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SITUATION REPORT

October 11, 2023

2023 Israel-Hamas War

IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT TRAVELERS IN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

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Overview

On October 7, Hamas militants launched an attack from the Gaza strip, targeting dozens of locations across southwestern Israel with rocket barrages and ground attacks. More than 2,200 deaths have been reported, with thousands more wounded. Several foreign nationals, including at least twenty-two Americans, have been reported among those killed.¹ Multiple borders and ports have been closed, while several airlines have suspended service into Israel.

Key Takeaways

1. **Following the initial attack by Hamas militants, Israel declared a “state of war” on October 8.** Following a brief Hamas occupation, Israel has since regained control over all settlements along the Gaza border.² The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) have since begun an extensive air campaign against targets in Gaza, and have prepared for a full ground campaign into Gaza.³ Prime Minister Netanyahu has stated the war’s goal is to strip Hamas of any ability to commit future violence against Israel.
2. **At least 22 Americans are confirmed dead, with as many as twenty considered missing.** These numbers are expected to rise as the conflict continues and more casualties are identified. Hamas is also holding several hostages within Gaza, but the U.S. government is currently in negotiations for a prisoner swap.
3. **Multiple airlines have halted operations at Ben Gurion Airport (TLV) in Tel Aviv.** United, Delta, American, Wizz, Air France, Finnair, Easyjet, TAP, Etihad, Hainan, Cathay Pacific, and Korean airlines have all canceled flights to Israel. Lufthansa currently maintains one flight from Tel Aviv to Frankfurt.

¹ <https://www.kcra.com/article/israel-hamas-war-gaza-updates/45507453>

² <https://www.politico.eu/article/israel-gaza-strip-border-town-settlements-control-hamas-attack/>

³ https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/senior-israeli-source-gaza-will-not-be-hamastan-roof-knocki ng-policy-no-longer-norm/

Conflict and Casualties

Since October 7, the harsh fighting has led to high rates of civilian casualties, including twenty-two Americans confirmed killed and several more missing.

On the morning of October 7, one day after the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, Hamas militants launched attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel by land, sea, and air. These attacks focused on overwhelming small Israeli border positions before moving on to larger population centers near Gaza. Hamas militants are known to have committed mass murder of civilians, as well as taken 100-150 hostages back to Gaza.⁴ Hamas stated the routine desecration of Muslim holy sites by Israeli settlers, primarily the Al-Aqsa Mosque, to be their primary motivation. Following the Hamas attacks, Israel has come under several attacks to the northern part of the country from the Hezbollah militant group, operating out of southern Lebanon. Israel has since regained control of all of its territory briefly occupied by Hamas and has since begun a massive air campaign. Israeli officials have declared a “complete siege” of the Gaza Strip, with water, food, and fuel cut off for the operation.⁵ These are likely precursors to a full-scale ground invasion with the goal of removing Hamas’ ability to commit acts of terror from Gaza.

Civilian casualties are likely to increase as missile barrages continue to land in Israeli territory. Hamas officials have also stated Israeli hostages will be executed on film if Israel continues bombing Gaza targets without warning.⁶ While it seems likely the majority of Israel’s civilian casualties were taken in the first two days of the conflict, military figures can be expected to grow, especially as Israel begins its ground operations into the Gaza Strip itself. Military casualty figures are high; the IDF claims to have recovered more than 1,500 militants killed-in-action from the border.⁷ Gaza is one of the most densely populated areas in the world. At approximately 141 square miles and with a population of over 2.3 million, civilian casualties within Gaza are likely to be extremely high as Israeli air operations continue.

In addition to Israeli civilians, a number of foreign citizens have been killed, including at least twenty-two Americans, and at least twenty more are being held hostage. Several other countries have reported their citizens to be among those killed, taken hostage, or missing in the conflict including: Canada, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Argentina, Thailand, Nepal, the Philippines, and Russia.

Transportation Disruptions

The conflict has resulted in the closure of multiple borders, ports, and air-service routes in Israel, making it incredibly difficult to evacuate or enter the country.

The shutdown of multiple airports as well as border and seaport closures have severely impacted travel in and out of Israel. Several airlines from North America, Asia, and Europe have suspended flights from Tel Aviv, citing the dangers to their passengers, staff, and planes.⁸ Hamas has also

⁴ <https://abcnews.go.com/International/live-updates/israel-gaza-hamas/?id=103804516>

⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/09/israel-hamas-live-updates>

⁶ <https://abcnews.go.com/International/live-updates/israel-gaza-hamas/?id=103804516>

⁷ <https://abcnews.go.com/International/live-updates/israel-gaza-hamas/1500-palestinian-militants-found-dead-along-israeligaza-border-idf-says-103856155?id=103804516>

