85!!”

“My grandmother established the kibbutz with her own hands, believed in Zionism, in this country that has abandoned her, a hostage,” she wrote. “She is apparently thrown somewhere, suffering from severe pain, without medication, without food and without water, dying of fear, alone.

“And no one is talking to us, no one can tell us anything.”

The call echoed the [pleas from the families of those missing](https://www.timesofisrael.com/relatives-of-dozens-killed-or-kidnapped-to-gaza-from-rave-nobody-is-helping-us/), many of whom say they have been [abandoned](https://www.timesofisrael.com/residents-near-gaza-strip-beg-for-idf-help-as-they-fight-off-terrorists/) by the authorities.

Desperate mother Alin Atias was looking for her daughter Amit Buskila.

“Nobody is helping us,” she said. “Where is the government?”

“I beg the whole country. Help me find my daughter,” she cried. “Benjamin Netanyahu, I am begging you, send helicopters. Find her, I beg you, please.”

Ella Ben Ami said that she believes her father has been kidnapped into Gaza after seeing a photo of him on social media being taken, and has no idea where her mother is.

The young woman told Channel 12 news that she has not heard any updates from any government or IDF officials.

“We just keep watching the news all day hoping for news,” she said. “It’s horrible, it’s a horrible thought, that we are only finding out information from the news.”

An Egyptian official said Israel had sought help from Cairo to ensure the safety of the hostages, and that Egypt’s intelligence chief had contacted Hamas and the smaller but more radical Palestinian Islamic Jihad group, which also took part in the incursion, to seek information. Egypt has often mediated between the two sides in the past.

However, both Israel and Hamas denied that talks over the hostages were taking place.

“Right now, we are fighting terrorists on Israeli territory. We’re not involved in any talks about the hostages right now,” an official told The Times of Israel.

The Israel Defense Forces’ top spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, said that on Sunday, more than 50 fighter jets targeted 120 sites in the Beit Hanoun neighborhood, demolishing Hamas assembly areas used to launch attacks against Israel. In all, the IDF has struck some 800 sites since the fighting began, Hagari said.

There were still Hamas terrorists in Israel, and Israeli troops were working to find them and kill them, he said.

“We will purify the area and attack terrorists wherever they are,” he said. “Hamas has inflicted a great disaster on the residents of the Gaza Strip. There will be a time for hard questions and tough investigation, but now we are at war and are busy attacking the enemy and winning.”

The existence of Israeli hostages in Gaza likely complicated Israeli plans for a widescale counterassault on Gaza. Nonetheless, Israeli jets pounded Hamas and Islamic Jihad positions throughout the Strip, intensifying its air campaign a day after Netanyahu vowed to “avenge this black day.”

Sites targeted by Israeli Air Force fighter jets and drones included headquarters used by the terror groups to manage the fighting.

The Israeli Navy also foiled attempts by terrorists to infiltrate into Israel via the sea, killing dozens of terrorists.

The Hamas-run health ministry in the Gaza Strip said 370 Palestinians have been killed and another 2,200 have been wounded in the Gaza Strip. Most of those were apparently killed in the Gaza Strip as a result of Israel’s retaliatory strikes.

The IDF has said that it has killed more than 400 Palestinian terrorists, both in Israel and in strikes in Gaza.

But inside Israel, security forces were still struggling to clear terrorist cells entrenched within devastated communities over 36 hours after the coordinated assault began. There were reports of heavy gun battles between Israeli troops and Palestinian terrorists in the southern town of Magen, close to the border with the Gaza Strip.

According to Hebrew-language media, the Israel Defense Forces also used tanks against the terrorists in the area.

Additionally, gunfights were continuing in Kfar Aza, where there were reports of at least 10 terrorists still holed up.

The military said it was evacuating civilians from towns adjacent to the border with the Gaza Strip, while searching the area for any terrorists who may still be in Israeli territory.

The towns include Nahal Oz, Erez, Nir Am, Mefalsim, Kfar Aza, Gevim, Or Haner, Ibim, Netiv Ha’asara, Yad Mordechai, Karmia, Zikim, Kerem Shalom, Kissufim, Holit, Sufa, Nirim, Nir Oz, Ein Hashlosha, Nir Yitzhak, Be’eri, Magen, Re’im, Sa’ad, and Alumim.

“Further evacuations will be carried out according to the assessment of the situation,” the IDF said.

Many civilians were still holed up in their homes, hiding in fear of roving terrorists searching for victims.

All known hostage situations, which saw Israeli civilians held captive by Hamas gunmen in their towns, were resolved overnight, with army and police forces killing terrorists and rescuing their captives after hours-long standoffs in Sderot, Ofakim, and [Kibbutz Be’eri](https://www.timesofisrael.com/kibbutz-beeri-bloodbath-reminds-israelis-of-fears-and-fortitudes-from-1948/).

But fears that terrorists could still be roaming free throughout the country remained rampant, keeping much of the country on edge.

Police said they “neutralized” a car with Palestinian terrorists on the Route 4 highway as it sped northward from Gaza, before veering off into a field close to Ashkelon. But later reports indicated that the driver had been an Israeli and the chase a tragic case of mistaken identity.

In Sderot, where terrorists managed to overrun a police station Saturday, a resident riding an all-terrain vehicle was shot and wounded by Israeli forces after refusing to halt, the municipality said.

Additionally, there was sporadic rocket fire throughout the day, mainly toward communities in the south, in contrast to barrages a day earlier, which targeted areas as far away as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Four people were wounded, one of them critically, in a rocket barrage toward the Sderot area. The municipality said at least six buildings were hit, while the Sdot Negev Regional Council ordered residents to remain in shelters until further notice.

On Israel’s northern border with Lebanon, the Hezbollah terror group shelled Israeli positions, drawing Israeli counterstrikes and sparking worries of a second front opening in the war.

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant ordered the IDF’s Home Front Command to put together plans for a possible evacuation of towns on Israel’s northern border as well, should fighting break out on that front too.

The military was engaged in a mass call-up of reserves soldiers amid preparations for what leaders promised would be an unprecedented military response, with many forces diverted toward the south and also in the north.

Israel was receiving broad support from Western governments and leaders, many of whom condemned the Hamas assault and the targeting and systematic abduction of civilians.