

# Testimony of Former Israeli PM Adds Urgency to Debate on Foreknowledge of October 7 Attack

By [Bharat Dogra](#)

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*The testimony of present-day leader of the opposition and former Prime Minister of Israel **Yair Lapid** has added to the already fierce controversy on whether **at the highest levels in the country there was foreknowledge of the attack by Hamas on October 7, 2023.***

Recently the former PM has testified before an independent commission that has been set up at the initiative of groups representing survivors and victims of the Hamas attack.

Yair Lapid stated before the Commission,

**“It is not true that the political system was not alerted to the October 7 disaster. For months the Prime Minister (Benjamin Netanyahu) and Cabinet Ministers received a series of severe and unprecedented warnings, and did nothing.”**

He further stated,

“From the middle of 2023 there were more and more voices within the terrorist organizations who said that the moment they had been waiting for has arrived, and these voices appeared in the intelligence assessments, and in discussions in the IDF, Shin Bet and Mossad.”

Of course this important information was also taken to the higher levels, to the PM and others.

The Israeli PM’s office has denied these allegations, as is understandable.

A little earlier Yair Lapid had told The Times of Israel in an interview—“all the signs, all the red flags, all the warnings” were there but Netanyahu “ignored them all”. (see report by Sam Sokol titled “Lapid says Netanyahu knew for months before that a violent eruption was looming” , The Times of Israel, August 31).

This is certainly of great significance.

Commenting on this testimony of the former Prime Minister and present opposition leader, Yossi Vertner wrote in the Haaretz dated August 31, 2024 (see article titled ‘Netanyahu’s lies laid bare: How Israel ignored the roadmap to the October 7 disaster), “It is hard to overstate the importance of opposition leader Lapid’s statement before the civil commission of inquiry investigating the state’s failures on October 7. He lists briefing after briefing he received, piece after piece of intelligence he saw, warning after warning he heard,

conversations he had with relevant 'sources', all in the relatively brief period of the summer of 2023."

These statements must be seen together with a lot of other evidence.

## **Warnings of Surveillance Soldiers**

An important role in the Israeli security system is assigned to Israeli women surveillance soldiers who are on duty at the long fence with Gaza. They are called tatzpitaniyot. They use security cameras and sensors to monitor the area on and around the fence carefully to look for any signs of unusual activity on 24X7 basis.

Several of these surveillance soldiers were killed in the October 7 attack, while some were also taken hostage.

Soon after the attack several of them spoke to Israeli media, including TV and print media, such as Kan News, Channel 12, Haaretz and others. What they stated is very important to understand what happened prior to October 7.

For about three months preceding the attack, these surveillance soldiers stated, they had started noticing highly unusual activities near the fence, most particularly relating to training by Hamas or persons similar to them.

They would create a replica of the fence wall, then breach it, then make it again and breach it again.

One of the surveillance soldiers Yael Rotenberg reported concentrated activity at two stretches on the section of the fence she was monitoring. On October 7 the fence was breached at both these places (among others). This shows how important such sightings were for real intelligence.

Another training activity related to preparing replicas of the observers who guarded the posts, and then attacking them. Observers were attacked in a similar way on October 7.

Replicas of tanks used by Israel were prepared and attacked or captured in the training. Holes were dug and explosives were put in them. Drones were being used and landing quite close to the fence.

One surveillance officer **Amit Yerushalmi** told Israeli media,

"People went down to the fence and detonated an outrageous amount of explosives, the amount of explosives was crazy."

She stated,

"The training went from once a week to twice a week, from every day to several times a day."

Another surveillance soldier **Maya Desiatnik** told something very similar—the training was first once a week, then once a day, then constantly. She stated her understanding then was that now it is only a matter of time before something big will happen.

These activities being observed by the women surveillance soldiers were being regularly

sent to their seniors, which means that these dispatches were being regularly read by their seniors for several weeks almost on daily basis, with more activities or more intense activity being reported with the passage of time.

In any country this would have led to a state of very high alert and all possible actions would have been taken to go to the depth of what exactly is the implication of all this training activity near the border fence. All possible steps would have been taken to eliminate or minimize any threat posed by such activities. Steps would also have been taken to improve the security for the women surveillance soldiers themselves. While such action would be expected in any country, this would be expected even more in Israel which is known to have a very strong security and intelligence force which is reputed for its high levels of alertness and efficiency. What is more this alertness would have increased further in view of the warning of increased militant training activity coming so close to the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur war (6 October 2023).



