



Palestinian Violence and Terrorism Against Israel, 2018 Data, Nature and Trends

February 3, 2019

Overview¹

The ITIC's annual study indicates that **in 2018 there were two main trends prominent in Palestinian violence and terrorism: in the Gaza Strip there was a sharp increase in the level of violence and terrorism**, after about three and a half years of relative quiet after Operation Protective Edge. One of the manifestations was **1,119 rocket and mortar shell hits in Israeli territory**, the highest annual number in the past ten years (with the exception of Operation Protective Edge). **In Judea and Samaria popular terrorism continued in its various forms**, primarily stabbing, vehicular and shooting attacks. After popular terrorism peaked in 2015 its scope decreased, but in the last months of 2018 there was **an increase in the number of attacks**.

► In addition, a large number of popular terrorism attacks were also prevented. According to the head of the Israel Security Agency, **480 significant terrorist attacks were prevented**, that is, close to nine significant terrorist attacks were prevented for every one carried out. The preventive activities and detentions carried out by the Israeli security forces indicates, according to the head of the Agency, **the great potential for terrorism simmering under the surface** (Israel Security Agency head briefing of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, November 2018).

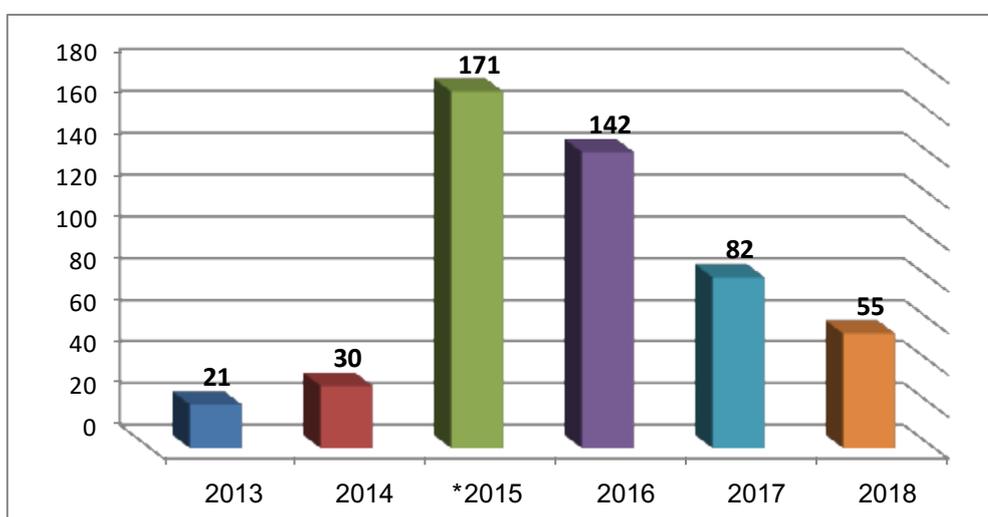
► The terrorism and violence carried out from the Gaza Strip received **support from Hamas and the Palestinian Authority (PA)**: in the **Gaza Strip** Hamas decided on a new policy of controlled violence to exert pressure on Israel to promote the organization's objectives (easing the Gaza Strip's economic distress, opening the crossings, receiving payments for its officials) while **avoiding a comprehensive military confrontation**. **In Judea and Samaria the PA and Fatah continued their support for the so-called "popular resistance,"** i.e., popular terrorism, **but prevented Hamas from turning it into military-type terrorism** that would lead to a mass uprising against Israel and destabilize the PA.

¹ The full version of this document appears in Hebrew on the Israel Intelligence Heritage and Commemoration Center website, and will shortly be translated into English.

► **The following were some of the prominent characteristics of popular terrorism ("popular resistance") in Judea and Samaria in 2018.**

◆ In 2018 the multi-annual trend towards a **decrease** in popular terrorism attacks continued,² **with 55 significant attacks (82 in 2017)**. However, **between September and December 2018 there was a rise in the number of attacks**. They peaked in December, in which nine attacks were carried out. Twelve people, civilians and members of the security forces, were killed (18 in 2017). So far it is unclear to the ITIC why there was a rise during the last four months of 2018, and whether it marked the beginning of a new trend or was a temporary rise (which has happened several times in the past).

