

Hello, this is the Global News podcast from the BBC World Service with reports and analysis from across the world. The latest news seven days a week. BBC World Service podcasts are supported by advertising. This is a Global News podcast special from the BBC World Service. I'm Jackie Leonard in London and this is our second special edition with listeners questions on what's going on in Israel and Gaza. We're recording this podcast at 1730 GMT on Friday, the 20th of October. With us to provide some answers, clarity and context is Lee's Doucet in Southern Israel. She is the BBC's chief international correspondent and also hosts the Conflict podcast. And in Jerusalem, we have Jeremy Bowen, our international editor. There is a lot to talk about. So let's get started.

We don't know how events in Gaza and Israel will unfold in the coming hours, much less days, but as soon as Hamas attacked on October the 7th, there was no doubt that Israel would respond. So let's start with this question. Hello, this is David from Sydney, Australia.

Given that Hamas would have known their barbaric attack would result in a massive reaction, why did they do it? Was it to provoke an overreaction that would lose Israel the support of its allies? And Lee's will come to you for that one. I think you'd have to look at a very broad canvas to get the reasons why they would have done it. They wanted to get the attention of the world. They did that. It was a time in which the Palestinian question was largely forgotten, including Gaza, where Arab states, who quite frankly have always let the Palestinians down, were looking to make deals with Israel or in some cases like Saudi Arabia, they were in negotiations with Israel. And we do know, and I had spoken recently actually to some mediating groups who for years had been talking to Hamas leaders, trying to move them away from the gun and how they had found that whenever they tried to approach Western governments, United States, they were always rebuffed. And so there was a feeling that whatever they tried simply wasn't working. So one political leader of Hamas was saying, well, it was out of despair and frustration that every door was shut. And so we basically knocked down, kicked down another very big door. And Jeremy, the next question is for you. Hello, my name is Emily. I'm calling from Australia and I'm curious to know when the Palestinians in Gaza hear about the atrocities, not just the numbers, but actually what happened? What do they think? Hi, my name is Reggie. I live in Perry, Georgia, South Atlanta. How do the people of Gaza feel about Hamas at this point? Are they angry towards them for provoking Israel? Is this pushing more towards radicalism? So Jeremy, what's your take on that? Well, you know what? I'm not in Gaza and I can't get into Gaza, which is for as a journalist, it's rather frustrating. So I can only go second hand on this and based on other similar, but not nearly as intense moments. I think that a lot of people in Gaza are not keen on Hamas. I don't think they follow them blindly. I think that they regard the people who control their lives as something they can't really do anything about. I think that the moment most people will be very concerned about what Israel is doing, because I think a common feeling among Palestinians is that, yes, these events provoke a response, but I think Palestinians see it against the backdrop of a long history, a history of occupation, a history they look back to, what they call the Nakba, the catastrophe when Israel was created in 1948 and nearly, well, more than 750,000 people became refugees and many of their descendants are in Gaza. So it's against that wider context. So I think it's really a bad history and actually it's not just Palestinians who think like that. I interviewed a man today who has his wife and three kids as hostages inside Gaza and I said, who do you blame? And he said, well, history really, the long history of the conflict.

Well, just as we were coming into the studio, we were hearing that Hamas had offered to release some of the Israeli hostages it's been holding in exchange for an immediate ceasefire. I hope we will have some more on that in just a moment. First, though, a lot of people are just really concerned about what's going on with the hostages. Here's a question on that.

Hi, BBC. My name is Tasman. I am from Gothenburg, Sweden. The question that I have is whether the

Israeli hostages in Gaza are still alive. Do we have any evidence that they're well and that they're actually retrievable? So, Lee, let's hear your take on that. What can you tell us about the hostages at this point? Well, we knew a bit about the hostages from the get go because these horrific images emerged of Hamas fighters pushing women, one gradling a baby and another toddler.

Old women described as Holocaust survivors being pushed across the border, others being pushed onto motorcycles. So we saw their images and their families saw these images and you can imagine their distress. Since they were dragged, swept, pulled across the border to Gaza, we've seen at least one video of a young man who was killed in an airstrike. There was one of those horrible hostage videos, 21-year-old Maya Shams, who said that she had had injuries, that they had been treated, but she appealed for everyone to do whatever they could to release the hostages. Aside from that, we heard nothing. And the statements where Hamas offers to make a deal

are from Hamas political leaders. They're not from the people who are holding the hostages. And their statements, the military leaders, has always been categorical that they're not going to bargain. But as we speak, there are reports coming in that Hamas has agreed to let a woman and her daughter, two American hostages, be freed on humanitarian grounds because they're said to be in poor health. And of course, Hamas is saying, see, we're not the people that you portray us to be. This is such a big human tragedy, but the politics of it is very cynical.

