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Perspectives On the Issues Shaping Policy

October 7: Did Netanyahu Know—and, If So, Why Did He Not Act?

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The October 7, 2023 Hamas attack has long been regarded as one of the greatest intelligence and security failures in Israel's history. For almost three years, the central question has been whether Israel simply failed to detect the impending assault, or whether the warning signs were detected but ignored.

A new report has now given that question an altogether more disturbing dimension.

According to an investigation published by *Haaretz*, UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan personally warned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about a planned major Hamas operation roughly ten days before October 7. The report, based on the forthcoming book *Hostages: 843 Days of Abandonment* by journalists Shlomi Eldar and Ruth Yuval, claims that the two leaders spoke for about 45 minutes. Bin Zayed allegedly conveyed information concerning Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar's preparations for a major operation capable of destabilizing the region and damaging the Abraham Accords.²

The allegation is explosive. Netanyahu's office has categorically denied that the conversation took place and has called

the report a "complete lie." Netanyahu is now reportedly pursuing legal action against *Haaretz* and the journalists involved.³

That denial must be taken seriously. At this stage, the reported conversation should not be treated as an established fact. But equally, it cannot simply be dismissed without an independent investigation. The report is particularly significant because it fits into a much larger body of evidence showing that warnings about Hamas existed before October 7.

The Warning That Should Not Have Been Missed

The reported UAE warning is not the only troubling piece of evidence.

Israeli intelligence personnel and border observers had reportedly detected unusual Hamas preparations before the attack. Earlier investigations revealed that Israeli intelligence had information concerning Hamas training for precisely the kind of cross-border attack that eventually occurred. Some analysts and surveillance personnel warned that Hamas was preparing for a major attack, but their assessments were discounted because they conflicted with the prevailing belief

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² Ruth Margalit, "The Warning Benjamin Netanyahu Ignored," *The New Yorker*, September 8, 2026, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-lede/the-warning-benjamin-netanyahu-ignored>

³ "Netanyahu to Sue over Claim UAE Leader Warned Him of October 7," *The Times*, September 9, 2026, <https://www.thetimes.com/world/middle-east/israel-hamas-war/article/binyamin-netanyahu-october-7-warned-mohammad-bin-zayed-book-gznnwpznl>

that Hamas was deterred and primarily interested in governing Gaza and improving its economic position.⁴

Israeli investigations have subsequently acknowledged multiple failures. An analysis by the Institute for Defense Analyses concluded that October 7 was not simply a failure to collect intelligence. Intelligence existed, but established assumptions prevented it from being properly interpreted and acted upon.⁵

This distinction is crucial.

Intelligence failures do not necessarily mean that nobody knew anything. Sometimes the information is there, but decision-makers fail to connect the dots.

The Netanyahu Question

This brings us directly to Benjamin Netanyahu.

If the UAE warning is false, then the issue remains one of catastrophic intelligence and leadership failure. If it is true, however, the question becomes much more serious:

What Did Netanyahu Know—and What Did He Do With the Warning?

According to the *Haaretz* account, Bin Zayed warned Netanyahu that Sinwar was preparing a major operation. Netanyahu allegedly reacted calmly, indicated that Israel was prepared for any eventuality and apparently believed that Hamas's intentions might relate more to the West Bank than Gaza. Most significantly, the report claims that the warning was not passed to Israel's senior security leadership.⁶

If independently verified, this would represent something much more serious than an ordinary intelligence failure.

It would raise the possibility of *political negligence at the highest level*.

But there is an important distinction between negligence and conspiracy.

Did Netanyahu deliberately allow October 7?

This is where speculation must be separated from evidence.

Some critics have suggested that Netanyahu may have seen political or strategic advantages in a Hamas attack. The reasoning is straightforward: a devastating attack would provide Israel with overwhelming domestic and international justification for a major military response against Hamas and could fundamentally alter the political and territorial realities of Gaza.

The subsequent Israeli military campaign certainly transformed Gaza. Tens of thousands of

Palestinians have been killed, much of the territory has been devastated, and the future political and territorial status of Gaza has become one of the central questions of Middle Eastern politics.

It is therefore tempting to construct a theory that: *Netanyahu wanted October 7 to happen*.

But there is currently no credible public evidence establishing that he deliberately permitted Hamas to attack Israeli civilians in order to create a pretext for war.

Indeed, such a conclusion would require evidence of a much higher standard than that presently available.

There is, however, a more plausible question: *Could political considerations have influenced how Netanyahu assessed the threat?*

That question deserves investigation.