Annual Distribution of Terrorist Attacks



* 134 attacks were carried out between October and December 2015, the first three months of a wave of popular terrorism. The other 37 attacks were carried out during the year before the month of October.

◆ Towards the end of 2018 a number of shooting attacks were carried out which were more "military-style" and more organized (compared with the regular types of terrorist attacks). They were carried out by a squad or squads in the Ramallah region and claimed the lives of four people. In some instances military grade weapons were used and the terrorists exhibited a high level of daring. They fled the scene and

² **Popular terrorism (the "popular resistance")** is generally carried out by individuals but sometimes by squads. The terrorists are not directed or supported from outside, provided by the established terrorist organizations. The main types of population terrorism attacks are throwing stones, rocks and Molotov cocktails; and carrying out stabbing attacks, vehicular attacks, and sometimes shooting attacks.

were captured after a relatively long period of time, which indicated the amount of their local support. Hamas was quick to claim responsibility for the attacks although the terrorists who carried them out were not necessarily handled with Hamas.

◆ **Given their stated policy of supporting popular terrorism,**³ the PA and Fatah continued to indirectly encourage popular terrorism and the culture of the shaheeds in various ways. For example by giving pensions and generous financial aid to the families of shaheeds and terrorist prisoners; by helping rebuild the houses of terrorists that had been destroyed by Israel; by glorifying terrorists who carried out attacks; by giving political and media support to popular terrorism; by the participation of senior PA and Fatah figures in the funerals of terrorists who were killed and condolence calls to the mourning tents erected by the families; by glorifying terrorists and shaheeds in the formal and informal education systems; and by naming streets, institutions and town squares for shaheeds.

◆ **Hamas failed in its attempts to export military-type terrorism to Judea and Samaria, despite its many efforts (through incitement and handling terrorist networks).** In ITIC assessment the main reason for its failure was **the effectiveness of the Israel Security Agency and the Israeli security forces' counterterrorism activities.** In addition, the PA security forces also carried out successful preventive activities. Moreover, the Palestinian public in Judea and Samaria, busy with their daily lives, did not go out into the streets en masse to participate in political protest demonstrations and days of rage, in spite of the "return marches" in the Gaza Strip and the relocation of the American embassy to Jerusalem (they reacted far more vigorously and with greater anger to a PA law passed to increase the social security tax).

◆ **Support from the population for terrorist operatives who carried out attacks:** in 2018 terrorists carried out shooting attacks and **managed to escape from the scene of the crime and hide for a number of weeks or even months.** That proved that **a public support system exists in Judea and Samaria for terrorists who carry out attacks, helping them evade the Israeli security forces.** The ability of the terrorists to evade the Israel security forces was admired by the Palestinian street and they

³ For further information, see the January 17, 2018 bulletin, "The PLO's Central Council and Mahmoud Abbas call for the continuation and strengthening of [so-called] 'peaceful popular resistance' [i.e., popular terrorism]."

became heroes and role models. In addition to popular support, the terrorists and their families received moral, media and practical support from Fatah and the PA.



The mourning tent opened in the PA embassy in Saudi Arabia for Palestinian terrorist Ashraf al-Na'alwa, who carried out the shooting attack in the Barkan industrial zone and was only captured after several weeks. Those who came to offer their condolences were received by the PA ambassador, the staff of the embassy and Bassem al-Na'alwa, Ashraf al-Na'alwa's brother (Fatah Facebook page, December 15, 2019).

◆ **The copy-cat phenomenon:** after carrying out an attack the terrorists received a wave of sympathy and admiration, either because they caused many casualties or because they successfully evaded the Israeli security forces. The terrorists' "successes" gave rise to **the copy-cat phenomenon**. The most prominent instance was when a Palestinian terrorist carried out a shooting attack in the Barkan industrial zone, killing two local Israeli workers, and evaded the Israeli security forces for nine weeks. That may have contributed to the increase in popular terrorism at the end of 2018, peaking in December.

► **At the operative level** the main characteristics of popular terrorism attacks in Judea and Samaria in 2018 were the following:

◆ **Types of attacks: stabbing attacks continued to be the most common type of attack.** A total of **22 stabbing attacks were carried out in 2018** (46 in 2017). The second most common type was **shooting attacks** (13 in 2018, 20 in 2017). On the other hand, the number of **vehicular attacks** rose in 2018 (13 in 2018, 10 in 2017).