These are bargaining chips for Hamas. And for more on what's happening on the ground in Gaza and Israel, do subscribe to the Global News podcast from the BBC World Service.

Well, another area that is of continuing interest to our listeners are some of the terms that are being used. It is a hugely sensitive area, as we discussed last week. And it's important to be clear and to tread really carefully. So let's hear some more on that topic.

Hi, I'm Brandi Mitchell from London. I've noticed people on the BBC podcast using the word Jewish instead of Israeli a few times. I think there's a lot of confusion about language here.

Please, can you explain the difference between being Israeli, being Jewish and Zionism? And please, can you also explain the difference between being pro Palestine and pro Hamas?

And we'll split this question, if you don't mind. Jeremy, would you like to take the first part on what it is to be Jewish, Zionist, Israeli? First of all, approximately 20% of the population of Israel is not Jewish. So if you say Israelis, it's not a synonym for Jewish. There are Jewish Israelis and there are Palestinian Israelis. Zionism was the movement that originated in Europe in the late 19th century to create a homeland for the Jews. It started with the first world Zionist Congress in Switzerland in 1897, at which point the man who was organised, again a man called Herzl, said that they would have a state within 50 years. In fact, they had one in 1948, which was 51 years after that. And please, help us out with pro Palestine and pro Hamas. And is there an overlap? Well, pro Palestine, there's a very big community around the world that

is very pro Palestine. And we see them developing all the time on university campuses. Now a whole new generation is very much pro Palestine. They identify with their demand for a Palestinian state, their historical demand for justice, for their right to return home on so many levels. Palestine means different things to different people. It could be historical Palestine, it could mean a Palestinian state. Pro Hamas is to support a movement, which Hamas means an Islamic resistance

movement, which is a group backed by Iran, which as we've seen in the past few weeks has adapted, has a military strategy and much more. Now it's a hostage taking strategy. So they're very different to be pro Palestine or to be pro Hamas, but you can be pro Hamas and pro Palestine.

But it's not necessary that if you're pro Palestine, you're pro Hamas. In fact, you could be very anti Hamas. And there's been a lot of talk as well about the need for Israel to respond proportionately and within the rules of international law. And we'll direct this question at you as well if we can, Lees. Is it justified to ask 20 lakh people to vacate an area within 24 hours? So the question is it justified to ask so many people to vacate an area within 24 hours?

No, especially when you live in one of the most densely populated places on the planet, and when you are under nonstop Israeli bombardment, and when the roads are strewn with glass and

large swathes of your neighborhood or the next neighborhood are been reduced to rubble, and when you're scared to go out of your house. No, the United Nations said it was a death sentence.

It would be very, very difficult, possibly impossible to even in a more developed country at peace. Human rights groups criticized it. And Jeremy, can you address this next one, which comes from the US? My name is Robbie Fox and I live in Phoenix, Arizona in the United States.

Is there a comparison to be made as Israel turns Gaza into a ghetto just as the Nazis did to the Jews in Poland in 1939? And should we expect better from the Israelis given their modern history? Jeremy? No, I think it would be wholly wrong to compare the Israelis and the Nazis. The Nazis had a program of mass extermination, and while Israel can be criticized quite heavily, and many people would say quite reasonably for breaking international law, for perhaps they would deny it, but many people would say not trying hard enough to fulfill their obligations in international law to preserve the lives of Palestinian civilians as they go about their military business. And Israel can also be faulted for denying Palestinians independence over many years, for confiscating land, for building settlements in defiance of international law.

It would be wholly wrong to compare them to the war crimes, crimes against humanity, the barbaric nature of the Nazi regime, which started a war that killed what was it, 50, 60, 70 million people? Well, we did talk earlier about Hamas' reasoning behind launching the October the 7th attack. Other listeners have been getting in touch to ask what might be acceptable to Hamas now. Hi, this is Mehmet Topeli from Turkey. What would be the demand of Hamas

for ceasefire? Would it be enough for Hamas to accept border lines that was agreed in 1967? If so, would Israel accept it as well? And first of all, these just remind us what was actually agreed in 1967. And then, if you don't mind, get to Mehmet's question.