⁴ Peter Beaumont, "Israeli Intelligence Leak Details Extent of Warnings over Hamas Attack," *The Guardian*, November 29, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/28/israeli-military-had-warning-of-hamas-training-for-attack-reports-say>

⁵ Larry Hanauer and Michael P. Connell, *Political Priorities, Poor Intelligence Tradecraft, and the Suppression of Dissenting Views: Why Israel Failed to Warn of Hamas's October 7 Attack*, Institute for Defense Analyses, September 2024, IDA Product 3002823, <https://www.ida.org/-/media/8e5040cc7ee5457dba26c8127b47c8e0.ashx>

⁶ Express Global Desk, "UAE President Warned Netanyahu 10 Days Before October 7 Attack, Israeli Media Claims," *The Indian Express*, September 9, 2026, <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/uae-president-warned-netanyahu-october-7-hamas-attack-haaretz-report-10868931/>

The Danger of Strategic Complacency

History provides numerous examples of intelligence warnings being ignored because they contradicted prevailing assumptions.

Before Pearl Harbor, American authorities possessed fragments of information indicating Japanese preparations, yet the attack still achieved strategic surprise. Before the Arab Israel War of 1973, Israeli intelligence possessed substantial indications of an impending Arab offensive, but its leadership remained trapped in the “concept” that Egypt and Syria would not attack until certain conditions were met.

October 7 appears to contain similar elements.

Israel had developed enormous confidence in its technological superiority, intelligence penetration and ability to deter Hamas. Hamas was increasingly viewed as a contained organization whose interests could be managed through economic incentives, Qatari financial assistance and periodic military punishment.

The assumption proved catastrophically wrong.

As one recent assessment noted, Israeli intelligence had actually obtained Hamas invasion plans years before October 7, but these warnings were not adequately acted upon.⁷

The lesson is profound: *having superior intelligence technology does not guarantee superior intelligence judgment.*

Could the October 7 Incident Have Been Prevented?

This may ultimately be the most important question, and the answer is probably yes.

It is impossible to know whether Israel could have prevented the attack completely.

Hamas had demonstrated considerable operational security and deception. But if senior leaders had correctly interpreted the available warnings, Israel could almost certainly have strengthened the Gaza border, increased troop readiness, restricted civilian gatherings in exposed areas and prepared contingency plans.

The attack might not have occurred on the scale that it did, and that is why the question of Netanyahu’s personal knowledge matters.

If he did not receive the alleged UAE warning, then he remains politically responsible for a system that failed catastrophically under his leadership. If he did receive it but failed to pass it to the security establishment, his responsibility becomes considerably greater.

If evidence ever emerges that he consciously chose not to act because he believed an attack would serve his political or strategic interests that would represent an entirely different category of failure.

The Need for an Independent Inquiry

There is only one way to resolve these competing claims: a genuinely independent investigation with access to classified intelligence, communications records, intelligence assessments and the testimony of Netanyahu and the senior political, military and intelligence leadership.

Israel’s own military inquiries have already identified serious failures, while the political leadership has resisted a comprehensive independent commission.⁸

That is unsatisfactory, and it is incredulous why a technologically-reliable warning system failed, and the Palestinians, whose lives have been transformed by the war that followed October 7, also have a legitimate interest in understanding how the catastrophe began.

The UAE warning may eventually prove to be

⁷ The Hanover Institute for Public Policy, “Were October 7 Warnings From Israeli Signals Intelligence Ignored? Reading the Probes, the Agency’s Own Account and the Reporting Record,” August 13, 2026, <https://hanoverinstitute.com/hanover/research/october-7-warnings-and-the-published-probes>

⁸ Gerry Shih, “Israel Underestimated Hamas before Oct. 7 Attack, Military Probe Finds,” *The Washington Post*, February 28, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/02/28/israel-hamas-oct7-gaza/>

true, partially true or false. Until the evidence is independently established, responsible analysis should resist the temptation to declare Netanyahu guilty of deliberately allowing the attack.

But there is an equally important principle:

A leader does not have to order a catastrophe to be held responsible for failing to prevent one.

October 7 was not merely a failure of fences, sensors, intelligence agencies or soldiers. It

was a failure of assumptions at the highest levels of Israeli decision making.

The real scandal, therefore, may not be that Netanyahu knew about October 7 and allowed it to happen.

It may be that warnings were available, the danger was visible, and yet a state renowned for its intelligence capabilities failed to believe what its own intelligence was telling it.

That is a question that Israel cannot afford to leave unanswered.

