



Palestinian Terrorism, 2019 Overview and Trends

January, 2020

The Situation on the Ground

Overview¹

Two main trends in attacks characterized Palestinian organized and popular terrorism in 2019: **in Judea and Samaria, the annual decline in the scope of popular terrorism and its lethality continued; in the Gaza Strip there was a significant rise in the scope and intensity of terrorism and violence, especially rocket fire.** In 2019 1,403 rockets and mortar shells were fired at Israel, an almost unprecedented number (with the exception of Operation Protective Edge, 2014).

► The reduction in the scope of terrorism and the level of its lethality during the past year again illustrated **Hamas' failure to export terrorism to Judea and Samaria**, while at the same time prompting a lull arrangement with Israel through Egyptian mediation. The main reason for Hamas' failure was **the great effectiveness of the counterterrorism activities of the Israeli security forces** (with the contribution of the counterterrorism activities of the PA security services). In November 2019 Nadav Argaman, head of the Israel Security Agency, said that **in 2019 the Agency had prevented more than 450 significant terrorist attacks**, among them showcase attacks which were liable to have had many victims. Thus it can be determined that **the relative quiet in Judea and Samaria in 2019 was to a great extent misleading, while beneath the surface attempts to carry out terrorist attacks continued.**

► The relatively small number of terrorist attacks also reflected the absence of public readiness in Judea and Samaria to take a significant part in terrorism and protest activities against Israel. Apparently the Palestinian public in Judea and Samaria continues to be more invested in matters of daily life and **the attempts made to recruit them to take to the streets for protests and rage were met with a limited response** (including on "national days" and during prominent events). However, given the fundamental hostility to Israel, **the**

¹This part of the study includes only the Overview. The full study is being translated and will appear shortly on our website.

Palestinian public supports the terrorist attackers and helps them escape from the Israeli security forces. Those who do manage to escape capture **are venerated and respected by the Palestinian street and become role models.**

► **Given the declared policy of support for popular terrorism (the so-called "popular resistance"²), the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Fatah continued to encourage popular terrorism activity and at the same time to foster the shaheed culture in various ways:** by giving political and media support to popular terrorism; glorifying the terrorists, including in the formal and informal Palestinian educational system; giving financial support to the families of shaheeds, wounded terrorists, and Palestinian terrorists in Israeli prisons; financing and rebuilding the houses of terrorists razed by Israel as a form of punishment; the participation of senior PA and Fatah figures in the funerals held for terrorists; visiting the **families of terrorists who had been called; giving awards, and more.**

► **In that way the PA and Fatah increased the population's fundamental hostility to Israel, especially the younger generation. However, fostering the shaheed culture and supporting terrorist attackers was not manifested by the Palestinians' massively joining popular terrorism attackers.**

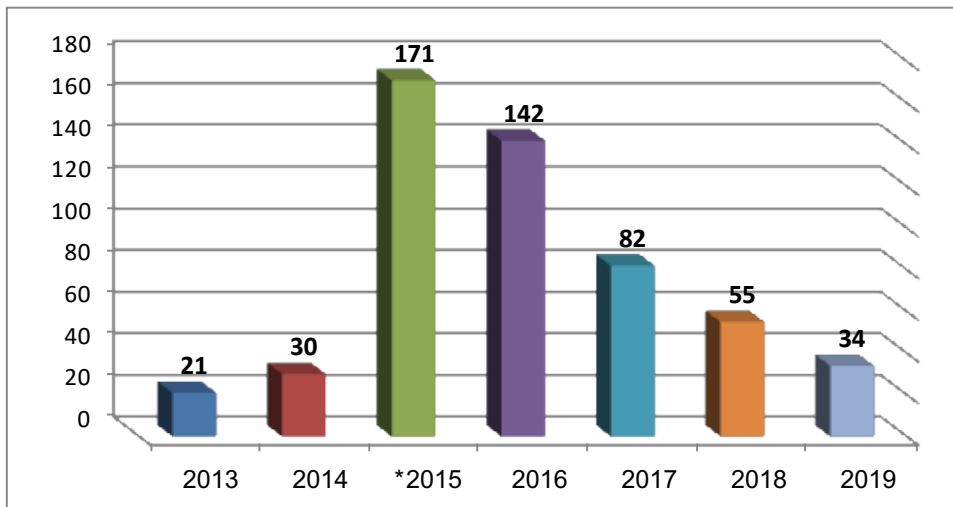
Judea and Samaria

The annual trend of decline in the number of terrorist attacks in east Jerusalem and inside Israel continued in 2019. In the past year there were 34 significant terrorist attacks, compared with 55 in 2018. The level of the lethality of the attacks also declined: in 2019 five Israelis (four civilians and one IDF soldier) were killed, 12 in 2018. Most of the attacks were within the framework of **popular terrorism**.³ However, this past year **a large, established PFLP network was exposed**, two of whose operatives carried out the lethal IED attack at Ayn Bubin (one Israeli civilian killed and two wounded).

