

Israeli Drone Pilots Targeted Own Settlements, Bases, Civilians on 7 October: Report

The pilots never imagined they would have to carry out air strikes on their own territory, and on such an 'undreamt-of scale'

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Israel's fleet of Hermes 450 "Zik" armed drones carried out attacks on Israeli military bases, settlements, and civilians during the Hamas attack on 7 October, according to a 14 November [report](#) from Mishpacha Magazine.

Previous reports have emerged showing that Israeli forces used [tanks](#) to kill Israeli civilians barricaded inside homes with their Hamas captors, and Apache [helicopters](#) to fire on Hamas fighters and their Israeli captives while returning back to Gaza.

During the fighting, some 1,200 Israelis were killed, with some killed by Hamas, and others by Israeli forces. Hamas took some 240 Israeli soldiers, civilians, and foreign workers captive.

Israel's armed drone program was [initiated](#) in 1993 by Ehud Barak, then Chief of Staff of the army under Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon later approved the use of offensive drones for assassinations in the Gaza Strip. The best known of these attacks was the killing of paraplegic Hamas founder Ahmed Yassin in 2004.

Since that time, armed drones have slowly been [replacing](#) Israel's previous use of warplanes, including US-made F-16s.

In its 14 November report, *Mishpacha* [interviewed](#) members of Squadron 161, which operates Israel's Zik drone fleet, for details of the role they played on 7 October, including in Kibbutz Be'eri.

The orthodox Jewish-focused magazine noted that Zik drones were the first aircraft to respond to the Hamas attack, and that "for the first time in history, they had to carry out

strikes within Israeli territory, even on IDF [Israeli army] bases.”

“The squadron was facing a scenario they had never imagined, on an undreamt-of scale, and above all, having to carry out strikes inside Israeli territory, inside bases, inside kibbutzim, something they had never prepared for,” the magazine added.

“Who ever thought we would have to carry out strikes inside Israeli territory, and on that scale? That was a scenario we had never imagined,” stated First Lieutenant A.

He explained that there were initially no Israeli forces on the ground, and so he and other drone operators were using their cell phones to communicate with civilians in the settlements, or kibbutzim, for the locations of Hamas fighters to hit with airstrikes.

“We eliminated dozens of terrorists this way. You talk to a civilian, receive a location, release your payload, and return to base. Again and again, like a movie,” he said.

Crucially, the drone operators targeted not only Hamas fighters but also their Israeli captives.

“On each flight, they killed dozens of terrorists, prevented them from advancing further into Israel or returning to the Strip with captives, and helped stop the attack,” *Mishpacha* wrote.

The airstrikes would therefore have killed both Hamas fighters and their Israeli captives as they crossed the border into Gaza.

First Lieutenant A explained further that,

“There were images we had never seen before. One of the advantages of our aircraft is the high quality of the cameras. Now they served us well. We saw everything. The massacre, the horrors.”

When asked why they did not send aircraft to the border fence to attack every cell trying to enter Israel or return to Gaza with captives, First Lieutenant A, explained, “I can’t go into the way the air force works and what exactly we did, for understandable reasons, but I can tell you that we worked on that front too.”

He continued by saying,

“At the end of the day, there are certain prioritizations that the public is not aware of, and there are things we can’t do for a variety of reasons. But believe me that we did do that as well.”

The first lieutenant’s mention of “certain prioritizations that the public is not aware of” appears to be a reference to the Hannibal Directive.

In 2016, the *Times of Israel* [described](#) how the “directive allows soldiers to use potentially massive amounts of force to prevent a soldier from falling into the hands of the enemy. This includes the possibility of endangering the life of the soldier in question in order to prevent his capture.”

“Some officers, however, understand the order to mean that soldiers ought to

deliberately kill their comrade to stop him from being taken prisoner,” the paper added.

Once the army did arrive in kibbutz Be’eri, the soldiers were apparently quick to call in airstrikes, despite the danger this would pose to the kibbutz residents, in particular those held captive in homes, in order to avoid endangering themselves by confronting the Hamas fighters directly.

“When we were on the ground in Be’eri and directed air force aircraft to strike terrorists, there was no way we could divert aircraft elsewhere,” says one soldier who spoke with *Mishpacha*.

“You should realize that the very few soldiers on the ground in Be’eri were almost entirely on their own, and if they had not had air support at that point, not only would nothing have been left of Be’eri, nothing would have been left of us, either,” he added.

According to one member of the local security detail who battled Hamas fighters at a dental clinic in Be’eri, many soldiers remained outside the kibbutz and did not join the fight.

Yair Avital [told](#) Israel’s *Channel 12* that when he was evacuated at 6:30 pm on 7 October,

“The thing I remember the most, and the most traumatizing thing for me from this ordeal, was [being evacuated after hours of fighting and] arriving at the entrance to the kibbutz and seeing 500 soldiers stationed in an organized and orderly manner, standing and looking at us.”

He said he and his team received help from a Special Forces unit known as Sayeret Matkal, but the 500 soldiers, who had dogs, equipment, weapons, and armored vehicles, did not come to their aid.

“I remember shouting at them from the stretcher, ‘They’re slaughtering us! Go in! Save us!’ and none of them looked at me, none of them said anything,” he explained.

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Featured image: The IAF’s 161st Squadron’s fleet of Hermes 450 drones at the Palmachim airbase. (Photo credit: Barak Shalev, Tomer Matzkin/Israeli Air Force)

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