

[Transcript] The Daily / War in Israel

There's no place like Oz, and after 20 years on Broadway, there's still no show like Wicked. It has moved us with its brains, heart, and courage, and shown us how to defy gravity.

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I'm very sorry about what happened, first of all.

Second of all, can you tell me how it started?

Yes, yes.

My wife and I and our two daughters live in Kibbutz na Haloz, which is a beautiful community on the border with Gaza.

And we are very proud and still are to be members of this community.

Yesterday morning at 6 a.m., we heard a whistle, and we realized that bombs are falling.

We are very attuned to these kinds of things, and actually in every house in our community, there is what we call a safe room, which is a room that is built of very strong concrete and has a special kind of door that is supposed to withstand the fall of mortars and rockets, and that's usually where the children sleep.

So we just ran to the safe room, closed the window, closed the door, and we just wait for it to be over.

But then, we started hearing gunfire.

Gunfire very close, and it became closer and closer, and that's when we realized we're in a different kind of event, and we realized that there are terrorists inside our neighborhood and at some point outside our window.

We could hear them talk, we could hear them run, we could hear them shooting their guns at our house, at our windows.

There was no military anywhere in sight, and at that moment, we realized that we are here alone, we are going to have to stay in there and pray, basically.

I have to say, my daughters were real heroes.

Our oldest is three and a half years old, and our younger is a year and a half.

We told them they have to be quiet, and so for nine hours, my girls have not eaten anything.

They have not gotten out of the safe room, we have no electricity, we have no phone, we have no light.

And around 3.30, I think it was, this is nine and a half hours into the ordeal, we heard a big bang on the concrete window, and we heard my father say, I got you, I'm here.

We opened the door, finally, and he came in with this group of soldiers.

We hugged them, they hugged us.

Then the difficult part began.

They started bringing into our house families that could no longer stay in theirs, wounded people, people who don't know where their loved ones are, people who heard terrorists walking inside their house, something that did not happen to us, and I think is way more traumatic.

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Everybody was gathered in our house, and you saw all the pain of the people and the fear of the children.

This went on for several hours, and in the middle of the night, the soldiers organized the bus, came and took all of us, including my father, now with us, out of the kibbutz.

I have to say, we are very, very angry and disappointed.

We felt alone.

We're crying for help, and nobody came.

And when we were sitting there with the girls and hearing the khamas sell outside our window, my wife told me, this is the Yom Kippur war of our life.

This is the Yom Kippur war of our generation.

From the New York Times, I'm Sabrina Tavernese, and this is The Daily.

Over the weekend, Palestinian militants launched a stunning and highly coordinated invasion of Israel, rampaging through Israeli towns, killing people in their homes and on the streets, and taking hostages.

Today, my colleague Isabel Kirshner, on the biggest attack against Israel in 50 years, and the all-out war that it has now prompted.

It's Monday, October 9th.

So, Isabel, we all woke up Saturday morning to this unbelievable news that there had been this massive attack on Israel.

And over the course of the day, I was absolutely glued to my phone and to your dispatches, trying to understand what on earth was happening.

This is not something we really ever see, an attack on this scale, on Israeli territory.

How did the day start for you?

Well, I was woken up by a phone call, probably about an hour into the beginning of the attack, which began with rocket fire.

And honestly, there was such a fog of what exactly was happening at the time.

It really took most of the day for details to emerge.

But as the hours unfolded, it became clear that this was a hugely coordinated invasion of Israel, carried out by militants from the Gaza Strip, which is a Palestinian territory adjacent to Israel.

And the militants were from Hamas, the Islamic militant group that controls the Gaza Strip. And those militants broke easily through the fortifications on the border, reaching more than 10 miles into Israeli territory, taking over houses, taking over whole villages, coming by air, land and sea.

And as the events unfolded and the day went on, it became clear that this was the broad biggest invasion of Israeli territory in 50 years.

Okay, so let's start to unpack this. When did it begin and how did it begin?