² 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]."

³ **Popular terrorism (the so-called "popular resistance")** is carried out by individuals for the most part, but sometimes by squads. The attackers are not supported by the established terrorist organizations. They throw stones and Molotov cocktails, carry out stabbing attacks, vehicular attacks and sometimes shooting attacks. The established terrorist organizations have often tried to claim responsibility for "successful" popular terrorism attacks.

Annual distribution of significant terrorist attacks

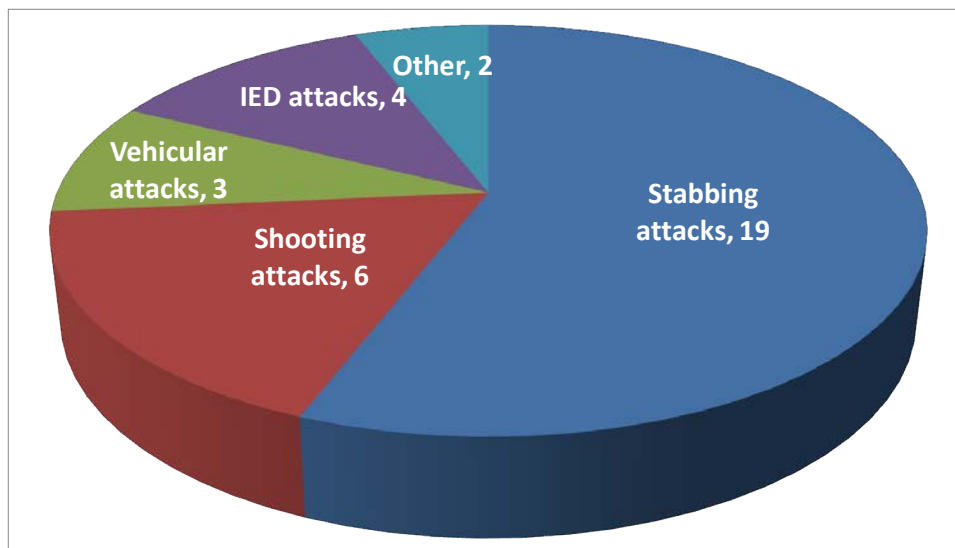


*134 significant attacks were carried out between October and December, 2015, which were the first three months of the wave of popular terrorism. The other 37 were carried out between January and October 2015, when the wave of popular terrorism began.

► On the operative level, there were several characteristics of popular terrorism in Judea and Samaria in 2019:

◆ **Type of attack:** Stabbing attacks continued as **the most common form of attack** (58%). **Nineteen stabbing attacks** were carried out in 2019 (22 in 2018). In 2019 there were five shooting attacks (13 in 2018), and three vehicular attacks (13 in 2018).

Distribution of types of terrorist attacks, 2019



◆ **The lethality of the attacks:** **Five Israelis** were killed in terrorist attacks in 2019 (four civilians and one IDF soldier), **12 killed in 2018** and 18 in 2017. Thus **79 Israelis**

(civilians and members of the security forces) were killed between the wave of popular terrorism which began in October 2015 and the end of December 2019).

◆ **The geographic distribution of the attacks:** Most of the attacks (11) in 2019 were carried out in **Greater Jerusalem**, and second was **the Ramallah area** (6). However, in the Hebron area there was a significant decline in the number of attacks in 2019 (three). Inside Israel⁴ there were two stabbing attacks, three in 2018. There was one near Modi'in (and another during an organized uprising of Palestinian terrorist prisoners in an Israeli jail).

