



## Palestinian Terrorism: Analysis of 2017 and Forecast for 2018

February 15, 2018

### The extent of Palestinian terrorism and the policies behind it<sup>1</sup>

**During 2017 the number of terrorist attacks continued to decline.** There were **82 significant terrorist attacks**, as compared with **142 in 2016** and **134 during the last three months of 2015**.<sup>2</sup> In 2017 there were **between 4 and 7** significant terrorist attacks a month, but there were also months when the numbers rose to **between 10 and 13**. Despite the decline in the number of attacks, **there was no decline in the number of deaths they caused**. In 2017 popular terrorism attacks (called by Mahmoud Abbas "peaceful resistance") caused the **deaths of 18 Israelis**, civilians and security force fighters, while in 2016 they caused the **deaths of 17**.

- ▶ Popular terrorism (the "popular resistance")<sup>3</sup> in Judea, Samaria and east Jerusalem **continues as the strategy favored by the Palestinian Authority (PA), Fatah, and Mahmoud Abbas, who heads them**. The PA and Fatah are of the opinion that the "popular resistance" can be used to make difficulties for Israel, the Israeli security forces and the Israeli residents of Judea and Samaria. In addition, they feel it can be used to increase awareness of the Palestinian cause, and serve as an alternative to Hamas' ideology of armed intifada.
- ▶ **Mahmoud Abbas, the PA and Fatah continue their indirect encouragement of popular terrorism and the shaheed cult in general in various ways**. That includes speeches and public declarations issued by senior figures,<sup>4</sup> glorifying the Palestinians who carry out attacks, providing political and media support for popular terrorism, the participation of

<sup>1</sup> The full version is available in Hebrew on the ITIC website. The full English version is being translated and will be posted in the near future.

<sup>2</sup> A **significant terrorist attack** is defined as a shooting attack, stabbing attack, vehicular attack, IED attack or a combined attack. Stones and Molotov cocktails are not included in the statistics.

<sup>3</sup> For the most part, **popular terrorism (the so-called "popular resistance")** is carried out by individuals but on occasion also by groups. Generally speaking the individuals and groups are not supported by the established terrorist organizations. It involves the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails, stabbing attacks, vehicular attacks and occasionally shooting attacks.

<sup>4</sup> The popular resistance strategy was reconfirmed by a conference of the PLO's Central Council on January 14, 2018. In a speech given at the opening session, **Mahmoud Abbas** said the Palestinian people would continue the "peaceful popular resistance." Its concluding statement included a call to continue, support and strengthen the so-called "peaceful resistance."

senior PA and Fatah figures at the funerals held for terrorists killed while carrying out attacks, paying condolence calls to the families of terrorists who were killed, naming streets, institutions and town squares for shaheeds and providing financial support to the families of shaheeds and prisoners.

► While in Judea and Samaria popular terrorism attacks declined in 2017, **there was an increase in rocket fire from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory. Thirty-one rocket hits were identified.** Of them **22 rockets** were fired **from the Gaza Strip** (mostly by rogue Salafist-jihadi organizations) and **nine from the Sinai Peninsula** (by ISIS's Sinai Province). That is in comparison with 2016, during which 15 rocket hits were identified and 24 during 2015. In addition, in 2017 there were a number of instances of **mortar shell fire from the Gaza Strip. The IDF responded to all rocket and mortar shell fire from the Gaza Strip by attacking Hamas**, which Israel regards as responsible for what occurs in the Gaza Strip.

► Despite the increase in rocket fire in 2017, **the number of rocket hits during the past three years is still lower than in the years leading up to Operation Protective Edge.** That is primarily because of Hamas' policy of restraint, which it **enforces on the rogue organizations.** In ITIC assessment the restraint policy results from Hamas' key strategic considerations. The most important considerations are **the strengthening of Israel's deterrence** since Operation Protective Edge, and **Hamas' desire to focus on continuing its military buildup**, especially developing its tunnel and rocket systems without Israeli interference.

► In addition, other Hamas considerations have been attempts at an internal Palestinian reconciliation (which so far have failed), Hamas' desire to improve its relations with Egypt, and its need to rebuild the civilian infrastructure. However, the increase in the amount of rocket fire after Trump's declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel may indicate that **Hamas' motivation and possibly its ability to strictly enforce the policy of restraint on the rogue organizations may have eroded since December 2017.**

### **Events contributing to the increase in terrorism from Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip**

► In 2017 there were Two Prominent Events concerning the Palestinian prisoners and the Temple Mount (both particularly charged issues in Palestinian society) that **contributed to the rise in popular terrorism in Judea and Samaria:**

