# Defeating Suicide Terrorism in Judea and Samaria, 2002–2005

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Introduction

From mid 2005 suicide terrorism from Judea and Samaria stopped being a significant component of the IDF's war on Palestinian terrorism, thus marking the end of a long, demanding process that began with the Israeli government's decision to launch Operation Defensive Shield and have the IDF operate in Palestinian cities. It is difficult to determine precisely when the process concluded, but around the middle of 2005 the number of suicide attacks from Judea and Samaria dropped to a very low level, and since then this general trend has been maintained (figure 1).

Figure 1. Suicide Attacks, 2001–mid 2005
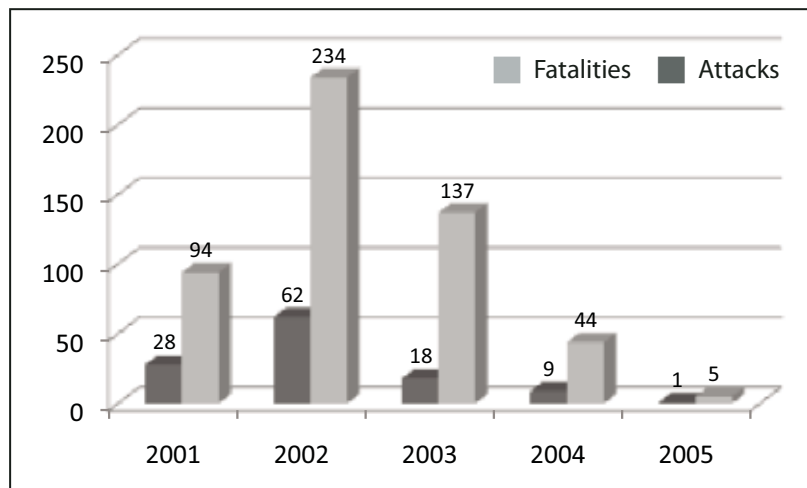
Source: IDF History Department

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Suicide attacks are a subject that has been studied and researched extensively,[1] with the primary emphasis on the phenomenon of suicide as a terrorist weapon. Yet although it has been nearly a decade since the outbreak of the violent Palestinian uprising,[2] the combat features used by the IDF and the security services against terrorism in general and suicide terrorism in particular, the most lethal form of terrorism, have not been studied in depth.[3] The purpose of this essay is to attempt to understand the major components of activity that resulted in the near eradication of the phenomenon. The focus of this paper is the war on terrorism in Judea and Samaria without dealing with terrorism from the Gaza Strip, which has developed and assumed different forms over the years and is beyond the scope of this essay.

This paper seeks to provide an historical picture of the processes employed by Israel in an attempt to foil suicide terrorism. The first part of the essay examines the political directives issued by the Israeli government to the IDF from 2000, when the fighting erupted, until the government decision that led to Operation Defensive Shield. These political directives framed the IDF's operational activities in Judea and Samaria. The second part examines the implementation of the directives and the development of the military and security response to suicide terrorism. This part of the essay also analyzes the process of formulating the military strategy for fighting terrorism in Judea and Samaria. It analyzes the concept of "military decision" in the context of this type of warfare, and examines the principles involved in fighting terrorism that developed and were applied in practice in Judea and Samaria in those years. The last part of the essay analyzes the ethical components of fighting a war on suicide terrorism that had the potential of being highly detrimental to the values of the IDF. In practice, the IDF and the General Security Service (GSS) succeeded in defeating suicide terrorism, and the IDF managed to preserve its fundamental values.

The Political Directive Issued to the IDF

The first related political directive was issued to the IDF in October 2000 and was updated in March 2001. The government decision to embark on Operation Defensive Shield in March 2002 can also be understood as a type of focused political directive. The original directive of October 2000 was composed of the following points:

a. Providing security and a sense of security to the Israeli population
b. Reducing the scope and intensity of the violence[4]
c. Preventing the other side from scoring successes through violence
d. Preventing internationalization of the conflict
e. Implementing security separation gradually and proportionally
f. Preventing regional deterioration
g. Renewing negotiations and reaching an agreement

When the fighting erupted, the IDF began to act according to operational plans that were formulated with the understanding that the year 2000 was liable to mark the outbreak of hostilities with the Palestinians. However, in those years the Israeli government was hard pressed to identify the enemy with any clarity. Was the confrontation against a collection of terrorist organizations, or was the State of Israel facing an organized Palestinian campaign? Furthermore, the government found it difficult to define the role of Palestinian Authority chairman Yasir Arafat in the fighting. It seemed that Arafat was enjoying the benefit of the doubt: he was seen by the international community as a moderating element, and by his constituents he was seen as a leader of the confrontation. Due to these difficulties, the IDF limited its activities in the Palestinian areas; it even refrained from realizing its full potential in Area A, which was under its control as stipulated by the security appendix to the Oslo Agreement.

