



## Children in the Service of Palestinian Terrorism: Security tensions, incitement in the social networks and favorable public reactions may influence more children to carry out terrorist attacks

February 20, 2023

### Overview

► During the past three weeks children between the ages of 13 and 14 carried out three terrorist attacks in Jerusalem, two stabbing attacks and one shooting attack. They were not extraordinary because in effect, since the latest wave of Palestinian terrorism began in 2022, we have witnessed adolescents and even children participating in clashes with Israeli security forces and carrying out terrorist attacks. However, their ages have recently decreased significantly. If in the past the attackers were adolescents and young adults aged 16 or more, today they are children barely in their teens. **The attacks and young attackers have been widely praised, especially on the social networks popular with that age group, which may encourage other children to emulate them.**

► Thus it is reasonable to ask whether the children acted alone or were subject to external influence other than the Internet. As opposed to past instances, where organizations were found to have directed the children, apparently the most recent attacks were carried out by children acting independently. **They were influenced by the growing tension in Judea, Samaria and east Jerusalem, accompanied by strong, pervasive online incitement.** The activities of individual children make it particularly difficult for the Israeli security forces to have advance knowledge of their intentions and prevent the attacks.

► **For the most part, Palestinian children grow up in a society that incites violence, and they absorb and are influenced by the general atmosphere in the Palestinian street, the anti-Israeli incitement in their textbooks and formal and informal educational environments, and particularly by the social networks.** According to a survey conducted about Internet use in Judea, Samaria and east Jerusalem, **TikTok** is the platform watched most by children of the relevant ages (IPOKE, January 1, 2023).

► Palestinian children have often participated in terrorist activities and terrorism-supporting violence (demonstrations, riots, clashing with IDF soldiers, smuggling weapons, surveillance and digging tunnels, to name a few). Minors carried out suicide bombing attacks during the first and second intifadas, and were involved in terrorist attacks during the wave of terrorism

in 2015 and 2016, especially regarding stabbing attacks. Palestinian adolescents have also participated in violence targeting Israeli security forces at many of the traditional friction points. Some of them were often cynically used by the terrorist organizations and sent on terrorist missions exploiting their young age and innocent appearance, which did not rouse the suspicions of IDF forces, who in any case would avoid deliberately harming children and adolescents.

► Formerly, internal criticism was heard in the Palestinian Authority (PA) and within Palestinian society of exploiting children for terrorist attacks. However, at the present time not only does the PA not appear to be taking effective steps against using children as terrorist operatives, it makes extensive political capital both internally and the international community by representing them as "innocent victims" [of Israel].

► In ITIC assessment, the ongoing tension regarding security in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, along with incitement to violence on the social networks, especially TikTok, and the sympathetic reactions of Palestinian society to terrorist attacks carried out by children, are liable to increase their number and make it more difficult for the Israeli security forces to prevent them.

## Detailed Information

► During the past three weeks three terrorist attacks were carried out in the Jerusalem region, two stabbing attacks and one shooting attack. The attackers were 13- and 14-year-old children from the **Shuafat refugee camp and Silwan in east Jerusalem:**

◆ **Stabbing attack at the Shuafat Crossing:** On the evening of February 13, 2023, a Border Police fighter and civilian security guard conducted a routine security check of a bus at the Shuafat Crossing near the Shuafat refugee camp. During the check a child armed with a knife stabbed and killed the Border Police fighter. The security guard shot the child (Israel Police Force Facebook page, February 13, 2023). The stabber was **Muhammad Bassel Fathi Zalbani, 13 years old**, from the Shuafat refugee camp (Radio al-Aqsa and the Israeli media, February 13, 2023).



**The scene of the attack (Israel Police Force Facebook page, February 13, 2023).**

◆ **Stabbing attack in the Old City of Jerusalem:** On February 13, 2023, a young Israeli man walking on a street in the Old City of Jerusalem was stabbed in the back by a Palestinian child armed with a knife. The victim was evacuated to a hospital for medical treatment. The child threw the knife on the ground and ran away. Israeli security forces were dispatched to the site, conducted a search and shortly thereafter apprehended **Jaffar Matour, 14 years old, from Shuafat, who was hiding on the Temple Mount** (Israel Police Force Facebook page, February 13, 2023).