Wrecks of Israeli and Egyptian armour stand directly opposed one another in a testament to the ferocity of the combat near the Suez Canal. (Licensed under CC BY 4.0)

However from all available evidence, all the high alert dispatches sent by the women surveillance officers were almost entirely ignored as far as taking action on them to strengthen security is concerned. In fact one of the women surveillance soldiers in media reports has been quoted as saying while describing the situation on the day of the attack—half of the force was home for Sukkot (a religious event). This indicates that security was exceedingly weak on the day of the attack, much below what is available in normal times, instead of security being strengthened.

It is important to give careful consideration to these statements as these can help to improve the understanding of what was happening prior to October 7 and also what happened on October 7. These surveillance soldiers are after all in government service and may not be able to speak so freely later, although immediately after the tragedy in their distress they spoke to the media.

## **Videos of Training**

After the October 7 attack on Israel there was a lot of interest of various media organizations in the various videos of military training by Hamas and related organizations, particularly those related to more recent times. Quite a few of these were in fact available on the internet and in social media as these were being rather freely shared. Hence various media organizations including reputed organizations could get a lot of these videos together to analyze these.

One important fact revealed by this analysis is that these videos often show the kind of military training which resembles what happened actually on October 7, or something very close to what happened.

Thus there are videos of breaching the formidable fences and tackling the surveillance systems (in fact three of the surveillance balloons had been sent for maintenance on the day of the attack and hence were not operational anyway) and even of hostages being taken.

As these videos were rather openly available in the weeks before the attack (also keeping in view the fact that several other warnings of planning of such attacks had been received), what would have been the most predictable response and role of the Israeli security forces in this context? As these forces are known to be very alert and aggressive, the most predictable response would have been to search where such trainings are being held and to take a very aggressive position to prevent such trainings. Secondly, even if they could not achieve this, the least they could be expected to do was to widely publicize these videos, such as those which depict hostages being taken, to tell the entire world regarding the dangerous plans of the Hamas as revealed by their own training, as a part of their propaganda against the Palestinian militants. Thirdly, on the side of caution, they should have taken further steps to strengthen the fencing and the surveillance to avoid these getting breached.

However none of this was done, from all available evidence. Amazingly, these videos of military training were simply ignored, as far as any effective action being taken on them is concerned.

When questioned regarding this were asked by journalists of reputed US media organizations whom they cannot ignore entirely, Israeli security officials have generally stated that we will examine all such things after the war is over. This is unlikely to happen anytime soon, and by the time the war is actually over so much more would have happened that it would be relatively easier to ignore such matters. Hence it is important to examine such issues now only, because such understanding would be very helpful in better comprehension of the wider reality that has been evolving in this volatile part of the world in recent weeks, happenings which increasingly have wider and very worrying implications for world peace and stability. It appears that deliberate efforts are being made to widen the conflict by some powerful persons and forces.

## **Suspicious Profits**

The Washington Post reported on December 5, 2023 under the title 'Traders earned millions anticipating October 7 Hamas attack, study says'—"Investors earned millions of dollars by

short-selling Israeli stocks days ahead of Hamas' October 7 attack, apparently profiting of foreknowledge of the bloody intrusion." This is based on a study by Prof. Robert J. Jackson of New York University School of Law and Prof. Joshua Mitts of Columbia Law School. This has also been reported by the Economist and other media.

It is important to find out how such profit-making based on foreknowledge could have been possible in the context of an event that has been generally and officially seen as completely a surprise attack.

Some people may say that this could have been a guess based on the fact that 6 October 2023 was the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur war but if this explanation is relevant then it would also follow that security should have been extraordinarily strict on and around this date while the reality was that it was found to be extraordinarily lax on and around October 7, with the bulk of the security force missing (diverted to other positions) and three surveillance balloons out of action too.

## **Egypt's Warning**

Representatives of some Arab countries such as Egypt as well as **Michael McCaul**, Chairman of US House Foreign Relations Committee, have stated that warnings of the attack were provided to the Israeli government days before the attack.