◆ **Lethality of attacks:** in 2018 there were 12 civilian and security force member fatalities (five between September and December 2018) 18 in 2017. **A total of 74 people**

(civilians and members of the security forces) were killed between the beginning of the wave of popular terrorism in October 2015 and the end of December 2018.

◆ **Main sites of the attacks:** most of the attacks (14) were carried out in the **Ramallah region**. In **greater Jerusalem**, which in the past was the preferred arena for terrorist attacks, **there were eight attacks** in 2018 (20 in 2017). **There was also a significant decrease in the number of attacks carried out inside Israel,**⁴ three in 2018, 11 in 2017.

◆ **The perpetrators of popular terrorism:** in 2018 most of the attacks were carried out by lone wolf terrorists with various motivations. In ITIC assessment, their motivation was mostly nationalist.. Among those whose identities are known to the ITIC, **most (31) were men**, and only one was a woman. The profile of the terrorists was similar to that of previous years: **most of them were young men in their twenties, most of them without a criminal or security record. Most were not affiliated with the established terrorist organizations.**

► **In the Gaza Strip there was a serious escalation in rocket attacks in 2018 after three and a half years of relative quiet following Operation Protective Edge.** There was also a significant rise in the level of violence. The source of the escalation and violence was **Hamas' policy of controlled violence,**⁵ manifested in two ways:

◆ **The "return marches,"** which began on March 30, 2018, **are violent in nature.** They have been accompanied by mass riots near the border fence; many attempts to break into Israeli territory; gunfire and the throwing of hand grenades and IEDs at IDF soldiers near the fence; and launching incendiary kites and balloons and drones carrying explosives. **Hamas has played a main role in the "return march" project,** although **the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)** and other terrorist organizations have also participated in organizing and carrying out the marches. Most of the violent acts are carried out by Hamas operatives near the border with Israel. As a result **a large number of Hamas operatives (97) were killed during the marches (about 15% of all the fatalities).**

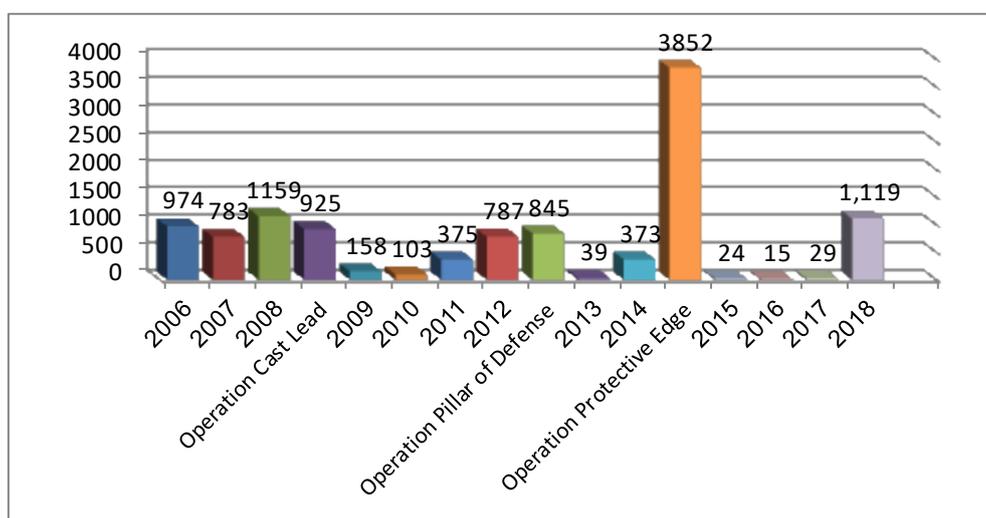
◆ **Firing rockets and mortar shells at Israeli territory:**

⁴ Inside Israel is defined by the ITIC as Israeli territory, excluding greater Jerusalem, which has its own unique characteristics.

⁵ For further information, see the June 27, 2018 bulletin, " Hamas' new policy towards Israel: from restraint and calm to controlled violence, creating escalation."

