

Israel's War on Terror
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Since the beginning of the Second Intifada in September of 2000, Israel has waged its own war on terror. This war has seen a trio of large scale military actions (Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, the Second Lebanon War in 2006, and Operation Cast Lead in 2009) and a dizzying array of special operations involving the Mossad, Shin Beit, and the Israeli Defense Force (IDF). Israel's enemies are the various Palestinian groups dedicated to the destruction of the Jewish state; the Palestinian Authority (run by Makmud Abbas' Fatah Party), Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, and several other organizations including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Islamic Jihad.

Israel's first line of defense in its war on terror is the intelligence services, Mossad, and Shin Beit. These organizations have waged a brutal and ruthless campaign against the vast Palestinian terrorist infrastructure. Of course, Israel has decades of experience to draw upon. Most famously, the perpetrators of the 1972 Munich Massacre were systematically hunted down by Mossad and liquidated¹. But the Second Intifada saw a renewed and vigorous effort on the part of Mossad and the IDF to assassinate Palestinian terrorists, 'We have suicide bombers, and suicide bombers cannot be threatened by death. The only way to stop them is to intercept those who send them,' said Shimon Peres in 2001, who himself was a strong advocate for the Oslo Peace Process.² Peres was responding to criticism of an IDF artillery strike on a house in Nablus, on 1 August of that year, which killed Jamal Mansour, a high level Hamas operative. Perhaps the most famous targeted killing carried out by the IDF occurred on 22 March, 2004, when the founder of Hamas, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, was killed when the car he was traveling in was struck by a missile fired from an Israeli helicopter. On 17 April, his successor, Abd al-Aziz Rantissi, was also killed by an Israeli helicopter fired missile, also in a car.³ Death by helicopter gunship is one of the most common forms of Israeli assassination.⁴

But it is not the only one. In 1996, Shin Beit assassinated Yahya Ayyash, a notorious Hamas bomb maker, by slipping him an explosive packed cell phone and detonating it when he answered.⁵ Israel repeated the feat on 26 September 2004, killing a Hamas terrorist leader named Izz el-Deen al-Sheikh Khalil by detonating a bomb when he answered his cell phone. Impressively, the bombing took place inside the Syrian intelligence service's compound. Whether the bomb was in Khalil's phone or under his car is unclear.⁶ As spectacular as these assassination were, cell phones are far more useful as tracking tools. It is now widely believed by outside observers and the various Palestinian terrorist organizations that Israeli intelligence services track their operatives through cell phone signals.⁷

The effectiveness of targeted killings is difficult to judge. Jewish Virtual Library says there were 14 such operations in 2001, 15 in 2002, 16 in 2003, 20 in 2004, 8 in 2005, 15 in 2006, and 5 in 2007. This corresponds with a drastic drop in the number of terrorist attacks, peaking at 55 in 2002 and dropping to just one in 2007.⁸ Undoubtedly

another key factor in reducing the number of Palestinian attacks is the Israeli security fence. The fence was approved by the Israeli cabinet in July of 2001 and covers virtually the entire border between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.⁹ A similar fence, built around Gaza has a 100% success rate. There have been no successful suicide bombers from Gaza since its construction in 2001.¹⁰

Human intelligence has also been important in Israel's war on terror. It was recently learned that Mossad agents had penetrated Hezbollah, with a retired Lebanese general named Adib al Aalam passing information to the Israelis.¹¹ Al Aalam headed a spy ring that may have included dozens of conspirators. In another case, a Lebanese resident of the Bekka Valley had been gathering intelligence for the Israelis since 1983 before being arrested in 2008.¹² In Gaza, disgruntled Fatah operatives and other persons unhappy with Hamas rule were crucial during Operation Cast Lead, helping the IDF target smuggling tunnels, weapons caches, and terrorist facilities.