**Right: The scene of the attack. Left: The detention of the 14 year-old stabber (Israel Police Force Facebook page, February 13, 2023).**

◆ **Shooting attack in Silwan:** On January 28, 2023, a Palestinian adolescent armed with a gun hid behind parked cars and shot at civilians walking to the Western Wall. He wounded a father and son, who shot back and wounded the Palestinian. He was **Mahmoud Muhammad Aliwat, 13 years old, from Silwan and a student in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at the al-Faraqan Islamic Boys' School in Shuafat.**



**Right: The gun used in the attack (Israel Police Force Facebook page, January 28, 2023). Left: Mahmoud Aliwat (aljazeera.net, January 29, 2023).**

## Glorifying terrorists

► The attacks received favorable reactions. The Hamas-affiliated Palestine Online news network published an infographic entitled "The Lions' Den of revenge " glorifying the three children and their attacks. It said, "The Lion's Den of revenge. Palestinian adolescents between the ages of 12 and 15, a new generation of lone wolves, eager to 'resist the occupation,' take their example from the [adult] attackers, [and] the 'occupation' cannot forecast their deeds." The infographic gave the names and pictures of the three.

**أشبال الثأر**

- فتية فلسطينيون
- أعمارهم بين 12 - 15
- جيل جديد من "الثأب المنفردة"
- يبادرون بمقاومة الاحتلال
- يقفون بمنفذ العمليات
- يفشل الاحتلال في توقع أفعالهم

**أحدث العمليات**

الأسير	الأسير	الأسير
جعفر مطور (عاشا 13)	محمود عليوات (عاشا 13)	محمد زباني (عاشا 13)
		
عملية طعن القدس القديمة	عملية إطلاق نار سلوان	عملية طعن حاجز شعفاط

فلسطين أونلاين  
Palestine Online

**Infographic glorifying the three young Palestinian terrorists (Palestine Online, February 14, 2023).**

► The attacks inspired many tweets with the hashtag #Lion's\_Den\_revenge. The tweets, mainly from Palestinians affiliated with Hamas in the Gaza Strip, featured pictures of the

children who carried out the attacks and called on other children and adolescents to emulate them. Some of the tweets had videos of the scene of the attacks and recorded praise and calls for more attacks. The "justifications" for the attacks were "defense of al-Aqsa mosque," Palestinians [allegedly] beaten by Israeli security forces, anger and the desire to avenge the deaths of friends, etc. Some tweets claimed the attacks challenged the "new fascist government" (several Twitter accounts using the #Lion's\_Den\_revenge hashtag, February 14-16, 2023).



**Inciting Palestinian adolescents to become terrorists**  
(Sahar Amer's Twitter account, February 14, 2023).



**"Jerusalem, a revenge stabbing"** (Alhadr Altwfan's Twitter account, February 15, 2023).

أبو عبدالرحمن · @bwbdlr...  
سيأتي زمان نبيد الطغاة 🙌

#أشبال\_التأر  
#فريق\_مجاهدون



84 🗨️ 14 ❤️ 15 ↻

From Abu Abd al-Rahman's Twitter account

## Involving Minors in Terrorism

- ▶ Using adolescents and minors to carry out terrorist attacks, including suicide bombing attacks, began during the first intifada (1987-1993). There were several examples of the terrorist organizations' cynically using children (deceiving some of them) for terrorist attacks by cynically exploiting their innocent, non-threatening appearance.
- ▶ Two prominent examples when three Palestinian children, aged 12 to 14, infiltrated the settlement of Netzarim on the night of April 23, 2002, to carry out suicide bombing attacks, and the IDF's apprehension of an 11 year-old boy at the Hawwara roadblock (south of Nablus) on March 15, 2005, when he tried to bring in a backpack containing an IED.
- ▶ The use of children and adolescents declined during the second intifada (2000-2005) after the Palestinian public strongly criticized it and calls were heard not to use children in attacks against Israel.
- ▶ Children carried out attacks during the wave of terrorist attacks in 2015 and 2016, mainly stabbing attacks. Adolescents were also sent to participate in riots against Israeli security forces at the traditional friction points in Judea and Samaria (including participation organized by Palestinian schools). They also participated in the return marches in the Gaza

Strip, where they carried out terrorist missions against the IDF, including standing in the front lines facing the IDF forces.<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ Children and adolescents, because of their young age, are easily influenced and serve as a human reservoir for terrorism. They are exposed to intense incitement and are convenient pawns because the IDF forces will not deliberately harm them. The Palestinian terrorist organizations often use children and adolescents for terrorist missions, both offensive and defensive, and to make political capital, in violation of international morality and rules of law.
- ▶ The children and adolescents who are influenced by the general atmosphere and incitement in the Palestinian street participate in activities for a variety of reasons, among them the desire to participate in the "struggle" against Israel and "rescue" the holy sites, and the desire to die as martyrs for the sake of Allah (shaheeds). Sometimes their motives are economic, i.e., the desire for financial aid and material benefits for themselves and their families.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the years of the conflict the IDF detained many children and adolescents who smuggled explosive belts, IEDs and large quantities of weapons for the terrorist organizations. Because of their small size they were used to dig tunnels in the Gaza Strip, and in Judea and Samaria they carry out surveillance and alert local residents when Israeli security forces enter towns and villages, they collect intelligence, defend the houses of terrorists against attack and participate in riots. Their personal situations and despair sharpen their Palestinian nationalist identity and national "awakening" at whose foundation is the "resistance" [Palestinian terrorism] and the "struggle," which serve as a release valve for their sense of helplessness.