Well, people often refer to UN Resolution 242 in which, after the Six Day War, Israel was called upon to leave all of the territories it had occupied during that time. And that is the kind

of ground zero for UN resolutions which haven't worked and have been flagrantly violated ever since. And it's a source of real irritation and anger for many, for decades since. During peace processes or whenever there was something approaching, they talked about returning to the 67 borders. Hamas, of course, has a founding charter in which they talk about the destruction of the Jewish state, so not willing to accept any land for the Jewish people. But in recent years, they have come up with documents. There has been a part of Hamas and partly working with Arab states like Qatar, working with three parties, trying to come up with a different way of governing, because they can no longer be just the group of the gun, because they are governing the Gaza Strip, or at least they were trying to. And they've seen, a few years ago, they did come up with a document which suggests that they were prepared to accept a state on the 67 borders. But they also wanted the rights of Palestinians, including the right of return to be accepted. But it's difficult now to talk about a united Hamas. There are certain principles that they agree on. But given all that's happened recently, we're not sure exactly what they would be satisfied with. In the first place, it's going to take a long time for really the embers to go out in this crisis. And many of Hamas's top political and military leaders will be killed as part of Israel's military operations, said to be about destroying Hamas.

And Jeremy, following on from that theme, this question comes from a listener in Israel. This is Joshua Eliasson from Givat Adda in Israel. My question is, what will it take for Hamas to remove its commitment to destroy the state of Israel from its charter, and accept Israel as a legitimate neighbor to a Palestinian state? Well, as they say, you know, it's hard to start from where we are, because things have gone on the way that they have. If you could wind back time to when Hamas won Palestinian elections in 2006 after a huge protest vote against their opponents in Fatah, who were seen as incompetent and corrupt correctly, by the voters, if then there had been an attempt to talk to Hamas, you never know what might have happened at the time. There were plenty of analysts who said that the powerful countries of the world were wrong to isolate Hamas, but it was isolated. About that time, actually, I had a background meeting with a very senior American who's still in a very important position over there, and he said, he said, look, first thing we've got to do is turn over that election. It's the wrong result, we can't accept it. So those are what ifs. The way things are right now, Israel is saying it wants to wipe Hamas off the face of the earth. So I think that even if Hamas suddenly said, actually, we've changed our minds, we would accept you. I don't know, would they, would Israel accept that? They probably wouldn't believe them, I think. So I think that at the moment, this momentum of war is going to have to play out. Then after that, you never know the shock of the casualties on both sides could be the catalyst for a new beginning. It would take different kinds of leaders, probably on both sides. But eventually, there will have to be a political deal, because if there isn't, it means that people on both sides, leaders on both sides, will sentence their children and grandchildren to more of the same. Jeremy, thank you. That was Jeremy Bowen, who has to leave us now to go and do other things. But we will continue with our podcast with Lee's Doucet.

Let's hear now about how the United Nations is responding.

Hello, this is Shamsir Kelot from India. I'm sending this watch note with the hope that you could provide more information about the various United Nations resolutions and responses to them from both Israel and Palestinians since the establishment of the State of Israel.

So can you talk us through that, Lee's? Well, at various times in Palestinian history, in Israeli history, the unit has taken on very different roles. There is a Palestinian agency

was set up specifically to deal with Palestinian refugees called UNRWA, United Nations Relief and Works Agency. It still works with them to this day, because many of the people living in the West Bank and in Gaza Strip are defined as refugees. They are the refugees of successive wars, the 1948 war, 1967 war. And every time there's a military escalation or conflict, people get pushed from their homes. As we're seeing yet again, there has been United Nations envoys to Israel and the Palestinian territories trying in some way to bring the two sides closer together. Obviously, that hasn't worked. And there are those UN resolutions which come from the world's top table, the UN Security Council, beginning with UN Resolution 242 in 1967, in the wake of the Six-Day War in which Israel occupied territory from neighboring Arab states. And I'm afraid another war is still going on and there's an air raid siren, and we do have to take it seriously. We'll be back.

Lise has just come back. Are you okay to continue, Lise? Is everything safe?

Yes, we're here. A few thuds in the background, but we're in a place where there are air raid sirens in Gaza that they don't get them. And we have a certain amount of time to get to the shelter because then we know we're safe and can come back. Looking further ahead, how do we move

on from here and what can we learn from the past? Here is a question from the U.S.

My name is Jean-Paul Jones, and I live in Los Angeles, California. I'm an American millennial and have never known a time when the Middle East has been at peace. On your podcast, a recurring talking point is that Israel and Palestine have been in conflict for seven decades. Was there ever a time when that region was at peace? I also ask this because this region is even depicted as an area of unrest in the Bible. Surely conflict in this region hasn't lasted since the authorship of biblical text, has it? Has it, Lise?