Intelligence gathering often leads to direct action. Throughout the last decade, the Israelis have launched brief incursions into Palestinian territory. For example, on 1 December, 2003, an Israeli army battalion entered the town of Ramallah and arrested dozens of suspected Hamas terrorists.¹³ In another instance, on 27 October, 2004, an IDF battalion entered the Jenin refugee camp with the purpose of demolishing the terrorist infrastructure there.¹⁴ In a raid on 5 July 2006, Israeli troops entered the Ein al Sultan camp to arrest a member of the al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, the subject was killed while fleeing.¹⁵

Because of the constant arrests, Israel has amassed a prison population numbering as many as 12,000.¹⁶ Prisoners are dealt quick and uneven justice, with trials taking bare minutes and sentences issued inconsistently. Suspected terrorists are often arrested, but not charged, tried, or sentenced; and held for months in 'administrative detention'.¹⁷ These prisoners are subject to a variety of controversial interrogation methods, including shaking, noise barrage, hooding, and sleep deprivation. Prisoners can also be held in windowless cells or be bound for hours on end. In 1996 one interrogation using such methods forced a confession from one 'Abd al-Halim Bilbeisi, a terrorist mastermind who had planned an attack which killed 21 Israelis. His confession led to the discovery of an unexploded bomb.¹⁸ The Israelis claim that over the same period, these techniques have prevented 90 terrorist attacks.¹⁹ Other Palestinians, claiming to be tortured, have won legal decisions resulting in financial compensation from Israel.²⁰ Some of the above mentioned techniques were outlawed by a 1999 Israeli High Court ruling, though recent decisions allow harsh methods in case of 'ticking time bomb' scenario.²¹

To fight terror groups like Hamas, Israel has decided to aid the PA in the hopes that they will battle Hamas and themselves give up terror. A similar strategy has proven effective in Iraq; turning the locals against the insurgents is the biggest key to defeating an insurgency. To that end, the Israelis are allowing arms shipments to the PA, consenting to Palestinian officers training abroad, and granting immunity to several hundred Fatah terrorists. There has also been in recent years, enhanced cooperation between Israeli and PA security forces. Of course, the Israelis tried this before, in the late 90's. The PA, under Yasser Arafat was unwilling to fight terror on behalf of Israel. 2008 did see a PA crackdown on Hamas, though this is more likely in response to the 2007 Hamas coup in Gaza.²²

The Israel war on terror is more than cloak and dagger assassination and pin prick raids. Three times in the last decade Palestinian terror has led to outright military conflict. The first of these, and probably the most successful, was Operation Defensive Shield. Defense Shield dealt a death blow the Second Intifada, brought a drastic decline in the number of suicide bombings, and de-legitimized Arafat. The operation was launched in response to a horrific string of bombings, the worst of which, on 31 March 2002, killed more than 31 at a Passover Seder in Natanya. In response, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ordered a grand offensive against the PA. On 2 April, more than 30,000 Israeli troops stormed into the West Bank, taking Bethlehem, where several dozen PA gunmen were besieged inside the Church of the nativity, and Ramallah, which saw Israeli troops surround Arafat's headquarters and occupy the first floor. The Ramallah operation yielded an intelligence windfall, as the Israelis seized thousands of documents linking the PA and Arafat to various terrorist groups in the West Bank, and describing their operations.²³

However, the most important result of Operation Defensive Shield was the battle for the Jenin refugee camp. The camp was home to several Palestinian bomb makers and housed a significant apparatus for the manufacturing of bombs and the recruitment of suicide bombers. On 2 April, the Israeli 5th Brigade, a reservist unit, entered the camp, beginning a week long battle with some 200-300 Palestinian terrorists of various factions. The advance was slow, with the Israelis exerting herculean efforts to avoid civilian casualties, eschewing air support and heavy artillery, and sending neighbors to knock on doors before entering a home. On 7 April, 13 reservists were killed while searching a courtyard booby trapped with explosives. In the aftermath, the Israelis brought their formidable D-9 armored bull dozers into Jenin. The D-9 proved to be impervious to RPGs and homemade bombs, with the plow being able to detonate them before they could explode under the chassis. By the end of the week, the Israelis had taken the camp, gutted the center in a major firefight, captured 37 terrorists and killed 25 more. Operation Defensive Shield netted many high value prisoners, including Marwan Barghouti, head of Fatah in the West Bank and leader of their Tanzim military wing.²⁴

Not all campaigns have gone so smoothly. In the summer of 2006, after Hezbollah attacked an Israeli border post, killing eight soldiers and kidnapping two others, Israel invaded Lebanon. Now led by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Israel's response was muddled and lacked direction. Israeli actions began with a series of airstrikes on Lebanese infrastructure, meant to keep Hezbollah from smuggling the kidnapped soldiers out of the country. Hezbollah began a rocket barrage against Israel, with more than 4,000 falling during the course of the war. Israeli air strikes were unable to stop the bombardment. Ground troops were not sent into Lebanon until 1 August and, even then, they only occupied a narrow strip just inside the country. The IDF fought a pair of sharp battles at Maruon al-Ras and Bet Jubail, Hezbollah's capital. A drive to the Litani River did not begin until 10 August, when the UN Security Council began negotiating a ceasefire resolution. Eight Israeli brigades, including the Golani and Paratrooper, raced for the Litani River, Hezbollah's unofficial border. More battles were fought, this time in the towns of Rashaf and Marjayoun, with Hezbollah taking heavy casualties in both.²⁵ By 14 August, most enemy positions had been destroyed.