⁸ <https://worldisraelnews.com/airlines-shut-down-most-flights-to-and-from-israel-after-rocket-hits-airport/>

officially stated Ben Gurion International Airport is an intended target for future attacks.⁹ Several cruise lines, including Royal Caribbean, Norwegian, and Celestyal, have also redirected their ships away from Israel.¹⁰ Several ports across Israel's Mediterranean coast, including Ashkelon have closed as well.¹¹ Egypt and Jordan have both closed their respective borders with Israel.¹² Lebanon has officially stated no desire to get involved, but the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah has launched several smaller attacks from the border between Lebanon, Israel, and Syria.¹³

Travelers should shelter in place or evacuate via an operational airport in **northern Israel**. The U.S. State Department is in talks with major U.S. airlines to encourage a resumption of flights, but does not currently have plans to evacuate American citizens from Israel.¹⁴

Regional and Civilian Responses

Responses to the conflict have been mixed, with multiple neighbors and world powers declaring adamant support or condemnation. Civilian groups in many countries have also taken to the streets to demonstrate in support of Israel or Palestine.

The international response to the conflict is mixed. Many Middle Eastern states such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Egypt have expressed support for the Palestinian cause. Radical states, like Iran and elements within Lebanon, have even come out in support of the acts of terrorism.¹⁵ Israel's supporters have largely come out of the West, with the governments of eighty-four countries expressing support and sympathies for the Israeli people.¹⁶ On October 9, the leaders of the U.S, Germany, France, Italy, and the U.K. released a joint statement in support of Israel's right to self defense, as well as a warning for other countries not to intervene.¹⁷ The U.S, Israel's closest ally, has been at the forefront of Israeli support, with both leaders in constant communication since October 7.¹⁸ The U.S. is supplying Israel with logistical support and has moved a naval strike group into the area with a possible second one on the way.¹⁹ The forceful response is likely intended to deter Iran, Hezbollah, and other vehement Hamas supporters from joining the conflict.²⁰

The civilian response, at least in the west, has been divisive. Demonstrations in support of both sides have swept the western world, with clashes between protestors and counter-protestors

⁹<https://www.cnn.com/travel/what-travelers-need-to-know-israel-gaza>

¹⁰ <https://www.cruise critic.com/news/cruise-lines-change-cancel-itineraries-following-israel-attack>

¹¹<https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/israel-hamas-gaza-rockets-attack-palestinians/card/ashkelon-israel-s-biggest-oil-port-is-closed-to-tankers-Sw4gmEzlhdbE4MnLja6>

¹² <https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/137961>

¹³<https://apnews.com/article/lebanon-israel-chebaa-farms-gaza-rocket-attack-cd7b26f890bf4cae32491721506ec0a1>

¹⁴https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-10-10-23/h_fcfa1489f28b9edc10a4dd776b817a4f

¹⁵<https://www.cnbctv18.com/world/hamas-israel-conflict-a-look-at-the-countries-supporting-palestinian-militant-group-17990631.htm>

¹⁶https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/foreign-ministry-says-84-countries-have-expressed-support-for-israel/

¹⁷ <https://il.usembassy.gov/joint-statement-on-israel/>

¹⁸ <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/10/09/israel-hamas-live-updates.html>

¹⁹ <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/us-surg-ing-air-defense-munitions-israel-official/story?id=103842022>

²⁰<https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/threat-to-israel-from-hezbollah-and-iran-raises-risk-of-wider-conflict-c8a293>

being a significant concern given the politically charged nature of the conflict.²¹ While most pro-Palestinian demonstrations have confined to denouncing Israel's occupation of Palestine and the West Bank, a vocal minority have praised Hamas for their aggressive behavior.²² Authorities expect a spike in anti-semitic hate crimes, and police in several countries have bolstered security at various synagogues and Jewish majority communities outside of Israel.

Implications for International Education

SafeAbroad Analysts predict Israel will be a critical-risk study-abroad location for the remainder of 2023 and well into 2024. A full-scale siege of Gaza, with the goal of removing Hamas, would be lengthy and create significant regional disruptions. The danger of terror attacks and isolated incidents is anticipated to be high even for Israeli standards. Following these recommendations can help travelers mitigate associated risks:

- Travelers should shelter in place or evacuate via an operational airport in northern Israel. Observe and comply with any curfews, restrictions, and regulations imposed by local authorities.
- Travelers should maintain a high level of situational awareness at all times while in Israel.
- Travelers should stock up on essentials such as food, water, and first aid supplies. Additionally, travelers should ensure all electronic devices such as phones are charged in the event of an emergency.
- Anticipate significant security disruptions throughout Israel, including missile strikes and an elevated risk of terrorist attacks near places of worship.
- Travelers in Europe or other areas of the Middle East should exercise caution when near synagogues and heavily Jewish populated areas due to the risk of further terrorist attacks targeting such locations.
- Monitor the local news for updates on the conflict's progress or developing terrorist situations.
- Register travel with the U.S. State Department STEP system in order to receive emergency alerts. Carry contact information for the nearest Embassy or Consulate.

²¹<https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-gaza-hamas-demonstrations-d5f00f49f9b967c3148a39c8b7ffec08>

²² <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/oct/10/aoc-palestinian-rally-new-york>