## **Hamas Quietly Helped Earlier by Israel**

At least in early days creation and growth of Hamas was helped by Israel. Israeli authorities wanted to foster Hamas as a militant religious force to counter the secular Palestinian force of PLO, or the Palestinian Liberation Organization, as PLO had much greater chances of gaining international recognition. The thinking of the more aggressive elements among the Israeli authorities, with Netanyahu as their leader, was that if an organization which can be condemned as a terrorist organization internationally emerges in a leadership role of Palestinians, then it will be easier to keep denying to them equal rights and statehood. Of course today this may be denied by some Israeli spokespersons or Hamas spokespersons or their supporters, but this reality can be seen historically from the help given by Israel for the early form of Hamas to get established as a charity and then to emerge as a much bigger political force. Israel helped with money and also looked the other way as Hamas fought and ultimately ousted PLO and Fatah to become the number one political power in Gaza.

While all this is well-known, what may be more difficult is to try to find till what time precisely this support continued. It is true that Hamas and Israel fought each other many times in recent years, but there were also other instances of collaboration. In particular it has been mentioned in several reports that Israel facilitated the availability of a lot of money from Qatar or elsewhere reaching the Hamas. This would not be surprising as the basic reasoning of the Israeli constituency represented by Netanyahu remained that the two state solution could be best thwarted by ensuring firstly that the Palestinian leadership in Gaza remained in the hands of an organization which could be described in the international community (particularly the USA) and the UN as a terrorist organization, and secondly, a gulf could be maintained between Gaza led by Hamas and the West Bank led by the Palestinian Authority.

Thus there are quotes from as late as 2019 with Netanyahu telling a Likud Party meeting—anyone who wants to thwart the establishment of a Palestinian state has to

support bolstering Hamas and transferring money to Hamas. Further he said that this is part of a strategy to isolate Palestinians in Gaza from the Palestinians in the West Bank. In the same year a senior officer supportive of Netanyahu stated that the strategy of Netanyahu is to prevent the two states solution and towards this end “openly Hamas is an enemy, covertly Hamas is an ally.” Finance Minister Smotrich has been quoted to have said that Hamas militancy, and hence its illegitimacy on the world stage, was a boon for the political strategy of his government.

Now a question that needs to be explored further is that if the support of the Israeli deep establishment for the Hamas in some form had continued in the more recent years too, when apparently it was fighting Hamas, then what form this had taken and what kind of intermediaries were used for this purpose.

In this context also what former PM Yair Lapid, who was Prime Minister for approximately the last six months in 2022, has stated recently is important. He said that suitcases filled with money had been coming in from Qatar but when he was PM he saw to it that these were diverted to the UN and could be used for food vouchers.

However Lapid was PM only for a short time, and so what happened after he went out and Netanyahu came in?

Facilitation of money from Qatar reaching Hamas till the recent past suggests that some kind of linkage had existed till very recently, and one question worth exploring is to what extent the linkage was between the more aggressive elements (only a few, of course) of the two sides.

In addition Lapid has also stated that the past efforts of Israel to be helpful to Hamas constitute “the most serious political and security error in the country’s history.”

## **NYT Report**

The next point of discussion is that about one year before the attack the Israeli authorities came in possession of a document which has been called ‘the Jericho Wall’, as reported in the New York Times (report by Ronen Bergman and Adam Goldman titled ‘Israel knew Hamas’s attack plan more than a year back’ in NYT in December 2023). The actual 10/7 attack was very much in accordance with what has been mentioned in this document. So clearly Israel had sufficient advance information about this. Why did they not take adequate actions and precautions based on this? The reason given has been that in the perception of Israeli officials the plan in the document was considered to be too ambitious compared to what the Hamas is capable of. This appears to be a highly unlikely response. Even if Israeli officials considered this to be genuinely overambitious, they could have used it to propagate the high aggressiveness of the Palestinians in general and of the Hamas in particular, instead of entirely ignoring such an important 40 page document.

One must also keep in mind, as mentioned in the NYT article, that in July 2023 an Israeli intelligence analyst had sent one more warning to her seniors that Hamas had organized a very similar type of military exercise recently (similar to what is mentioned in the plan). This too was, at the more apparent level, dismissed without taking the necessary actions and precautions. What is more likely is that both the Jericho Wall document and the July warning were actually known to very high level leaders including Netanyahu.

## Weapons and Training

Another important point is that the October 7 or 10/7 attack needed the kind of weapons, equipment and training which were not possible to arrange without getting detected. As Gaza is a very small region where the presence of the Israeli intelligence agencies, generally known for high efficiency, is very high and this is in addition to the presence of other intelligence agencies which are friendly to Israel and share intelligence with it. Hence both keeping in view this factor as well as the prior availability of the Jericho document, it seems highly unlikely that the Israeli intelligence and leadership were not aware of the preparations being made for 10/7 over a fairly long period.