This was the situation regarding the terrorist attacks before the government decided to act. Immediately following the suicide bombing at the Park Hotel in Netanya, the Israeli government decided to order an extensive military action against Palestinian terrorism. The government decision also cut through the Gordian knot of limitations on IDF activity in the entire sector and defined Arafat as an enemy. Below are the details of the political directive for Operation Defensive Shield recorded in the government decision of the night of March 28-29, 2002:

a. The government of Israel met tonight for a special meeting in light of the escalating severity of Palestinian terrorism.
b. The government approved guidelines for an extensive operational plan of action against Palestinian terrorism.
c. Israel will act to suppress the infrastructure of Palestinian terrorism in all its components, and will therefore undertake extensive action until the goal is met.

d. Arafat, who founded the coalition of terrorism against Israel, is an enemy and will be isolated at this stage.

e. In light of operational needs, the government approved the mobilization of reservists in order to allow the IDF continuous activity over time in the locations where terrorism is concentrated.

In practice, the decision signaled the start of effective combat and the construction of appropriate operational capabilities for this type of fighting. The processes related primarily to beginning operations in Palestinian cities and refugee camps, constructing operational and intelligence capabilities, and developing a command pattern that concentrated the core of the defense establishment's resources in a focused manner to achieve the goal.

In June 2003, about 15 months after Operation Defensive Shield, a ceasefire (hudna) between the Palestinians and Israel came into effect. It collapsed less than two months later when major attacks recurred. Once the ceasefire ended, the fighting continued and the terrorist organizations attempted to carry out attacks with the assistance of Hizbollah, which had deepened its hold on terrorist infrastructures in Judea and Samaria. Hizbollah became the most important driving force behind the attacks by funneling money, providing the technical knowledge, and connecting organizations with suicide terrorist cells.

The Development of the Operational Response

From mid 2002, when the IDF entered Palestinian cities and refugee camps, a pattern of action developed that allowed the Central Command forces and IDF headquarters in Judea and Samaria to maintain a high capacity of intelligence and preventive missions in the entire sector, while receiving intelligence directions from the GSS. These actions started to bear fruit and the scope of suicide attacks decreased. At the same time and on the basis of understanding that it was necessary to provide a broad context for the extensive operational activity underway, a parallel thought process began in late 2003. This process, set in motion in the Judea and Samaria Regional Division and supported by the Central Command, touched on several components, including the comprehensive strategic dimension. The goal was to formulate an overall military strategy for operational activity while examining the significance of "decision" in a confrontation with the Palestinians. Finally, there was an attempt to

formulate a total operational philosophy from which it would be possible to derive combat principles.[5] This process, which evolved in 2004, resulted in focused operational activity and made it possible to build on its successes.

The Military Strategy

The thought process taking place in the IDF analyzed several military strategies and a preliminary process examined some possible strategy alternatives:

a. *The strategy of attrition*.[6] This strategy seeks to wear down the other side and wrest a decision against terrorist elements by eroding both the ability and the desire to act. The use of terminology such as "demonstrating the price of defeat" in order to "win on points" or in order to "sting the Palestinian consciousness and ethos," and actions designed to effect these ends are derived from this strategy.

b. *The strategy of decision*.[7] This strategy seeks to wrest a decision from the Palestinians by forceful aggression, make it accept Israel's position, and paralyze its ability to act. The term "decision" was found to be problematic and was therefore recast in order to create the appropriate context for the fighting.

c. *The strategy of a reasonable security situation*. This strategy seeks to manage the conflict (in contrast to the drive to erode or gain a decision) and create "a reasonable situation"[8] in order to provide a convenient basis for statesmanship to achieve its goals.