### Factors of incitement

- ▶ **From the time they are toddlers, children in the PA absorb hatred for Israel at home,** in the street, in the formal and informal education systems, playing with their friends, from the mosques, the various media outlets and many other sources (the ITIC website has a great deal of information on the subject).
- ▶ Among the influences on Palestinian children and adolescents are the following:

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<sup>1</sup> For further information see the May 28, 2018 bulletin, " Hamas sends boys to their deaths in the 'great return march:' the case of Saadi Abu Salah, 16, who died in an attempt to cut through the security fence on May 14, 2018."

<sup>2</sup> According to the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, 70% of Palestinian children under the age of 14 in east Jerusalem live below the poverty line (N12, May 26, 2022).

◆ **The general atmosphere of the Palestinian street:** They are exposed to the culture of shaheed-glorification through posters, signs and notices, and the distribution of candy and pastries after terrorist attacks, all of which turn the shaheeds into objects of veneration and role models, especially those who killed Israelis. At the same time they are immersed in the complex situation they live in, dictated, to a great extent, by security limitations, the lack of a political horizon and a stalled political system, the internal Palestinian schism, unemployment and the lack of economic opportunity, all of which make it difficult for the Palestinian man in the street to realize his potential and achieve his goals.

◆ **The social networks:** Their difficulties and despair are expressed openly and freely on the Palestinian social networks, which influence the youth in Judea and Samaria. Children between the ages of 13 and 14 primarily watch **TikTok**, where they see videos documenting terrorist attacks, commemorations of terrorists as objects of veneration and emulation, and instructional videos on attacking. TikTok is also used for purposes of recruitment, and the Israeli Security Agency recently exposed an attempt made by an operative in Lebanon to recruit Palestinians on the platform (Israeli Security Agency, February 2, 2023).

◆ **The formal education system:** Anti-Israel incitement begins in kindergarten with displays of hatred for Israel in which the children take part, and the dissemination of materials for young children incorporated into various activities. At the elementary school level children are inculcated with anti-Israel incitement in the official PA-published and distributed textbooks, which are rife with the rejection of the State of Israel's right to exist, the demonization of the Jews and Israel ("the Zionist enemy") and the teaching of a violent "struggle" for the "liberation of Palestine." **Not one single book or teacher's guide mentions a call for the peaceful resolution of the conflict or for coexistence with Israel.**<sup>3</sup>

◆ **The informal education system:** Incitement in the informal education system is particularly strong in the summer camps, attended every year by tens of thousands of children and adolescents. They enjoy various summer camp activities, a substantial

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<sup>3</sup> For further information see the September 9, 2020 bulletin, "Palestinian Authority textbooks and teachers' guides dealing with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (based on books published in 2019)" by Dr. Arnon Groiss



part of which are devoted to indoctrination according to the ideology of the sponsoring organization, including the glorification of terrorist operatives and shaheeds, and often also including military and semi-military training. This past summer many of the camps were named for terrorists killed during confrontations with Israeli security forces in Nablus and Jenin.<sup>4</sup>

► Apparently the influence of the above factors was heightened this past year by increasing tension, the frequent clashes with Israeli security forces and the rise in the number of terrorist attacks and subsequent rise in the number of Palestinian fatalities (civilians and terrorist operatives). They all intensified the motivation for terrorist activity in general and among the young in particular. The trend was also evident in the public opinion survey conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in December 2022, which showed that 65% of the residents of Judea and Samaria support "armed groups" such as the Lion's Den,<sup>5</sup> as well as the public sentiments after attacks, including the expressions of joy and support for the network operatives.

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<sup>4</sup> For further information see the July 28, 2022 bulletin, "Fatah summer campers in the Nablus district undergo military training."

<sup>5</sup> For further information see the January 8, 2023 bulletin, "Palestinian public opinion poll reveals increase in support for armed terrorist attacks against Israel and attacks inside Israeli territory."