Hezbollah lost as many as 700 killed during the war in exchange for 119 Israeli soldiers and airmen.²⁶

Despite the apparent Israeli success, Hezbollah won the 2006 war. The Israeli high command was racked by bickering, indecision, and hesitation. At first, the Israelis were too reliant on air power, not surprising since the chief of staff, Dan Halutz, was an air force general. Olmert did not call up reserves until 21 July and waited too long to order a ground assault.²⁷ Israeli troops were unprepared for the ferocity and organization of Hezbollah's resistance. They also lacked urban warfare training.²⁸ Because of the deficiencies, Hezbollah survived, when a quick strike, mounted a day or two after the initial attack, would certainly have landed a more lopsided blow, and may have dealt a fatal one.²⁹

Israel fought yet another conventional anti-terror campaign, this one against Hamas in the Gaza strip. The attack came after Hamas' renounced the truce which had been in place and escalated its daily rocket barrages, with 60 being fired on 24 December alone. Called Cast Lead, this operation saw the Israelis unleash an opening air strike reminiscent of Pearl Harbor in which 60 aircraft struck dozens of targets inside the Gaza Strip. This was followed by a second wave half an hour later, timed to strike Hamas rocket launchers as they deployed for a retaliatory barrage. There followed a week of constant air attacks against weapons caches, terrorist hideouts, rocket and bomb making facilities, and the all important smuggling tunnels from Egypt. Phase II began on 3 January, with a ground incursion by the elite Golani, Givati, and Paratrooper Brigades. Fierce clashes with Hamas fighters resulted, with 50 being killed on the first day of operations and 100 on the second. In one battle with the Golani Brigade in Gaza City, Hamas' elite Iranian unit was wiped out. When the Israelis declared a unilateral ceasefire 17 January, they had killed more than 700 Hamas fighters, captured 150 more, drastically reduced the number of rockets fired into Israel from about 70 per day to about 20, and destroyed about 2/3rds of the smuggling tunnels into Gaza.³⁰

Operation Cast Lead could not have been more different than the mismanaged Hezbollah War. Israel started with a hammer blow delivered from the air, catching Hamas completely by surprise. Israeli units entered the strip with clearly defined goals and objectives. Reservists, who were thrown into battle pell-mell in 2006, first went through a week of urban warfare training before entering the fray. Where the IDF had traditionally shied away from striking holy sites, this time mosques used to store weapons were targeted and destroyed. Civilian casualties were avoided through a variety of methods, from telephone calls to targeted homes, to 'roof knocking', a technique where a loud but non lethal missile was detonated on a rough; scaring away civilians there or inside.

Interestingly, Operation Cast Lead may point the way toward Israel's next war. As noted above, the first blow was struck by two waves of more than 100 aircraft. The first wave struck 50 targets inside of five minutes. In the Spring of 2008, Israel conducted an exercise off the coast of Greece which involved 120 aircraft, including helicopters. Not coincidentally, Greece is 900 miles away from Israel, the same distance as Iran. Greece also operates the S-300 Surface to Air Missile system, which the Iranian recently purchased from Russia.³¹ Lest one think Iran is too distant, during Operation Cast Lead, Israeli aircraft struck an arms convoy bound for Gaza – via Sudan, itself 600 miles to the south.³² Further hinting that something big is in the works,

the government In 2009 conducted a weeklong series of drills simulating a massive missile/terrorist attack on the country.³³ Clearly the Israelis are planning some kind of aerial assault on Iran, or want the world to think they are.

¹ For instance, one was gunned down on the street in Paris, while two others were killed in their Beirut apartment. For a complete list see www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org, 'Israeli Hits on Terrorists'.

² Shuman, Ellis. *Israel to Continue Targeted Killings*. Israeli Insider, 2 August, 2001.

³ *The Independent*, obituary, 19 April 2004.