Well, since I'm not a biblical historian, I'm just going to go back as far as the history that I've lived through. And that was in the wake of the Oslo Peace Accord signed with great celebration and ceremony on the White House lawn in 1993. I moved to the region first to Jordan in 1994 and then to Jerusalem. And that was a time where people dared to believe in peace, where we used to

go to Ramallah in the West Bank along with Israeli friends, where menus in restaurants were in Hebrew,

as well as in Arabic, where Israeli and Arab businessmen made plans to set up industrial zones together, where Palestinian and Israeli politicians, they got to know each other, their children got to know each other. They dared to believe that the next generation would be living in a time of peace. I wrote it from our own correspondent about this about Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader who returned from exile to Gaza, went to visit Singapore and he talked about how Gaza would become the Singapore of the region with so much investment. And it was a very, very different time. People knew the Oslo Accords were not perfect. There were many cynics at the time, but there was that tantalizing possibility. But sadly, as we say, the rest is history. A spate of suicide bombings, the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the commander turned peacemaker. Many believe that the peace process, the hopes for peace, died with him when he was assassinated by a Jewish extremist who didn't like his peacemaking. Well, let's bring it back to the present and a couple more questions. Hello, BBC. I am Edmund Chavez III from the Philippines. I apologize for asking a most difficult question. How can Israel and Palestine have lasting peace? And before you try to answer that one, Lise, here's a suggestion from another listener.

My name is Claudia Nielsen and I'm based in Hartford in the UK. I am a psychotherapist and my work with clients is, yes, to take the history and talk through their early life experience, but my remit is about working with the situation in the here and now. The path will always be there, but what can they do within the circumstances they find themselves to bring about the change they need in order to become the people they are meant to be free of the shackles of Israel? That is what I think needs to happen in the Middle East. Many mistakes are made, true, but what is needed is to move forward from where we are today in order to build a better future for everyone. So, Lise, the biggest question. I would really love to agree with the psychotherapist that we could all just put our baggage down and start anew, but history is lived here, not in the past, but in the present. I was really struck when I first moved to this region how so many people still carry the rusted keys of the homes that they had before 1948 and the Independence

War for Israel. And when I met people, when I would say where are you from or where is your home, they would refer to where their grandfather was born, which was a village in the Westbanger in Gaza. And we now know in our time there's a lot of medical scientific evidence about generational trauma that you live through the trauma of your ancestors. And this is very much being lived by Palestinians now when we hear suggestions that why don't the Gazans just move for a short time? Why don't they cross the border and just set up camps in Egypt, just a temporary tent? Or why don't they go to Jordan? They know that when they do that they will become refugees again. And the generational trauma of Israelis as well has to be taken into account? Of course, again we are having the the echoes of the Holocaust, you know, so graphically when you have Holocaust survivors being taken as hostages by Hamas, when you have the president of Israel, Isaac Herzog saying never have so many Jewish people died in a day since the Holocaust. Again, they live with that generational trauma. They also live with the trauma of suicide bombings that have taken the lives of loved ones. They feel threatened and fearful by the Palestinians next door. That is why the talk of peace became the talk of separation, get each other out of their lives. And so if I was to answer the question, how can Israelis and Palestinians be at peace? In some ways they just want what we all want. They want to have a home where they feel safe, a neighborhood where their children can go to school. They want to have control

their own lives, not to have another country. In the case of the Palestinians, it's the Israelis. In the case of the Israelis, they feel threatened by the Palestinians. They don't feel safe and they certainly don't feel safe now. They want to be able to live their own lives. For many people and many politicians, it was the two-state solution, a Palestinian state side by side with an Israeli state. But here we are in 2023 and Jewish settlements have expanded by so much that many now think that a two-state solution is simply not possible. There's not enough land for a contiguous Palestinian state. So before this crisis erupted, many were saying that it had to be a one-state solution, a state for Jews and Arabs and those living in the West Bank and Gaza. But that brings up a whole set of other problems. People want a home. And I think that's something everyone can understand. Lees, thank you. And that's it from this special edition of the Global News Podcast and the Conflict Podcast. Thank you very much for being part of it, Lees. It's truly an honour, Jackie, to be part of your Global News Podcast and even more to bring the new pop-up podcast, The Conflict, in with you. It's a real joy to hear from your listeners and to be part of your program because after all, I'm a listener to your podcast too.

And that's it from us for now. Our thanks to Lees Doucet and Jeremy Bowen. And thank you to everyone who got involved. I'm sorry if we didn't get to your question this time, but we will be back to do this again. If you have more questions, record us a voice note or write an email and send it to globalpodcast.bbc.co.uk. You can also find us on X, formerly known as Twitter, at Global NewsPod. This edition was mixed by Philip Bull. The producers were Judy Frankel and Anna Murphy. Our editor is Karen Martin. I'm Jackie Leonard and until next time, goodbye.