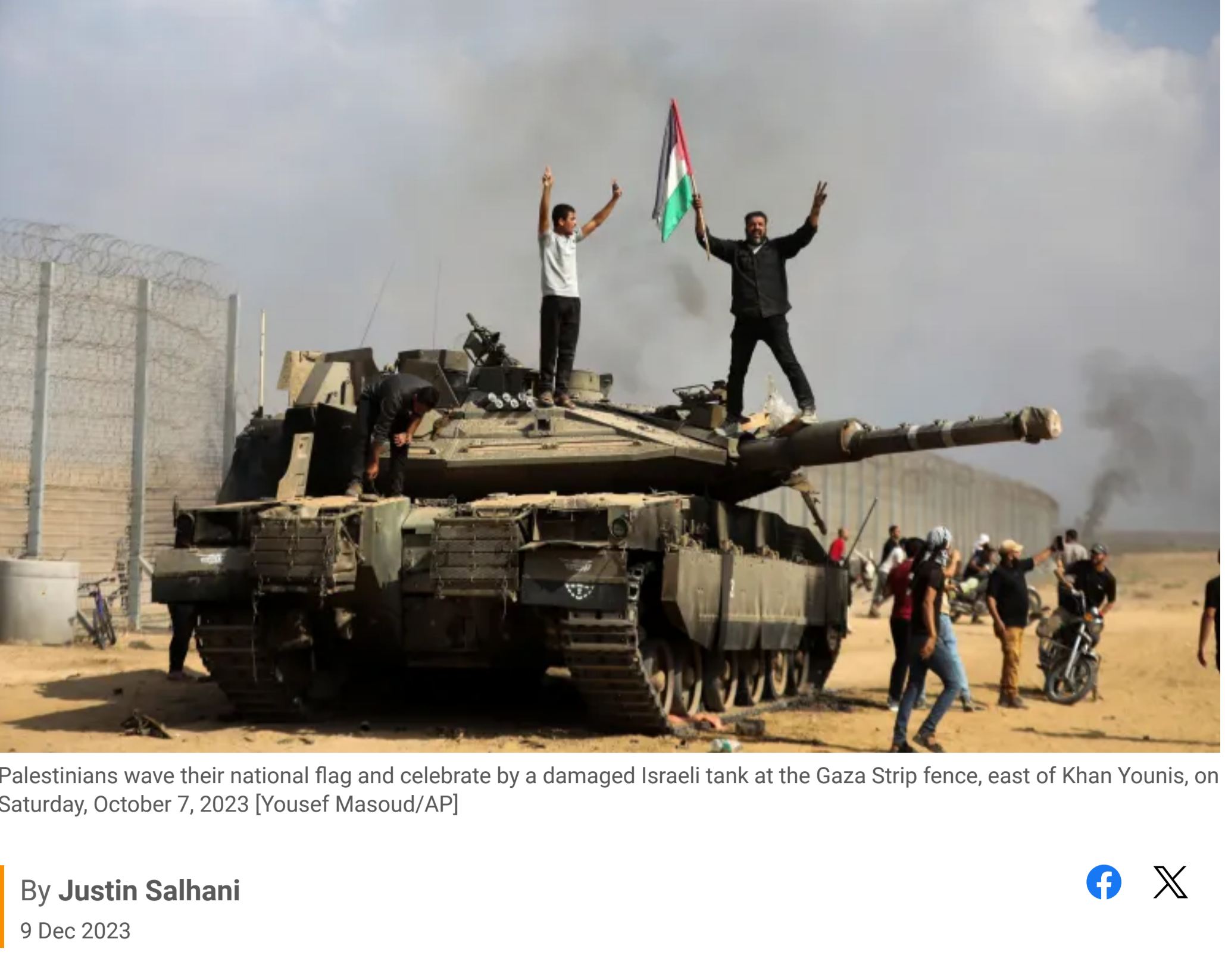


Features | Israel-Palestine conflict

# Did Israel's overreliance on tech cause October 7 intelligence failure?

A dependence on 'high-tech' tools resulted in complacency that led to the failings of October 7, say analysts.



Palestinians wave their national flag and celebrate by a damaged Israeli tank at the Gaza Strip fence, east of Khan Younis, on Saturday, October 7, 2023 [Youssef Masoud/AP]

By Justin Salhani  
9 Dec 2023

An overreliance on technology by Israel's intelligence agencies and military has continued to shape the current conflict in Gaza, analysts say, while also being partially responsible for the failure to detect the Hamas attack on October 7.

Hamas's surprise attack on army outposts and surrounding villages in southern Israel, which resulted in the deaths of 1,200 Israeli and foreign nationals, mostly civilians, took the [Israeli intelligence](#) agencies by surprise. Hamas fighters also took about 240 people captive.

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Israel, in its brutal military response, has killed more than 17,000 Palestinians in Gaza since then.

