

PALESTINE - ISRAEL

# Gaza's shock attack has terrified Israelis. It should also unveil the context

Sunday 8 October 2023, by [MATAR Haggai](#) (Date first published: 7 October 2023).

**The dread Israelis are feeling after today's assault, myself included, has been the daily experience of millions of Palestinians for far too long.**

This is a terrible day. After waking up to air sirens under a barrage of hundreds of rockets fired on Israeli cities, we have been learning about the unprecedented assault by Palestinian militants from Gaza into Israeli towns bordering the strip.

[News is flowing in](#) of at least 40 Israelis killed and hundreds wounded, as well as some reportedly kidnapped into Gaza. Meanwhile, the Israeli army has already begun its own offensive on the blockaded strip, with troops mobilizing along the fence and air strikes killing and wounding scores of Palestinians so far. The absolute dread of people who are seeing armed militants in their streets and homes, or the sight of fighter jets and approaching tanks, is unimaginable. Attacks on civilians are war crimes, and my heart goes to the victims and their families.

Contrary to what many Israelis are saying, and while the army was clearly caught completely off guard by this invasion, [this is not](#) a "unilateral" or "unprovoked" attack. The dread Israelis are feeling right now, myself included, is a sliver of what Palestinians have [been feeling](#) on a daily basis under the decades-long military regime in the West Bank, and under the siege and [repeated assaults](#) on Gaza. The responses we are hearing from many Israelis today — of people calling to "flatten Gaza," that "these are savages, not people you can negotiate with," "they are murdering whole families," "there's no room to talk with these people" — are exactly what I have heard occupied Palestinians say about Israelis countless times.

The attack this morning also has more recent contexts. One of them is the looming horizon of a [normalization deal](#) between Saudi Arabia and Israel. For years, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been making the case that peace can be achieved without talking to Palestinians or making any concessions. The [Abraham Accords](#) [1] have stripped Palestinians of one of their last bargaining chips and support bases: the solidarity of Arab governments, despite that solidarity having long been questionable. The high likelihood of losing perhaps the most important of those Arab states may well have helped push Hamas to the edge.

Meanwhile, commentators have been warning for weeks that recent escalations in the occupied West Bank are leading to dangerous paths. Throughout the past year, more Palestinians and Israelis have been killed than in any other year since the Second Intifada of the early 2000s. The Israeli army is routinely raiding into [Palestinian cities](#) and [refugee camps](#). The far-right government is giving settlers an entirely free hand to set up new [illegal outposts](#) and [launch pogroms](#) on Palestinian towns and villages, with soldiers accompanying the settlers and killing or maiming Palestinians trying to defend their homes. Amid the high holidays, Jewish extremists are [challenging](#)

the “status quo” around the Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, backed by politicians who share their ideology.

In Gaza, meanwhile, the [ongoing siege](#) is continuously destroying the lives of over two million Palestinians, many of whom are living in extreme poverty, with [little access](#) to clean water and about four hours of [electricity](#) a day. This siege has no official endgame; even an Israeli State Comptroller report found that the government has never discussed long-term solutions to ending the blockade, nor seriously considered any alternatives to recurring rounds of war and death. It is literally the only option this government, and its predecessors, have on the table.

Palestinians at the Erez Crossing, also known as the Beit Hanoun Crossing, between Israel and the northern Gaza Strip, after Hamas launched a large attack on Israel, October 7, 2023. (Atia Mohammed/Flash90)

The only answers that consecutive Israeli governments have offered to the problem of Palestinian attacks from Gaza have been in the form of band aids: if they come from the ground, we will build a wall; if they come through tunnels, we will build an underground barrier; if they fire rockets, we'll set up interceptors; if they are killing some of ours, we will kill many more of them. And so it goes on and on.

All this is not to justify the killing of civilians — that is absolutely wrong. Rather, it is meant to remind us that there is a reason to everything that is happening today, and that — as in all previous rounds — there is no military solution to Israel's problem with Gaza, nor to the resistance that naturally emerges as a response to violent apartheid.

In recent months, hundreds of thousands of Israelis have been [marching](#) for “democracy and equality” across the country, with many even saying they would [refuse military service](#) because of this government's authoritarian trends. What those protestors and reserve soldiers need to understand — especially today, as many of them announced they will halt their protests and join the war with Gaza — is that Palestinians have been struggling for those same demands and more for decades, facing an Israel that to them is already, and has always been, completely authoritarian.

**Haggai Matar**

---

**P.S.**

- +972. October 7, 2023:  
<https://www.972mag.com/gaza-attack-context-israelis/>
- 

**Footnotes**

[1] The Abraham Accords include a trilateral declaration, signed in September 2020, between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, called the “Declaration of the Abraham Accords”, to which US President Donald Trump affixes his signature, a bilateral “peace treaty” between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, and a bilateral “peace declaration” between Israel and Bahrain. Morocco and Sudan were added to the list.