- ◆ The **Palestinian prisoners' hunger strike (April 2017)**, and the **number of popular terrorism attacks reached 13** (the largest number in 2017). In ITIC assessment the attacks were carried out as a show of popular solidarity with the prisoners, whose hunger strike continued for 40 days.
- ◆ The **"metal detector crisis" (July 2017)**, during which there were **ten popular terrorism attacks**. They were motivated by Israel's decision (July 15, 2017) to close the Temple Mount precinct after the shooting attack from the Temple Mount in which two Israeli policemen were killed. As a result, the Israeli security forces were reinforced, the gates to the Temple Mount were fitted with metal detectors and security cameras were installed. The installation of security equipment at the entrances to the Temple Mount led to a wave of protests. There was a call for Muslims not to enter the Temple Mount to pray. The crisis was resolved when the metal detectors were uninstalled, at which point prayers were renewed.
- ▶ **On December 6, 2017, Donald Trump announced that the United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel.** His declaration led to a wave of protests and riots in Judea, Samaria, east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip **greater than those of the preceding months** (several thousand at some of the focal points). However, the protest against the Trump declaration was **not manifested by a significant rise in the number of popular terrorism attacks. On the other hand, there was a significant rise in the number of rockets fired into Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip** (at least 11 rockets fell in Israeli territory during December 2017, as opposed to between 0 and 2 rockets in the preceding months).

### Popular terrorism attacks, 2017

- ▶ The following are some of the characteristics of the popular terrorism attacks carried out in 2017:
  - ◆ **Fatalities:** The number of Israelis killed in 2017 **did not decline** despite the decline in the number of popular terrorism attacks. During 2017, **18 Israelis were killed**, civilians and security force operatives, as opposed to **17 during 2016. A total of 61 people were killed in popular terrorism attacks between the beginning of the wave of popular terrorism in October 2015 and December 2017** (Note: Plus two Israelis killed since the beginning of 2018).

- ◆ **Stable number of terrorist attacks carried out inside Israel:**<sup>5</sup> The number of terrorist attacks carried out inside Israel is similar to the number carried out 2016, despite the decline in the overall number. **During 2017 there were 11 attacks** inside Israel, ten in 2016, and 20 during the last three months of 2015.
- ◆ **Profile of the terrorists carrying out the attacks:** Most of the terrorists who carried out the attacks were young **Palestinians between the ages of 14 and 20** (similar to the previous years). The majority had **no former record of involvement in terrorist attacks against Israel or affiliation with any terrorist organization. Most of them were driven by nationalist or religious motivations, and some had personal problems.**
- ◆ **Gender and origin of the terrorists:** Most of the attacks (86%) were carried out by **Palestinian men** and the rest (14%) by **Palestinian women**. Exceptions were six attacks carried out by **Israeli Arabs** (three from Umm al-Fahm, two from Haifa and two by Bedouins from the Negev). One was carried out by a Jordanian citizen who carried out a stabbing attack in Jerusalem.
- ◆ **Sites of the attacks: Greater Jerusalem continued as the focal point** for terrorist attacks (20 attacks). Second to Jerusalem was the **Ramallah region** (15 attacks). They were followed by **Hebron** (14 attacks), **Samaria** (10 attacks) and **Gush Etzion** (eight attacks) and the **Nablus region** (seven attacks). There was an **increase in attacks in Samaria**, which has continued into 2018.
- ▶ In 2017 there was a **limited response of the Palestinian public** to participate in demonstrations, rallies and riots with the Israeli security forces. There **was a rise in participation in demonstrations and riots** only during the **prisoners' hunger strike** (April-May 2017), **the closing of the Temple Mount** (July 2017) **and the Trump declaration** (December 6, 2017). However, even after those events, despite the efforts made, **the leaders of the protests did not manage to keep a large presence of Palestinian protesters in the streets over a long period of time.**

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<sup>5</sup> **Inside Israel** refers to sites within the Green Line not including the Jerusalem region, which have their own characteristics.

## Forecast for Palestinian terrorism 2018

- ▶ **In ITIC assessment Palestinian terrorism will take two main directions in 2018:**
  - ◆ **In Judea and Samaria popular terrorism will continue, supported and encouraged by the PA and Fatah, with fluctuations in its extent and the degree of its deadliness.** At the same time, Hamas and the other terrorist organizations will continue their efforts **to establish networks in Judea and Samaria to carry out showcase terrorist attacks** (such as suicide bombing attacks and abductions of Israelis), **including inside Israel**. The success of Hamas and the other terrorist organizations will be influenced **principally by Israeli security force counterterrorism activities** (and to a certain extent PA security force activities), **which proved their effectiveness in 2017**.
  - ◆ **In the Gaza Strip Hamas may continue its policy of restraint, although its motivation to enforce it may be decreased.** The **key factor** that may lead to a **change** is **the difficult economic situation** in the Gaza Strip. Other factors are the **damage done by Israel to the tunnels penetrating into Israeli territory** (Hamas' main asset for the next round of fighting) and **the collapse of the reconciliation process with Fatah** (and a renewal of worsening relations with Egypt). All of the above may **increase internal pressures on the Hamas leadership** and lead to a situation in which Hamas will decide to challenge Israel and attempt **to channel Hamas' hardships to Israel**. **Such a situation increases the potential for a deterioration between Hamas and Israel in the coming year.**

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