

Report reveals Israeli army used Hannibal Directive during October 7th Hamas attack

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An Israeli soldier participates in operations in the Gaza Strip [File: Israeli army/Handout via AFP]

Tel Aviv, July 8 (RHC)-- The Israeli army ordered the Hannibal Directive – a controversial Israeli military policy aimed at preventing the capture of Israeli soldiers by enemy forces at any cost – on October 7th

last year, an investigation by the Israeli newspaper Haaretz has revealed.

In a report on Sunday, the newspaper, based on testimonies of Israeli soldiers and senior army officers, said that during Hamas's unprecedented attack last October, the Israeli army started making decisions with limited and unverified information, and issued an order that "not a single vehicle can return to Gaza."

"At this point, the [Israeli army] was not aware of the extent of kidnapping along the Gaza border, but it did know that many people were involved. Thus, it was entirely clear what that message meant, and what the fate of some of the kidnapped people would be," the report said.

On October 7th, Hamas captured dozens of Israelis, many of whom are still in captivity or have been killed in Israeli air strikes on Gaza, according to the Palestinian armed group. But many of those captured were civilians and not soldiers, to whom the Hannibal Directive does not apply.

The death toll in Israel from the Hamas-led attacks is estimated to be 1,139, while nearly 250 others were taken as captives, Israeli authorities say. Meanwhile, more than 38,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli attacks on Gaza since October 7, according to an Al Jazeera tally based on official statistics.

While Haaretz said it was not aware how many soldiers and civilians were hit due to the Hannibal military procedure, it added that "the cumulative data indicates that many of the kidnapped people were at risk, exposed to Israeli gunfire, even if they were not the target".

The report said the Hannibal protocol "was employed at three army facilities infiltrated by Hamas" and "this did not prevent the kidnapping of seven of them [soldiers] or the killing of 15 other spotters, as well as 38 other soldiers."

The Hannibal Directive, also known as the Hannibal Procedure or Hannibal Protocol, is an Israeli military policy that stipulates the use of maximum force in the event of a soldier being kidnapped, Yehuda Shaul, a former Israeli army soldier, had told Al Jazeera in November of last year.

"You will open fire without constraints, in order to prevent the abduction," he said, adding that the use of force is carried out even at the risk of killing a captive soldier.

In addition to firing at the abductors, soldiers can fire at junctions, roads, highways and other pathways opponents may take a kidnapped soldier through, Shaul added.

Israel last invoked the Hannibal Directive in 2014 during its war on Gaza that year, according to leaked military audio recordings, though the Israeli army denied it had used the doctrine. Dozens of Palestinians were killed in the Israeli bombardment that followed, sparking accusations of war crimes against the Israeli army.

The directive is believed to have been revoked in 2016, though it is unclear what led to its annulment. A report by Israel's state comptroller also recommended the army abolish the directive because of the criticism it received as well as because of its various interpretations by those in the army, Haaretz said.

According to Haaretz's investigation, a senior Israeli army source also confirmed the Hannibal procedure was "employed on October 7th." The source said post-war investigations would reveal who gave the order.

Meanwhile, an Israeli army spokesperson told the newspaper that the army "has begun conducting internal investigations of what transpired on October 7 and the preceding period".

"The aim of these investigations is to learn and to draw lessons which could be used in continuing the battle. When these investigations are concluded, the results will be presented to the public with transparency," the spokesperson said, according to the Israeli newspaper.

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