◆ **The personal profile of terrorist attackers remained similar to that of previous years:** Most of them were **young men** in their twenties, **most of them without a criminal or security record and without organizational affiliation.** Regarding their motives, apparently, as in previous years, **most motives were ideological (nationalistic) or personal, but they were not religiously motivated.**

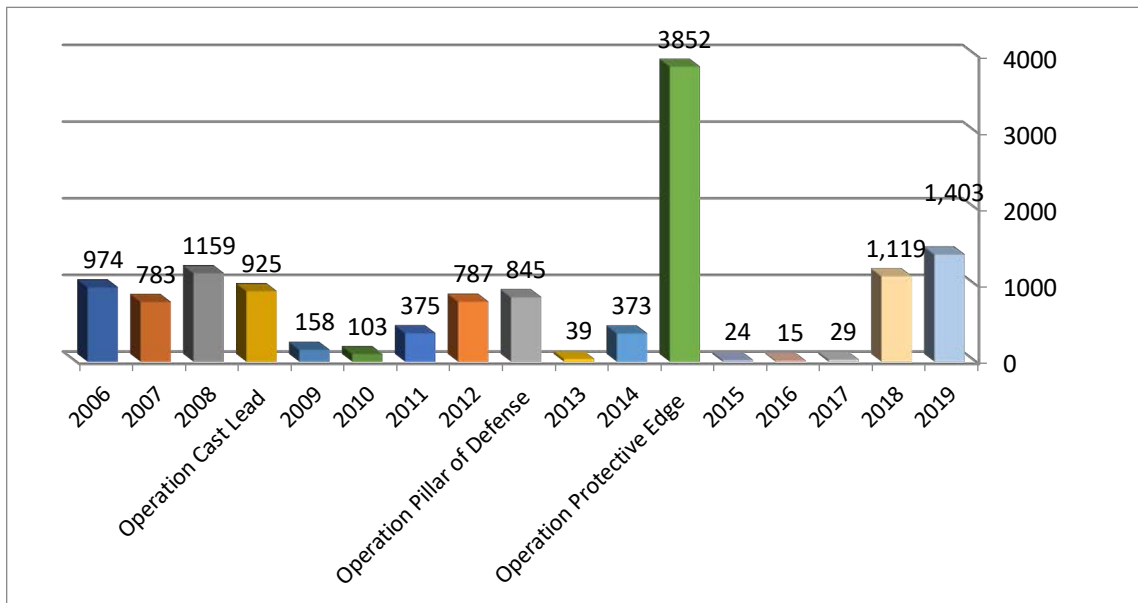
Gaza Strip

In 2019 in the Gaza Strip there was an increase in rocket and mortar shell attacks. There were **three rounds of escalation** in which Israel was attacked with massive rocket and mortar fire. **Between the rounds there was sporadic but continual rocket and mortar fire.** The rocket fire and the violent weekly return marches **disrupted the daily life of the residents of Israel's south, especially those living in the communities near the Gaza Strip.**

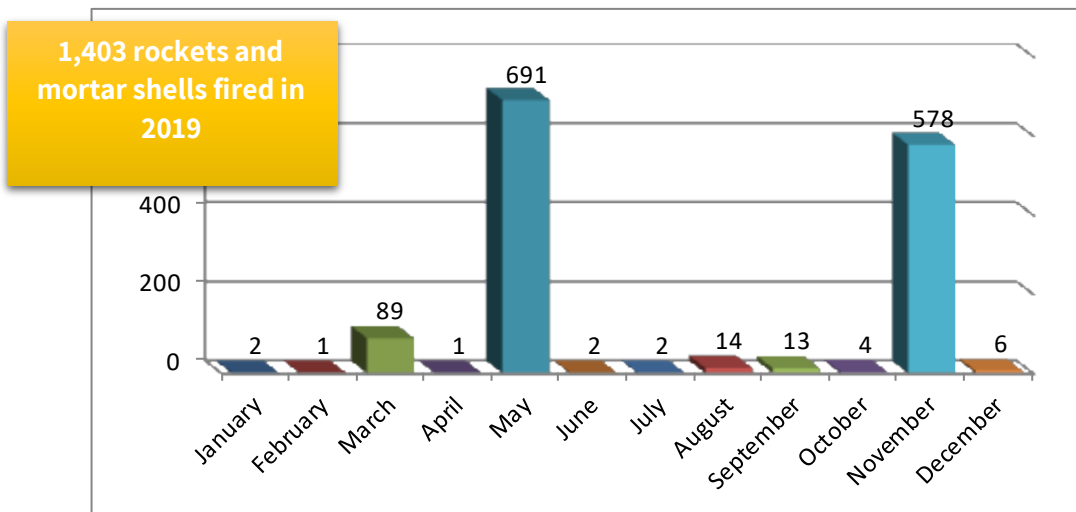
► **In 2019 1,403 rockets and mortar shells were fired.** In 2018, the first year of the return marches, **1,119 rockets and mortar shells were fired.** **In 2019 most of the hits were short-range. Most of the rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system, or landed in open areas in the western Negev.** In most instances the IDF responded by attacking terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip, mostly with aircraft. Most of the targets attacked belonged to Hamas, which Israel considers responsible for what happens in the Gaza Strip.