So it began at about 6.30 in the morning. It was a Saturday, the day of the Sabbath here, when most people would have been asleep. It was also a Jewish holiday of Sukkot, Simchat Torah, which is usually a very festive day, which caps the high holy days of the autumn season. And people had really been gearing up for a nice weekend and woke up to barrages of rocket fire, sirens going off all over the country. They were going off in Tel Aviv, they were going off in central Jerusalem.

As the morning went on, there were scenes emerging on TV and social media of tractors

just crashing through the border fence on the Gaza border. We saw columns of vehicles speeding through with nobody there to stop them. They were headed to the communities along the border, villages, kibbutzim and small cooperative villages. Once they reached these communities and towns, they literally went off to the border.

They went house to house and started knocking on doors or shooting their way in.

And we began to see the most terrifying scenes on TV of people calling in, whispering and begging for help,

saying, I can hear the gunmen, they're outside my house or in some cases they're inside my house. And we're talking here about families, grandparents, people with young children.

And then it began to emerge that there had also been an all night rave not far from the Gaza border. Whoever tried to run away, they were shooting him from both sides. And there were about 2,000 young Israelis who'd spent the night there and then found themselves surrounded by gunmen. They took out people from the car and just gunned them down.

Shooting into their cars, shooting at them as they ran on foot.

There were people hiding in bushes and among the trees for hours in this open rural area being hunted by these gunmen.

And it appears that both in the villages along the Gaza border and at the rave, the militants were picking up sometimes injured Israelis and in many cases uninjured Israelis and just taking them into Gaza as hostages.

There were whole families, there were young couples, there were elderly people.

This was a stunning and shocking scenario, a nightmare scenario for Israelis.

Very soon after the rocket fire of Saturday morning and the invasion of the gunmen, the Israeli military puts planes in the sky and starts to strike in Gaza, across the Gaza Strip. And the government says it's trying to target cells and launching pads where the rockets are being fired from, but we know the strikes are deadly and often inflict casualties on Palestinian civilians there. And soon after that, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu comes on television with a recorded statement and announces that Israel is calling up reserves for a retaliatory offensive in Gaza and says that we are at war.

So this is just an extraordinary attack on so many levels, historic and a complete shock.

Do we have any sense of how this happened? How was Hamas able to pull this off?

Well, that's the big question that everybody here is now asking, because this was a complete surprise. Israel was caught completely off guard. It's not clear how Hamas did this, but there are hints that from Israeli officials now that there's been some Iranian help.

We know that Iran has given logistical support to Hamas for years and Hamas has just grown in sophistication in terms of its military machine. We've seen over the years its rockets reaching further and further into Israel, but nothing on a scale like this, because this was clearly such a well-planned and coordinated and multi-pronged attack and how that could have all happened without Israel noticing is the question that everybody here is now asking.

Well, let's talk about that. Do we have a sense yet of how Israel didn't see this coming?

Well, first of all, people are baffled because Israel has such a vaunted intelligence apparatus.

So much has been invested in that border fence in the fortifications for years. Israel was building a multi-billion shekel barrier that reaches underground in order to stop Hamas militants or other militant groups coming into Israeli territory through underground tunnels. This is an incredibly sophisticated structure with sensors, cameras. It's being watched all the

time. There are usually blimps in the air. I mean, the fact that this was happening all along the fence and that these heavily armed forces were just driving straight through overland, not underground, and reaching miles into Israeli territory and nobody was there to stop them. I mean, this was just an incredible failure. Israel was caught totally off guard. Many people here are saying Israel just took its eye off the ball. And in fact, the focus of the last few months for the military has been the West Bank, the occupied West Bank, which is the other major territory with a population of millions of Palestinians and hundreds of thousands of Jewish settlers living among them and where we've seen bursts of violence and increasing friction over the last few months. And so they just didn't see this coming.

So they were totally blindsided.

Absolutely, absolutely. And the shock of Saturday's events is now reverberating in Israel and throughout the region.

We'll be right back.

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Hi, I'm Claire Tennis-Getter. I'm one of the many names you hear in the list of credits on the daily every week.