- In 2018, for the first time since Operation Protective Edge, there was a significant increase in rocket fire at Israel. **There were 1,119 rocket hits identified in 2018 compared with 31 in 2017.** The rocket fire in 2018 was carried out in **six rounds of escalation between May and November 2018**, during which large quantities of rockets and mortar shells were fired.
- As part of its new policy, Hamas usually determined **when a round of escalation would begin and when it would end.** Most of the rockets fired at Israel in 2018 were short-range and fell in open areas or near communities and cities in the western Negev. However, there were also pre-planned direct hits on Israeli villages and cities. The IDF (usually the Israeli Air Force) responded to most of the fire by attacking targets belonging to Hamas, which Israel regards as responsible for everything that happens in the Gaza Strip. Between the rounds of escalation **Hamas calmed the situation on the ground and lowered the level of violence** to keep from getting dragged into a broad military confrontation. Thus, in the final analysis, the escalation of 2018 was carried out according to Hamas rules of engagement.

Annual Distribution of Rocket Fire from the Gaza Strip



► ITIC assessment for trends in terrorism and violence in 2019:

◆ In Judea and Samaria two trends will continue, as follows:

- **Hamas and the other terrorist organizations will continue their efforts to establish terrorist networks in Judea and Samaria to attack Israel.** In 2018 Hamas' efforts failed. Their success in 2019 will depend to a great extent on **the**

efficacy of the preventive activities of Israel's security forces, and to a lesser degree on the PA's preventive capabilities. Given the weakening of the PA and the war of inheritance being waged in Fatah, security coordination between the PA security forces and Israel may be harmed. That might negatively affect the preventive activities carried out by the PA security forces and their motivation.

- **Popular terrorism will continue with PA and Fatah support (especially stabbing, vehicular and shooting attacks)**. The weakening of the PA and the possible disappearance of Mahmoud Abbas from the stage **may lead to internal tensions, some of which may be turned against Israel**. Therefore, and given the increase in popular terrorism in recent months, in ITIC assessment the multi-annual decrease in the level of popular terrorism may be halted and popular terrorism may become reach a higher level (the increase in popular terrorism during the last four months of 2018 may be an indication of such a trend).

- ◆ In ITIC assessment, in the Gaza Strip the "return marches" will continue to generate violence and terrorism. **Hamas regards the marches as its most effective leverage against Israel**, and will continue to regulate the level of violence from the Gaza Strip in accordance with its considerations and interests. **That means the violence from the Gaza Strip in general and along the border in particular will continue, with increasing and decreasing levels of violence, and attempts to create new methods of operation during the "return marches."**

- ◆ Hamas may try to exert pressure on Israel (which may increase as the general elections in Israel approach). That **may lead to additional rounds of escalation during which the communities in the western Negev (and possibly more distant population centers) will be exposed to rocket and mortar shell fire**. Hamas' policy of controlled violence does not seek a broad military confrontation with Israel, but the violence instigated by Hamas and the other terrorist organizations, and the worsening economic situation in the Gaza Strip, **create a fragile, explosive situation with the potential to deteriorate into a broad military confrontation, even if neither side wants one**.

The Structure of This Study

► Part One: Popular terrorism in Judea and Samaria

◆ Overview

◆ **Types of attacks:**

- Stabbing attacks
- Shooting attacks
- Vehicular attacks
- IED attacks
- Other sorts of attacks

◆ **Main sites of the attacks:**

- Nature of attacks in the leading sites
- Attacks in various sites
- Attacks inside Israel

◆ **Profile of Palestinians who carry out attacks**

◆ **Lethality of popular terrorism**

◆ **Preventing attacks and exposing terrorist networks:**

- Overview
- Attacks prevented by ongoing security activity
- Israel Security Agency exposure of terrorist networks

◆ **Demonstrations and riots**

- Overview
- Stones and Molotov cocktails

▶ **Part Two: Terrorism and violence from the Gaza Strip**

- ◆ Overview
- ◆ The "return marches"
- ◆ Attempts to attack IDF soldiers and to sabotage the infrastructure along the Gaza Strip border
- ◆ Arson terrorism
- ◆ Rocket fire at Israel
- ◆ Neutralizing tunnels penetrating into Israeli territory by the IDF

▶ **Part Three: The involvement of ISIS or other jihadist organizations in terrorist activity in the Palestinian arena**

- ◆ Judea and Samaria
- ◆ The Gaza Strip
- ◆ Israeli Arabs