## Lax Security

The next point is the one made by leading journalist Seymour Hersh quoting insiders that a significant part of the soldiers guarding Gaza-Israel border were removed just before the attack for providing security for a festival so that the region which was attacked was left with a very small security force around the time of the attack, probably just a third of the regular security force. Was this just a remarkable co-incidence, sudden luck for Hamas and sudden misfortune for Israelis, or was there something more to this?



Militant abducting a man during the Re'im music festival massacre that left at least 360 people dead and others taken hostage (From the Public Domain)

## Strange Response

Finally, we have increasing evidence that several of the Israelis killed in the 10/7 attack were actually killed by Israeli forces, including by tank and helicopter gun firing which caused the kind of damage to cars and buildings that Hamas weapons could not have caused, the official explanation being that these killings took place in the process of crossfire, rescue effort and to prevent hostages being taken (the Hannibal doctrine has also been mentioned in this context). Whatever the explanation, the fact remains that the tragedy of loss of lives of innocent persons became bigger because of some killings caused by Israeli firing (in addition to those killed by Hamas attack). Lastly, there have also been reports of cars crushed and having blood on them being hastily removed or even buried

citing religious reasons, while others have alleged that this amounts to removing evidence relating to an attack or a crime.

If we add all these points then the conclusion appears to be different from the official narrative of a very sudden unexpected attack mounted by the Hamas on its own after making long preparations with all this remaining completed undetected from Israel authorities.

## **Events After October 7**

The extremely disproportionate response of Israel first in Gaza and subsequently also in West Bank has raised the question whether Netanyahu, as a highly aggressive leader but also a leader chased by serious corruption charges and attempts of weakening judiciary, facing serious risk of imprisonment, wanted a way out of the mess by launching huge attacks on Palestinians but needed a pretext for this.

If this is a possibility, then two alternative explanations of 10/7 are possible.

One is that Hamas (plus any allied organization) was independently planning an attack. Keeping in view the usefulness of this for a much bigger counter-attack later, Netanyahu and company turned a blind eye to whatever warnings they got so that after the attack they can launch a much, much bigger counter-attack, perhaps aimed at driving out as many Palestinians as possible from their present homes, and creating such terror for them that they agree to leave.

The second possibility is that there was some sort of understanding between the most aggressive elements on the two sides, known only to very few, that a terror attack at a certain time on Israel up to a certain time limit, say a few hours, would go relatively less defended and there would be lower than normal security arrangements in place.

## **Rapid Mobilization of Weapons**

For its highly disproportionate response Israel quickly needed additional huge imports of many more weapons. In the case of one important supplier Germany it has been reported that weapon supply to Israel increased by as much as about ten times in 2023 compared to 2022, with most increase taking place after 10/7, but some increase even before this. As it is difficult to increase weapon supplies on such a massive scale in so short a period, questions arise regarding whether Israel had sounded the main weapon suppliers well in advance regarding the huge increase, and if this was indeed the case, then this would indicate that there was foreknowledge of the 10/7 attack and the planned counter-attack. Again a question arises whether at least a hint of any such foreknowledge was shared with the most important weapon suppliers and friends.

Hence alternative explanations of 10/7 should also be considered, also in view of the increasing domestic problems of Netanyahu as well as the extremely disproportionate response from Israel resulting in a hugely tragic and distressing situation. In addition, it is also very worrying that possibilities of a widening of the conflict have emerged at a time when the world really needs peace.

Of course only a well-resourced and proper unbiased investigation can provide the most reliable answers but there appears to be adequate reason at least to raise these questions. These issues are worth exploring in detail not just for the sake of it, but because if there is a



significant element of truth here, then this can provide a powerful means of strengthening the forces of peace and isolating the forces of extreme aggression. It is sometimes seen that the most aggressive elements on two sides of a conflict feed on each other's aggression and hence may be maintaining some links to advance their mutual interests, not always of course but in certain stages . It is best that such links, if any, are exposed and forces of peace with justice are strengthened on both sides.

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**Bharat Dogra** is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include *Planet in Peril*, *Protecting Earth for Children*, *Man over Machine* and *A Day in 2071*. He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

*Featured image: Yair Lapid (R) with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken who recently visited the Middle East. (Image tweeted by Yair Lapid)*

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