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Israel's use of Hannibal Directive led to many deaths on October 7, including Israeli civilians

According to the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) issued the Hannibal Directive that ordered the use of force to prevent soldiers being taken into captivity at three army facilities infiltrated by Hamas on October 7. The orders were implemented in buildings where hostages were known to be held. Other orders were given to fire on civilian buildings and open areas.

The IDF formulated the Hannibal Directive during Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon in 1986 after several abductions of IDF soldiers and the subsequent, very controversial, prisoner exchanges. The Directive, which was kept secret and never published, aimed to prevent the capture of Israeli soldiers by enemy forces, even at the cost of their lives. It was revised several times before officially being abandoned in 2016.

The use of the Directive during the October 7 attack to prevent the abduction of Israeli citizens represented an escalation of the supposedly abandoned policy and implied that the IDF should kill any Israelis rather than allow them to fall into the hands of Hamas.

Haaretz story published July 7, 2024, "IDF Ordered Hannibal Directive on October 7 to Prevent Hamas Taking Soldiers Captive" [Photo: screenshot from Haaretz website]

In the nine months that have passed, the IDF has refused to say whether it had employed the Directive against civilians who had been taken hostage. It now seems, according to documents and testimonies viewed by *Haaretz*, that this and other orders were given that led to the deaths of a significant number of the 1,222 people—including Jews, Israeli

Palestinians and Bedouins along with foreign nationals—that died during the October 7 attack.

As yet, the number of civilians and soldiers killed by Israeli fire is unknown, in part at least because there have been no autopsies identifying the cause of death, such as the type of weaponry used.

According to the official narrative of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s far-right government, repeated faithfully by his imperialist backers, the October 7 “Al-Aqsa Flood” incursion was an unexpected and unprecedentedly barbaric attack by Hamas that killed 1,222 people. It provided the necessary justification for a war, long sought with endless provocations against the Palestinians, to annihilate Hamas and carry out a genocide in Gaza.

Within days of the attack, the lies began to unravel. It turned out that the operation was far from unexpected, with the military and intelligence services having received multiple warnings of what was in the offing and having ordered its border security to stand down. Once the attack took place, a massive military operation by the IDF resulted in a large number of casualties. On October 20, *Haaretz* identified 331 soldiers and police officers along with a further 13 rescue service members—a number later revised upwards to 377 military and police personnel--among those killed in the attack.

This indicated that there were ferocious armed battles between the Israeli military and the Palestinians in which the lives of civilians counted for very little with the IDF. Yasmin Porat, an Israeli woman whose partner was killed, and who was held hostage in Kibbutz Be’eri, told how the IDF fired not just on the 40 or so Palestinian invaders in the building, but also on the 14 hostages, including two children. She described the heavy crossfire as “insane.”

Hadas Dagan, another witness, corroborated her story. According to a *New York Times* report, Brig. Gen Barak Hiram, the commander of Division 99, said he ordered a tank commander to fire on the house “even at the cost of civilian casualties.” The families of the 13 Israelis who died in the attack are demanding an IDF investigation.

The latest revelations by *Haaretz* provide further damning evidence of Israel’s role in the massacre. These include:

* At 6:43 a.m., when the attack began with an avalanche of rockets and an attack by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad on army strongholds, Brig. Gen. Avi Rosenfeld

declared that “the Philistines have invaded,” the signal to set in motion the use of heavy fire inside Israeli territory to block an enemy raid.

* At 7.18 a.m., after the report of a kidnapping at the Erez border crossing, next to the IDF’s liaison office, divisional headquarters issued the command “Hannibal at Erez” and “dispatch a Zik,” an assault drone.

* At 7.41 a.m., as the military realised that Hamas had killed and abducted soldiers at the crossing and at the base, the IDF issued another Hannibal order “Hannibal at Erez” to prevent more soldiers being kidnapped.

* The Hannibal procedure was initiated at two other locations: the IDF’s divisional headquarters at Re’im and the Nahal Oz outpost where female spotters were based. Nevertheless, 15 spotters and 38 other soldiers were killed and seven kidnapped.

* At 10.19 a.m. and 10.22 a.m., there were reports of Zik drones attacking the Re’im base.

* While these previous orders related to army positions and bases, later more general orders to fire were given. At 10.32 a.m., an IDF order, attributed to Brig. Gen. Rosenfeld, was issued to fire mortars towards the Gaza Strip, even though soldiers and civilians were in open areas or in woods along the border, hiding from Palestinian fighters.

* At 11.22 a.m., the IDF issued an order to its Gaza division that went further. It stated, “Not a single vehicle can return to Gaza.” A military source in Israel’s Southern Command told *Haaretz*, “Everyone knew by then that such vehicles could be carrying kidnapped civilians or soldiers ... Everyone knew what it meant to not let any vehicles return to Gaza.”

* At 2:00 p.m., the IDF instructed its forces not to leave the communities near the border with Gaza, which was at that time under intense fire, making it a danger zone, and not to chase the attackers. *Haaretz*’s military source said, “The instruction was meant to turn the area around the border fence into a killing zone, closing it off toward the west.”

* At 6:40 p.m., with military intelligence believing that many of the attackers at or near Kibbutz Be’eri, Kfar Azza and Kissufim were intending to flee together back to the Gaza Strip, the IDF launched artillery raids at the border fence area, very close to some of these communities, and fired shells at the Erez border crossing.

There has been little coverage of *Haaretz*’s report in the mainstream media, given its undermining of Israel’s claims that Hamas was responsible for the majority of civilian deaths, the pretext for its genocidal war.

The use of the Hannibal Directive also sheds an unwelcome light on the ethos prevailing in the Israeli military and society, evidenced in the number of video clips posted by soldiers celebrating their shooting of defenceless civilians and destruction of their towns and cities. The Israeli military, spurred on by the fascistic elements in the government, has adopted increasingly loose open-fire regulations, including in the West Bank, where soldiers shoot in support of far-right settlers attacking Palestinians and their property.

Israeli citizens more broadly are taking it upon themselves to execute people they deem terrorists, without recourse to an investigation or trial. In 2016, the soldier Elor Azaria shot an incapacitated Palestinian knifeman as he lay on the street in Hebron. He was released from prison after serving nine months for manslaughter.

Last November, an off-duty soldier shot Israeli civilian Yuval Doron Kestelman who had rushed to the scene of an attack in Jerusalem and killed the assailants. Kestelman had dropped his gun, thrown up his hands and opened his jacket to show that he was not carrying an explosive device, but was killed in the belief that he was a Palestinian fighter.



Israeli far-right lawmaker and the head of "Jewish Power" party, Itamar Ben-Gvir, gestures after first exit poll results for the Israeli Parliamentary election at his party's headquarters in Jerusalem. November 2, 2022. [AP Photo/Oren Ziv]

This shoot-to-kill policy is set to increase with the widespread distribution of firearms initiated by the fascist National Security Minister and Jewish Power leader Itamar Ben-Gvir.

The revelation of Israel's criminality against its own citizens exposes the US media and political establishment and its European allies, which have fully embraced Israel's claims

surrounding the October 7 attack. The revelations further expose the Gaza genocide as a criminal conspiracy by the Netanyahu regime and its imperialist backers.

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