A big part of my job as a producer is talking to my colleagues, to New York Times reporters, to get their expertise on the news.

But we also want to explore the human side of the news.

And so another big part of my job is talking to people about how they're experiencing what's happening in the world.

That can mean walking up to people on the street, making cold calls.

It's spending months making sure we represent all sides of the story.

Whether it's about what shapes our political identities or how we're coping with crises, we always feel like there's something to learn from these conversations.

We often hear from listeners that these types of stories are what makes the daily special.

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And thanks.

Isabel, this attack just happened and you're still sorting through the details.

But I think the question many of us have at this point is, why now?

Why did Hamas attack Israel from Gaza now?

Well, we don't exactly know, but Gaza has long presented a challenge for Israel on its border.

Gaza is a narrow strip of land with two million Palestinians living there.

Many of them are refugees and the descendants of refugees from what was Palestine before the state of Israel was founded.

And the place has been under blockade by Israel and neighboring Egypt for the last 16 years, ever since Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip.

So Gaza has long been compared by many to an open air prison.

And frustration has just been growing up there for years and years.

But when you ask why now, there have been shifts in the broader region for years.

Many of the Arab states refused to recognize or have diplomatic relations with Israel until Israel and the Palestinians had found some resolution to their conflict.

But we've seen that beginning to change.

So in 2020, we saw several Arab countries deciding that they would normalize relations with Israel while basically bypassing the Palestinians.

And now in the last few weeks, we've seen increasingly open declarations that Saudi Arabia, which is the big player in the region in this respect, is moving closer and closer to a normalization deal with Israel.

And this is something that would be very threatening to Hamas and to the Palestinians in general, who may fear being left behind.

And I assume this attack in Israel's declaration of war makes it more complicated for Saudi Arabia to normalize relations with Israel.

I mean, this deal could be a tough sell for Saudi leaders if Israel is in an all out war with Palestinians in Gaza.

Sure. I mean, the future path is now very unclear, but that could certainly be the case.

So that's one potential motivation, preventing a deal between Israel and the Saudis.

But we know Hamas isn't entirely alone in the region.

It has a strong backer and that's Iran. How might Iran factor in here?

Well, Iran would be no fan of this emerging Saudi deal with Israel, which is intended to strengthen the anti-Iranian axis in the region.

Iran and Saudi Arabia are absolute rivals.

And in fact, what we've seen now is the Iranian president, Ebrahim Raisi,

calling Ismail Haniah, the leader of Hamas,

and expressing his appreciation for Saturday's invasion of Israeli territory.

And he's quoted in a statement as saying,

you have made the Islamic nation happy with this initiative.

I mean, one thing that's really remarkable here is that this attack comes in a moment of real upheaval inside Israel, right?

We've been covering this on the show.

They've been rolling political crises about the future of the judiciary in the country, but that's brought around a real soul searching among Israelis.

And at times it's brought the country to a standstill.

There have been these rolling strikes. People are out on the streets.

Do we know if this played a role in the timing of this attack?

Well, it's a really interesting question.

It could very well be that Hamas looked at what was going on in Israel and all the upheaval and thought that this might be a good time to take Israel on because Israel appeared to be weak.

This upheaval, the rifts in Israeli society over the far-right government's plans to curb the judiciary, have actually reached all the way into the army.

And we've seen thousands of Israeli reservists who've been threatening and declaring in recent months

that they would not show up for duty as volunteers anymore

because they felt that this government was undermining the democratic system that they had signed up to defend.

But actually what we've seen in the last 24 hours or 36 hours is an incredible turnaround because we've seen the country putting its differences aside, at least temporarily, to deal with what many here see as a dire national emergency.

And we've seen the protest groups calling on the reservists to show up and the military has been telling me that actually in the call-up of the reserves, they've had no refusals.

And I spoke to one of the leaders of the reservists who had been protesting against the government and he said to me, of course, I've shown up for duty.

This is a time of a national emergency and defending the citizens comes first.

Interesting. So just a remarkable turnaround.

I mean, something we couldn't have imagined just weeks ago.