In context of the alternatives, the term "decision" in warfare against terrorism in Judea and Samaria was analyzed in order to try to understand if actions by the IDF and the security forces could exact a decision against Palestinian terrorism according to the classical military definition. This process generated several insights. Regarding the operational forces' action on the ground (at the tactical level), the classical term "military decision" has a great deal of validity. Here we were dealing with a physical clash between IDF forces and terrorists. The missions were delimited in time and place and allowed immediate performance results. The comprehensive level of activity by the IDF headquarters in Judea and Samaria was seen as the system nexus connecting the tactical level with the IDF's comprehensive military strategic level.

However, using the phrase "tactical decision" in this context was problematic. Thus, the following insight emerged: the systemic goal was not always to seek a decision, and attaining the systemic goal was not always dependent on gaining a tactical decision over the enemy. As such, it was decided to focus on attaining a reasonable security situation given the circumstances as a central objective of the fighting. Finally, the strategic-military context of the fighting was analyzed. This generated the understanding that using the term "decision" was erroneous in the context of strategy. Support for this approach may be found in Israel Tal's book, *National Security*, which states:

> A state adopting an absolute strategy, striving to attain ambitious goals without addressing the reality of the limits of force, in the end suffers defeat and pays a steep price. The strategy of compromise derives from moderate national goals and does not define a rigid final objective.[9]

On the basis of this analysis, the following conclusions were drawn: (a) the term "strategic decision" and "systemic decision" should not be part of the terminology used in the confrontation; (b) the term "tactical decision" should stay in use and IDF forces must strive to attain a tactical decision in every encounter with the enemy; (c) finally, on the basis of the understanding that the optimal strategic and systemic goal was not decision but creation of a reasonable, lasting security situation, it was decided to adopt a strategy that sought to provide the State of Israel with a reasonable security situation.

Because of the need for focused action, three operational goals that had to suit the operational activity environment were identified: (a) neutralizing terrorists' ability to carry out effective terrorist activity[10] aimed at Israel's civilian front; (b) severing the connection between the PA and terrorist activity in Judea and Samaria and Israel's home front, and improving Israel's ability to create a more convenient strategic reality for a future dialogue with the Palestinian Authority; (c) creating maximal differentiation between the Palestinian public and terrorism. These three goals were the basis for the operational concept and for the formulation and assimilation of the principles of the fighting.

The Formulation of the Comprehensive Operational Concept

In the process of formulating the comprehensive operational concept, two main action approaches were examined. The first was the standoff approach, based primarily on technological means that allow for attacking terrorist elements from afar on the basis of accurate intelligence. This approach relies primarily on the ability to apply accurate fire from the air. In the process of studying the operational concept, it was decided to examine the extent to which this approach would serve the comprehensive strategy and if this combat approach would be more effective than others. The second approach considered was the direct contact approach, which depends on the IDF's ability to act on the ground in the entire sector and undertake preventive missions face-to-face with terrorists.[11]

At the end of the process, the decision was made to focus IDF operational activity in Judea and Samaria on efforts to engage terrorists directly and as such, radically minimize the use of standoff fire in preventive missions. This was deemed the approach having the highest deterrence potential against terrorists who suddenly found themselves IDF targets fighting for their survival. In addition, the approach entailed fewer casualties and less collateral damage, so that differentiation between the population and terrorists was attained also in the context of operational preventive missions, thereby boosting the comprehensive operational effectiveness.

Moreover, the need to enhance the overall synergy between IDF capabilities was recognized. This was learned from the IDF's experience in southern Lebanon before the 2000 withdrawal, where it was clear that the IDF was not maximizing its potential and therefore the fighting in practice was left in the hands of the operational forces only.[12] As a result, IDF commanders made sure that the entire basket of capabilities, integrating ground superiority with aerial superiority, intelligence gathering, and information, was realized. Therefore many capacities of SIGINT Unit 8200 (the Central Collection Unit of the Intelligence Corps) and other Intelligence Corps units were deployed. Furthermore, great emphasis was placed on creating a common language and joint operating patterns with the GSS.

The Development of the Principles of Fighting

As an integral part of the thought processes that took place in late 2003 and early 2004, principles of fighting were formulated for IDF soldiers in the Central Command and in the Judea and Samaria region. These principles were created for adoption by IDF commanders to help focus planning operational activity. They include:

The necessity of the objective: ensuring security and a normal routine for the Israeli public, deepening the understanding of the significance of the mission in Judea and Samaria for Israel's overall security – from safety and the sense of personal security to stabilization of national security.

