Israel girds for long war as death toll since Hamas terror onslaught passes 1,300

October 12, 2023

By Emanuel Fabian

The Times of Israel

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-girds-for-long-war-as-death-toll-from-hamas-terror-onslaught-passes-1300/>

The Israel Defense forces stepped up preparations Thursday for a ground offensive into the Gaza Strip to destroy the terror group as the death toll from Hamas’s massive onslaught passed 1,300. The military also said there were signs that Hamas was preparing for an extended conflict with Israel.

Israel is six days into a war with Hamas following the Palestinian terror group’s shock assault on Israeli communities in an early morning raid on Saturday. Over 1,300 people — most of them civilians — were killed, according to the latest toll, more than 3,300 injured, and an estimated 200 were captured and taken to the Gaza Strip. Their fate is not yet known.

As the slow, tortuous process of identifying bodies continues, funeral after funeral is being held across Israel for soldiers and civilians as the country reels from the mass infiltration and massacres of men, women, children, elderly people and hundreds of young partygoers at a music festival.

Lt. Col. Richard Hecht, an Israeli military spokesman, told reporters Thursday that forces “are preparing for a ground maneuver, if decided,” but that the political leadership has not yet ordered one.

Meanwhile, the chief of the military’s Home Front Command said that the relatively slow rate of rocket fire from the Gaza Strip over the past day indicated that the Hamas terror group was preparing itself for an extended fight.

“We have identified the behavior of Hamas, which realizes that it is entering a long war,” said Maj. Gen. Rafi Milo in a call with reporters Thursday morning, amid a 10-hour lull in rocket attacks.

Moments later, sirens sounded near the coastal city of Netanya and several West Bank settlements, with rockets being intercepted and others landing in open areas, causing no damage.

“Hamas is managing the fire in a way that is meant for weeks [of fighting], and they dropped to a rate of fire of around 200-400 rockets per day, to allow themselves a very long fight,” he said. In Hamas’s initial attack, the terror group launched thousands of rockets into Israel within a few hours.

Milo said Hamas was targeting central Israel once or twice a day to keep many Israelis under the threat of rocket fire.

Also Thursday, Energy Minister Israel Katz vowed that there would be no letup in Israel’s siege of Gaza, including the supply of electricity and water, until those abducted during Hamas’s shock onslaught are returned home.

“Humanitarian aid to Gaza? No electrical switch will be turned on, no water pump will be opened and no fuel truck will enter until the Israeli abductees are returned home,” he posted on X, formerly known as Twitter.

“Humanitarianism for humanitarianism. And no one can preach morality to us,” he wrote.

The Israel Defense Forces meanwhile was continuing its air campaign in the Gaza Strip, targeting thousands of Hamas assets and members, in a bid to obliterate the terror group. Defense Minister Yoav Gallant vowed on Wednesday night to [“wipe Hamas from the face of the earth.”](https://www.timesofisrael.com/gallant-vows-to-wipe-hamas-from-earth-after-the-worst-terror-attack-in-history/)

In strikes overnight, the IDF said it struck and killed a senior member of Hamas’s naval force. The military said Muhammed Abu Shamala was a senior operative in the terror group’s naval forces in the southern part of the Gaza Strip.

“Abu Shamala’s house was also used to store naval weapons intended to be used in terror operations against Israel,” the military added.

In a call with reporters, IDF spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said the military also killed Mustafa Shahin, a Hamas operative who filmed and broadcast the terror group’s murderous attack on southern Israel on Saturday.

“We will settle accounts with everyone who was involved in the horrors of the war. We’re taking videos from the internet and identifying them with the help of facial recognition,” Hagari said.

In separate strikes overnight, the IDF said, it hit dozens of sites belonging to Hamas’s commando forces.

Hagari also said the military had so far notified the families of 97 hostages being held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

“We are aware of the uncertainty but there is a tension between reliability and speed and understanding what is happening on the ground. It must be accurate,” he says in a call with reporters.

The military also responded to a report by Channel 13 news that there had been some unspecified indications the night before Hamas launched its deadly terror attack on southern Israel.

According to the report, senior officers discussed the signs late Friday night and agreed to continue the conversation in the morning.

Hagari said there were no major intelligence warnings, but confirmed there had been some signs.

“There was no such warning. The signs that came up hours before could be based on different intelligence signs,” Hagari said, adding that the military would investigate everything surrounding the terror group’s surprise attack.

Troops have been sporadically clashing with Palestinian terrorists still in Israeli territory over the past day, as sweeps continue to root out Hamas infiltrators.

The military said that on Wednesday evening, Shaldag troops killed two terrorists near Mefalsim, and another two unarmed Palestinians were arrested near Sde Teiman.

Terrorists have been unable to infiltrate via the border fence in recent days, according to the IDF, as Combat Engineering forces worked to seal up the security barrier, and the IAF struck gunmen approaching the area.

Meanwhile, the IDF said it had deployed reservist forces to towns on the Lebanon border, amid a general reinforcement of troops in northern Israel.

“The forces are carrying out various defense tasks in the towns, which include patrols, ambushes, and the deployment of roadblocks, in order to ensure the safety of the residents,” the military said in a statement.

Tensions have been high in northern Israel in recent days, amid several deadly clashes on the border, some of them claimed by Palestinian terror groups operating out of Hezbollah-controlled southern Lebanon and others by Hezbollah themselves.

Israel has mobilized 360,000 reservists and appears increasingly likely to launch a ground offensive into Gaza, with its government under intense public pressure to topple Hamas, which has ruled the territory since 2007 and remained firmly in control through four previous wars.

An Egyptian official told The Times of Israel on Tuesday that Cairo has been informed by Israel that it is readying for a months-long ground campaign in Gaza.

According to the Hamas-run Gaza health ministry, some 1,203 have been killed in Israeli strikes in Gaza over the past six days.

More than 250,000 Gazans have fled their homes, the UN said, the most since a 2014 air and ground offensive by Israel uprooted about 400,000. The vast majority are sheltering in schools run by the UN agency for Palestinian refugees. Damage to three water and sanitation sites have cut off services to 400,000 people, the UN said.