Right.

What about the political class and what's happening in high politics?

So even there, we're seeing now the leaders of the centrist opposition parties who had vowed just weeks ago never to sit in a government with Benjamin Netanyahu actually proposing forming a national unity government with him an emergency government to see Israel through this crisis.

So if Hamas had thought that it was taking advantage of Israel's weakest moments or one of its weakest moments, perhaps they will find that this has backfired.

So Isabel, stepping back for a minute here, this is really a defining moment for Israel.

As you said earlier on Saturday morning, Netanyahu made a declaration of war. What has he done since then?

So late Saturday night, there was a meeting of the security cabinet.

The first objective is to clear out enemy forces and restore security.

The second is to exact an immense price from the enemy.

And in the early hours of Sunday morning, the government put out a statement in which it said it was going to cut off power, electricity that it supplies to the Gaza Strip, as well as fuel and goods.

Israel has continued with a relentless campaign of airstrikes.

It's now struck hundreds of targets within the Gaza Strip.

Entire apartment buildings, homes, schools and even a mosque.

It's taken down multi-storey buildings there.

And of course warned Gaza residents to move out of certain areas and neighbourhoods.

Many people there have nowhere to go.

And so there is a huge amount of panic on the ground.

We, like everyone here, are being oppressed.

Under the fire, the bombing, all night long.

This building, 80 families lived here.

And we're seeing the death tolls on both sides rising.

And now we're seeing the army evacuating the residents of the Israeli communities along the Gaza border, which is possibly an indication of a much larger offensive to come.

And that leads to the next question of whether Israel is planning to go into Gaza with its ground

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forces.

Do you think that's a serious risk?

I mean, what are the chances Israel will actually invade the Gaza Strip?

Well, we don't know.

But if you listen to Netanyahu's words, he has said that all the sites in Gaza where Hamas is deployed

and is hiding and is operating from, he said we will turn them into rubble.

He has told the Gazans, leave now because we will operate forcefully everywhere.

And I think you can't rule out listening to those words,

that Israel will go as far as it feels it needs to go to achieve its goals.

Isabel, thank you.

Thank you, Sabrina.

By late in the night on Sunday, the death toll from the weekend's attack had risen to 700 Israelis.

More than 400 Palestinians had been killed, as Israel struck back.

While the precise number of Israelis captured and held hostage was unknown,

a senior Hamas official said Sunday that it was more than 100.

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Afghanistan rose to at least 813 people on Sunday,

making the quakes one of the deadliest natural disasters to hit the country in decades.

The two earthquakes, both 6.3 magnitude, occurred along Afghanistan's border with Iran.

They were especially destructive because many homes in the region are made from mud and bricks and collapsed instantly when the earthquakes struck.

And in a surprise decision over the weekend,

the governor of California, Gavin Newsom,

has vetoed a bill that would have made his state the first in the nation

to outlaw discrimination based on a person's caste,

a social and religious hierarchy carried over from South Asia.

Proponents of the bill, which was the subject of a recent episode of The Daily,

argued that it would increase awareness of caste-based discrimination

and encourage victims of it to come forward.

But opponents, many of them Hindu, said it unfairly targeted them

because the caste system is most commonly associated with Hinduism.

In the end, Newsom sided with opponents,

saying that the law was unnecessary because California already prohibits discrimination

on the basis of ancestry, religion and national origin.

Today's episode was produced by Rob Zipko, Sidney Harper and Will Reed,

with help from Lindsay Garrison.

It was edited by Mark George and Lisa Chow,

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contains original music by Marion Lazano and Rowan Nemisto,
and was engineered by Chris Wood.

Special thanks to Patrick Kingsley, who interviewed Amir Tabun at the top of the episode.

Tabun is a journalist at Haritz, an Israeli newspaper.

Special thanks also to Shira Frankel.

Our theme music is by Jim Brunberg and Ben Landsberg of Wonderly.

That's it for The Daily.

I'm Sabrina Tavarnisi. See you tomorrow.

Thank you.

Thanks for watching.