⁴ "Inside Israel" refers to the Israeli communities which are not part of the greater Jerusalem area, which has its own unique characteristics.

Annual distribution of rocket fire from the Gaza Strip



Monthly distribution of rocket and mortar fire



► **In 2019 return marches were held almost every week** (with some exceptions). Hamas played a central role in the marches (although the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and other organizations also participated). During 2019 **an average of 5,000 Palestinians participated**, but towards the end of the year, when participants began to feel that the marches had exhausted themselves, the number declined.

► **The marches were accompanied by a variety of violent activities:** the border fence was sabotaged; attempts were made to break into Israeli territory; shots were fired at IDF soldiers and hand grenades and IEDs were thrown by rioters near the fence; IED and incendiary kites

and balloons were launched, and more. During the year **31 return march participants were killed** (most of them affiliated with various terrorist organizations, especially **Hamas**).

Global jihad activity in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip

► **In 2019 no organized network of ISIS or any other jihadist organization was identified in Judea and Samaria.** In the Gaza Strip the activities of the Salafist-jihadist organizations were not prominent. The connection between the jihadists in the Gaza Strip and ISIS operatives in the Sinai Peninsula was tenuous, especially because of the intensive counterterrorism activities carried out by the Egyptian security forces. In 2019 no rockets were launched into Israel by jihadists from the Sinai Peninsula.

Assessment of trends and violence, 2019

► **In ITIC assessment popular terrorism will continue in Judea and Samaria in its present form** (stabbing attacks, vehicular attacks and shooting attacks), with fluctuations in quantity and quality. The scope of popular terrorism was influenced by the effectiveness of the Israeli security forces, the **economic situation in Judea and Samaria and the possible disappearance of Mahmoud Abbas from public life.** Economic difficulties damaging the fabric of daily life and the PA and Fatah's war of inheritance are liable to lead to an increase in terrorism.

► Given a possible arrangement in the Gaza Strip and a calming of the situation on the ground, **Hamas and the PIJ can be expected continue their efforts to recruit and direct terrorist networks in Judea and Samaria,** mainly from the Gaza Strip and Turkey. As in previous years, the success of their efforts will depend to a great extent on **the effectiveness of the Israeli security forces' counterterrorism activities** (and to a lesser extent the readiness of the PA security services to continue their cooperation with the Israeli security forces).

► the **Gaza Strip** there is currently **a lull on the ground** which can be expected to continue in view of the (minimalist) arrangement which is being formulated with Egyptian mediation.⁵ However, **rocket fire can be expected to continue (to a lesser degree), as can expressions of violence along the border fence,** for two main reasons: **Hamas has not fully abandoned the use of violence** to leverage concessions from Israel; and **the PIJ** (and with it the "rogue"

⁵ For further information, see the December 15, 2019 bulletin, "Hamas's perception of the lull agreement with Israel, recently discussed in Cairo."

terrorist organizations and operatives), which have their own political agenda, **may again disrupt the lull**, as the did throughout 2019.

Contents

▶ Part One: Popular terrorism in Judea and Samaria

- ◆ General overview
- ◆ Modus operandi
- ◆ The geographic distribution of the attacks
- ◆ The lethality of the attacks

▶ Part Two: Preventing terrorist attacks and exposing terrorist networks in Judea and Samaria

- ◆ Overview
- ◆ Exposing established and semi-established terrorist squads

▶ Part Three: Demonstrations and riots in Judea and Samaria

- ◆ Overview
- ◆ The throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails

▶ Part Four: Terrorism from the Gaza Strip

- ◆ Overview
- ◆ Rocket and mortar fire into Israeli territory
- ◆ The return marches
- ◆ The violence and terrorism accompanying the return marches
- ◆ Flotillas and demonstrations in the northern Gaza Strip
- ◆ Other violent activities accompanying the return marches
- ◆ The use of quadcopters
- ◆ Preventing the smuggling of dual-use items into the Gaza Strip