Systemic and tactical continuity: ongoing examination of missions in order to serve the strategic and systemic objectives of the State of Israel. First, the strategic objective is served by means of operational continuity, that is, realizing defensive and offensive efforts continuously in the entire sector at all times. In doing so, emphasis is put on maintaining offensive operational continuity, with the understanding that this pattern of activity severely challenges reconstruction efforts of terrorist infrastructures. This requires high quality intelligence, significant and flexible offensive ORBAT, a decentralized command and operations-approving command system, and initiated activity when intelligence is lacking. Second, systemic objectives serve to maintain a stable, ongoing civilian policy in order to allow for a normal way of life for the civilian public in the sector.

Mission effectiveness: effective execution of missions at minimal cost (loss of life, fatigue) with minimal economic resources, at high speed, and with minimal damage to innocent civilians, civilian infrastructures, and the surrounding landscape.

Realization of operational and intelligence effectiveness at all levels: sparing use of forces and ongoing effective use of all operational resources and intelligence resources (combat intelligence) in order to realize superiority in contact fighting while minimizing erosion of technological advantages in the fighting. In this context and with a broad strategic understanding, the IDF acted to reduce as much as possible the ORBAT in the Judea and Samaria region allocated to fighting terrorism.

Creating deterrence with force and means: creating and maintaining deterrence with creative, unexpected operational patterns of action while striving for flexible thinking and operational creativity, and

making ongoing efforts to throw the terrorists off balance. This entails a combination of features such as mobile activity, secrecy, and overt and covert (undercover) actions of the lowest signature possible while engaging in direct close combat rather than standoff fighting.

Maximal differentiation between terrorism and the public: identifying ways and operational methods to reduce harm to innocent civilians, both out of moral reasons and the need to reduce motivation to join the cycle of terrorism.

Credible, proactive, accessible public relations: maintaining an ongoing effort at all levels for credible, proactive, and accessible PR in order to improve and preserve legitimacy within the IDF and in local and international public opinion.

Organizational and inter-organizational learning: maintaining extensive learning processes with rigid debriefings, sharing information and lessons among forces and organizations, and maintaining ongoing, cross-hierarchic learning.

Responding to future challenges: continuous thinking, planning, and responding to challenges in order to enable the construction of operational readiness for various operational scenarios, such as resolution-related processes or escalating terrorism.

Alongside the above principles, an extensive process of force buildup and training was implemented. New capabilities were introduced into field units, the combat intelligence structure was improved, and infantry brigade units were organized into reconnaissance battalions that were more effective for fighting terrorism. These processes and the assimilation by operational forces of the combat principles produced operational synergy that extended to the GSS and other elements of the security establishment. The operational elements were complemented by the construction of the separation fence, which created a physical barrier in sensitive sectors that made it more difficult for terrorists to dispatch attacks into Israel. As a result, in 2004 and until mid-2005, suicide terrorism was defeated and was in practice taken off the public agenda of the State of Israel.

The Ethical Dimension
The fighting in 2000-2005 presented the IDF with complex moral challenges. On the one hand, there was tremendous public pressure to

give the IDF free rein to eradicate terrorism, and the motto "let the IDF win" was a frequent popular refrain. On the other hand, Israel's legal system was challenged, and the political echelon and IDF commanders understood that there were moral red lines in the confrontation. The intensity of the suicide terrorism presented the IDF with a challenge that had the potential to upset commanders' and soldiers' fundamental ethical norms. These difficulties touched not only on combat operations and injury to innocent bystanders in the fighting, but also on the ongoing exhausting work of soldiers stationed at checkpoints, making arrests, and engaged in routine activity as a result of the increased security measures.

IDF commanders worked hard to find the appropriate balance. For example, one such struggle was the dilemma over the ethics of destroying terrorists' homes. This tool, used in the first years of fighting, was discontinued in light of the recommendations of an IDF committee established in early 2005 charged with examining the policy of destroying homes as a deterrent to terrorism. The complexity of this tool can be deduced from the Supreme Court decision of early 2009 that allowed exceptions to this policy, e.g., sealing the homes of some of the terrorists responsible for the terrorist attack at the Mercaz Harav yeshiva in Jerusalem. Another example concerned the development of the "neighbor procedure,"[13] which presented significant ethical dilemmas. The method was presented to the Supreme Court, which forbade its use. At the same time that the system was dealing with these questions, IDF commanders had to tackle ethical problems at the level of the individual solider and commander.