⁴ For a good round up of Israeli assassinations via helicopter gunship see the website Little Green Footballs, whose proprietor, Charles Johnson, has been chronicling the odd phenomenon of Palestinian 'car swarms' in which bystanders gather round a destroyed vehicle in a bizarre form of mass mourning,

⁵ See Global Security's entry for Yahya Ayyash

⁶ Lynfield, Ben. *Israel Sends Syrian Tough Message with Strike*. CS Monitor, 27 September, 2004.

⁷ Straffor article appearing in Lebanon Wire, 20 February, 2008

⁸ Number of Israel civilians killed are as follows, 220, in 2002, 142 in 2003, 55 in 2004, 22 in 2005, 15 in 2006, and 3 in 2007, www.mfa.gov.il see entry for *Victims of Palestinian Violence and Terror Since September 2000*.

⁹ www.securityfence.mod.gov.il. People's Daily Online (english.people.com.cn) also has a good description of the fence.

¹⁰ Major General Almog, Dorom. *Lessons of the Gaza Security Fence for the West Bank.*, Jerusalem Issue Brief, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 23 December, 2004.

¹¹ Stern, Yoav. *Report: Israeli Spy Ring in Lebanon Penetrated Hezbollah*. Haaretz, 4 April, 2009.

¹² Worth, Robert F. *Lebanese in Shock Over Arrest of Accused Spy*. New York Times, 18 February, 2009

¹³ *Dozens Arrested in Israeli Raid on West Bank*. AP Report via Sydney Morning Herald, 2 December, 2003.

¹⁴ AP report via Fox News, 27 October, 2004

¹⁵ *Israeli Troops Kill Palestinian in West Bank Raid*, Sydney Morning Herald, 6 July, 2006

¹⁶ Institute for Middle East Understanding. FAQ on Palestinian Prisoners.

¹⁷ *Palestinians Decry Israeli Court System*. Washington Times, 27 March, 2007

¹⁸ Wisotsky, Alexandra L. *Israeli Interrogation Methods Legitimized by Court*. The Human Rights Brief, The Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law at Washington College of Law, American University. Two similar cases are documented in this report.

¹⁹ ISRAELI INTERROGATION CASES, UN HIGH COMMISSIONER ON HUMAN RIGHTS. Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under Article 19 of the UN Convention Committee Against Torture (18 February 1997) CAT/C/33/Add.2/Rev.1--Israeli Report

²⁰ Greenberg, Hanan. *Palestinians Compensated Over Torture Claims*. Ynet News, 1 February, 2006.

²¹ Mari'l, Mohammed. *Israeli High Court Permits Torture of Palestinians*. Arab News, 31 May, 2007. Palestinians outraged at Israeli mistreatment of their prisoners have some nerve, considering what passes for normal procedure in the PA and Gaza, not mention Egypt and Jordan.

²² Heywood, Cherrie. *Israeli Backed PA Hits Hamas Hard in West Bank*. Middle East Times, 12 October, 2008.

²³ The Israeli foreign ministry has catalogued various examples online.

²⁴ For an in-depth account of Operation Defensive Shield, see the author's own article in Strategy & Tactics Magazine no. 256. For an independent account see Rees, Matt. *Battle of Jenin*. Time Magazine.

²⁵ For a summary of the final rush to the Litani see Roggio Bill, *To the Litann River, Heavy Fighting for Rashaf, Marjayoun*. Counter Terrorism Blog, 10 August, 2006

²⁶ For casualties see Brilliant, Jonathon. *Hezbollah Plans Recovery Timetable*. UPI 7 September 2006.

²⁷ Ariel, Jonathan. *Analysis: Government and IDF Racked by Unprecedented Leadership Crisis*. Israeli Insider, 9 August, 2006.

²⁸ See the author's own article *The 2006 War in Lebanon*, in Strategy & Tactics no 245. For an independent analysis of the war see Mathews, Matt. *We Were Caught Unprepared: the 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War*. US Army Combined Arms Center, Ft Levenworth, KS.

²⁹ *Hezbollah Says Israeli Response a Surprise*. AP 25 July, 2006

³⁰ See the author's own summary of Cast Lead in Strategy & Tactics no. 257. For an independent round up of Cast Lead see Ynet News, *Cast Lead (2008)*.

³¹ Gordon, Michael, and Schmitt, Eric. *U.S. says Israeli Exercise seemed Directed at Iran*. New York Times, 20 June, 2008

³² *State media: Israeli Airstrike on Sudan Convoy Killed 119*. Reuters, 26 May, 2009.

³³ *Israel Stages Biggest Ever War Drill*. CNN, 31 May, 2009