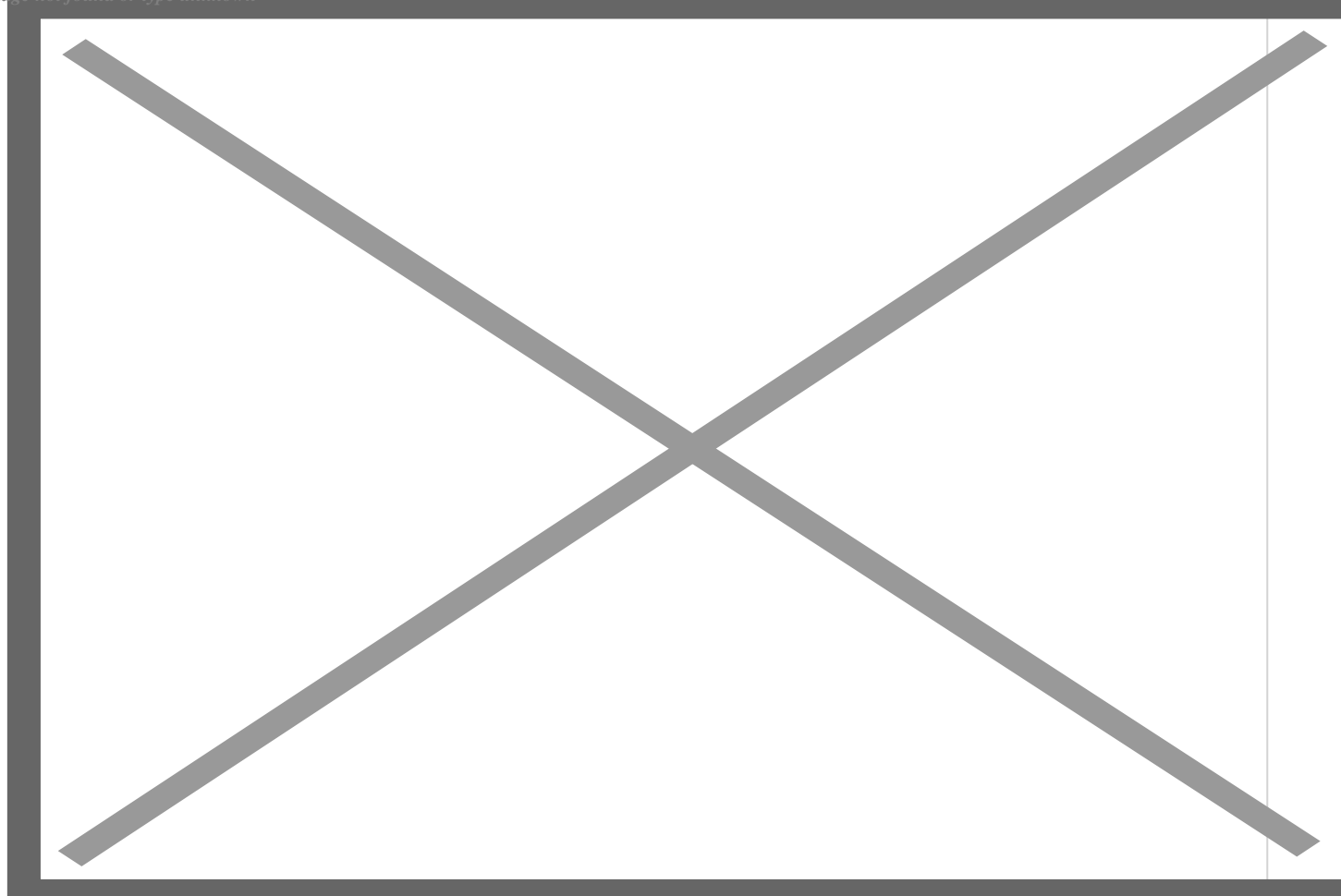


Palestinian fighters reported inside Israel as Hamas declares military operation against Zionist regime

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A Palestinian man takes a selfie in front of a burning Israeli military vehicle [Yasser

Gaza City, October 7 (RHC)-- Palestinian fighters have launched the largest attack on Israel in years, infiltrating areas of southern Israel amid a barrage of rockets fired from the Gaza Strip that killed at least one woman and injured 15 others, Israeli medical workers said.

The rocket fire began from multiple locations in Gaza starting at 06:30am local time (03:30 GMT) on Saturday and continued for nearly half an hour, the Agence France-Presse news agency reported.

Mohammed Deif, a senior Hamas military commander, later announced the start of a military operation in a broadcast on Hamas media, calling on Palestinians everywhere to fight. Deif said the rockets fired marked the start of "Operation Al-Aqsa Storm", according to reports.

"We've decided to say enough is enough," Deif said as he urged all Palestinians to confront Israel. "This is the day of the greatest battle to end the last occupation on earth," he said, adding that 5,000 rockets had been launched.

Israel's military told Israelis living around the Gaza Strip to stay in their homes and warned that Hamas will pay a "heavy price for its actions."

Israeli media reported that armed fighters had opened fire on passersby in the town of Sderot, in southern Israel, and footage circulating on social media appeared to show uniformed Palestinian fighters engaged in clashes in the border town. Another video on social media appeared to show a burning Israeli tank. The authenticity of the videos could not immediately be verified.

Palestinian media also reported that a number of Israeli soldiers had been taken captive. The Israeli military was aware of reports of captives, a security source told the Reuters news agency, but provided no further details. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was meeting with his top security officials on Saturday morning.

Al Jazeera's Rob Reynolds, reporting from occupied East Jerusalem, said the "element of surprise" in the early morning attack which appeared to involve Palestinian fighters in trucks inside Israel and on paragliders, in addition to the rocket fire, will leave Israelis "shocked and stunned".

The fighting on Saturday comes after weeks of growing tensions along Israel's volatile border with Gaza, and clashes in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. At least 247 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces so far this year, while 32 Israelis and two foreign nationals have been killed in Palestinian attacks.

Saleh al-Aroui, an exiled Hamas leader, said the operation on Saturday was a response "to the crimes of the occupation." He said Palestinian fighters were defending the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and fighting for the thousands of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant approved the mobilisation of army reservists on Saturday in response to the Hamas operation, an Israeli defence ministry spokesperson said.

Israel's military declared "a state of war alert", earlier in the day.



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