In this context, Israeli Supreme Court Justice Elyakim Rubinstein wrote the following:

> This reality has presented Israeli law with a challenge. This is a trying time for us, the jurists of the civil service, as trustees of the values of the State of Israel and its public law. There are people who ask whether the existing legal rules are relevant when a state is forced to fight an inhuman phenomenon such as suicide terrorists. But is there really any truth to the claim made by many that because reality has changed the law has to change as well?...I believe that in our society the principles are everlasting and represent an eternal idea of justice, but in our application of these principles we must not ignore changes occurring in reality.[14]

The war on terrorism includes many volatile and ethical pitfalls. However, at the end of the day the IDF prevailed operationally and strategically while able to preserve its basic ethical values.

Conclusion

The IDF's success in defeating suicide terrorism managed to contain its effect and reduce it to tolerable levels. On this point, Meir Elran has written the following:

> If the intifada was supposed to have undermined the foundations of Israeli society, sent it into a tailspin, and unhinged it, it failed…Even during the most difficult times, the Israeli public, generally speaking, believed that it had the ability to withstand the dreadful onslaught of terrorism. In most cases the public expressed optimism and belief that the future would be better, both for the individual and the public as a whole.[15]

In this challenging fighting, with IDF and GSS forces quickly adjusting to the required changes, suicide terrorism was defeated. This process of change, accompanied by a deep thought processes, is an example of Israel's security establishment's ability to cope with the many complex changes the state will undoubtedly have to face in the future.

The recent years of calm, the construction of a Palestinian security apparatus with the support of the United States, and international involvement in improving the economic situation of the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria have all created a comfortable situation that did not exist even in the Oslo era. The political echelon can now make decisions from a position of strength and on the basis of the security interests of the State of Israel.

Notes

1   Yoram Schweitzer and Sari Goldstein Farber, *Al-Qaeda and the Internationalization of Suicide Terrorism*, , (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2005, Memorandum No. 78); see also Nachman Tal, "Suicide Attacks: Israel and Islamic Terrorism," *Strategic Assessment* 5, no. 1 (2002), http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=593; and Shaul Kimhi and Shmuel Even, "Who Are the Palestinian Suicide Terrorists?" *Strategic Assessment* 6, no. 2 (2006), http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=672.

2   These events were labeled the "second intifada." This is often a misleading name because in practice the IDF fought a military campaign against the terrorist organizations and the Palestinian Authority security forces.

3   To the best of my knowledge, the fighting against the Palestinians in those years has not been investigated in an in-depth manner even within the IDF.

4   In March 2001 the above directive was changed, and the words "reducing the scope and intensity of the violence" were substituted with "ending the violence."

5   This chapter was written while relying on a non-classified version of the document, "Changes and Challenges in the War on Terrorism: Report Issued on the Completion of IDF Commander in Judea and Samaria Brig. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot's Term in Office," May 2005.

6   Yehoshafat Harkabi, *War and Strategy* (Maarachot, 1992), p. 126.

7   Ibid.

8   Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Critical Decisions* (Am Oved, 1987), p. 51. Harkabi lays out his understanding of terrorism as the permanent tax paid by modern society and explains the notion of managing the war of terrorism so as to keep it to a tolerable level.

9   Israel Tal, *National Security: The Few against the Many* (Dvir, 1996), Chapter 7: "The Objectives of War."

10 Effective terrorism has been defined as "terrorism of a scope or quality that limits the political echelon's ability to make decisions."

11 A comprehensive analysis of these two approaches to fighting may be found in Gabriel Siboni, "The Military Battle against Terrorism: Direct Contact vs. Standoff Warfare," *Strategic Assessment* 9, no. 1 (2006), http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=129.

12 In this context, see also statements made by Brig. Gen. Shmuel Zakkai and Gen. Shmuel Malka during the seminar held on May 28, 2010 at the Institute for National Security Studies to mark ten years since the withdrawal from Lebanon.

13 Using a local resident in order to enter terrorists' homes and calling on them to leave. This procedure is known as the "early warning procedure."

14 Elyakim Rubinstein, "Security and Human Rights in the War on Terrorism," *The Law and the Army* no. 16, 2003.

15 Meir Elran, *Israel's National Resilience: The Influence of the Second Intifada on Israeli Society* (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2006, Memorandum No. 81).