Within both Israel and the wider Arab region, many have asked how Shin Bet, one of the world's most respected and feared intelligence agencies, which is responsible for Israel's domestic security, could have been outmatched by Hamas using bulldozers and paragliders.

The world's disbelief has sparked a bounty of conspiracy theories in some quarters. However, analysts emphasise that even the best agencies are prone to breakdowns in their intelligence gathering and analysis cycles.

"There is no perfect intelligence organisation," Omar Ashour, a professor of security and military studies and the founder of the Security Studies Programme at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, told Al Jazeera.



A member of Israeli security forces fires a tear gas canister to disperse Palestinian protesters across the border fence, east of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip on May 9, 2021 [File: Said Khatib/AFP]

## 'Nobody was listening'

Israeli security services are understood to have collected more than enough data to anticipate an imminent Hamas attack. Indeed, Israeli intelligence was aware of plans for an impending Hamas attack up to one year beforehand, according to a report in the New York Times.

"The intelligence failure is from multiple directions," Oren Ziv, a journalist with +972 magazine, a publication based in Tel Aviv, told Al Jazeera. But a particular overreliance on technology and artificial intelligence (AI) seems to have been among the most pronounced shortcomings on October 7.

Billions of dollars invested in high-tech defences like [border walls and security cameras](#) around Gaza were believed to be enough to stop any attack, according to Ziv. But the technological reliance led to a false sense of security.

Comprehensive intelligence gathering requires a number of sources: open source, intercepted communications, satellite imagery and tracking are all crucial factors in intelligence gathering before putting together an analysis, Ashour said. But the human intelligence aspect is also crucial.

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"These technologies along the border – the cameras and the automatic rifles and the balloons and the smart fans – are [supported] also by the fact you have people – human beings – maintaining them, watching them," Ziv said.

On October 7, the border with Gaza was undermanned. Many of the troops were allegedly at home, celebrating the Jewish holiday, Sukkot, while others had been relocated to support Israeli operations around the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and in the West Bank. "Only two or three battalions were left around the Gaza border," Ziv said, adding that even they were not at full capacity due to the holiday.

A number of young female soldiers who monitored a section of a few kilometres of the Gaza Strip via cameras knew the comings and goings of everyone in that zone – from farmers to Hamas commanders. When they noticed certain changes in behaviour and movements, they alerted senior officers.

"Nobody was listening to them," Ziv said. Apparently, he added, the Israeli military suspected Hamas would break through the barrier surrounding Gaza, disable security equipment and storm border towns. The newspaper, Haaretz, posed the question on November 20 of whether the response would have been different if men had been the ones warning their superiors.

"The intelligence collection was good but the analysis was [lacking]," Ashour said.

The reputational damage done on October 7 wasn't just about failing to anticipate Hamas's operation. It was also about how inadequately Israeli forces reacted after the border fence was breached. The Israelis who came under attack that day expected help from the military or police in minutes. Instead, help took hours to arrive – in one case as many as 20 hours.

"The image that Israel created for decades has been dented," Antony Loewenstein, author of the book, *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World*, told Al Jazeera.

Israeli troops are seen crossing the border fence between Israel and Gaza on November 13, 2023 [Fadel Senna/AFP]

## 'A mass assassination factory'

But that failure hasn't stopped the Israeli military from continuing to use AI and technology for its current war on Gaza.

A groundbreaking report in +972 Magazine laid bare how loosened restrictions on civilian casualties, an expanded authorisation to bomb non-military targets and an AI system used to rapidly generate targets have combined to create "a mass assassination factory".

Known as "[Habsora](#)" or "The Gospel", this system relies on AI and can generate targets almost instantaneously, according to the report.

"One of the things that people who promote AI usage in warfare think is that somehow it's going to make wars more humane," Loewenstein said. Proponents of the use of AI, he said, argue that "the targeting will be more precise and that so-called collateral damage will not happen or will happen far less". But those arguments do not hold up, according to Loewenstein.

"I've seen literally no evidence for that," he said.

The report in +972 Magazine coupled with the devastating images coming out of Gaza paint a grim reality where nowhere near enough is being done to protect civilian lives or infrastructure. But where some see horror, others see opportunity.

"The impact of the +972 Magazine reporting will be that a large number of countries will see it and be [desperate to get their hands](#) on that technology themselves," Loewenstein said. "That's how the laboratory works and it's happened time and time and time again around Gaza and around the West Bank for years."

It may not be just the technology itself that is attractive to prospective buyers but also the tactics used to justify its use.

"The unparalleled amount of civilian casualties has not been an impediment to that technology selling, but in fact, will be seen as a bonus because so many other nations around the world, look at what Israel is doing in Palestine – not just since October 7, but years before," Loewenstein said. "They want to obtain not just the technology but the idea of how do you get away with such a massive civilian death toll."

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