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## **Six Months of Terrorist Attacks by Lone Individuals:**

### **To Be Continued**

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The Israeli public, policymakers, and media are hard pressed to define the climate of terrorism that descended on Israel in September 2015 and has continued since. Of the more than 250 attacks that have been waged since October 2015, over 90 percent have been perpetrated by lone individuals. Although there has been an ongoing decline in the number of attacks, there is still no sign of an end to the phenomenon. One contributing factor to the belligerent environment is the frustration of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Jerusalem due to their bleak prospects for the future. No less important has been the culture of violence that the Islamic State has sowed throughout the Middle East.

With a new and unexplained phenomenon, the impulse is to frame it in familiar terms. For this reason, the terrorist attacks of the past half year have been referred to as an “intifada,” with some referring to it as an “intifada of lone individuals” and others as an “intifada of knives,” insofar as most of the attacks have been stabbing attacks. It is doubtful, however, that the term “intifada” suits the reality that has emerged. Common to the two intifadas, which were highly different from one another in character and development, was the involvement of almost all of Palestinian society in a clash with Israel. Today, however, Palestinian society is watching the perpetrators of attacks from the side – glorifying, but not joining, them. The mass demonstrations of October regarding the status of the Temple Mount, organized around allegations that Israel sought to change the status quo at the site, have subsided. Today, only dozens of Palestinians come out each Friday to clash with the IDF.

The perpetrators of the attacks were not sent by any organization, and most have a personal story that contains an element of hardship and disappointment. Moreover, the interrogation of the attackers who have survived their attacks (approximately 90 in number) indicates that all were inspired by the media (the internet, television, and the press), which provided them with illustrations of the injustice that Israel commits against

the Palestinians and sparked them to take action. Many are also relatives or acquaintances of one or more of the 180 Palestinians killed in the past half year.

Unlike during the second intifada, when most of the suicide terrorists underwent a few days of training, the decision in the current period to act is made shortly before the attack itself. The attackers include men and women, parents and singles, employed and unemployed. The decisive majority fit the classic profile of the lone attacker: 71 percent of the attackers were between the ages of 15 and 25, with most unmarried and unemployed. The Islamic State targets precisely such young people when cultivating the prevailing violent atmosphere of adventurism, inviting them to take part in the “real game” and win the blessings of Allah in the process. These young Palestinians, whom some in the IDF refer to as YEFs (young educated and frustrated) or “neo-Palestinians,” have contempt for all sources of authority: their parents, the Palestinian Authority, and the established terrorist organizations, not to mention Israel. Although their discourse focuses on basic human rights and the desire for an end to the occupation, they are uninterested in the framework for a solution and even less so in Israel’s easing of restrictions against the Palestinians. Prior to carrying out their attacks, some have demanded that no organization claim responsibility.

The sophisticated Israeli intelligence system has appeared helpless in the face of the attacks by lone individuals. The effective apparatus that was constructed to identify terrorist organization is useless against unorganized terrorism and independent decisions. The algorithms developed to identify Palestinians on the social networks expressing a desire to sacrifice their lives are also ineffective against the tens of thousands who currently proclaim this goal on a daily basis. Israeli deterrence likewise has no effect on the array of considerations of these attackers. Most of the terrorists presumably act under the assumption that they will not survive, but also know that their families will receive social honor and dignity, as well as a generous stipend from the Palestinian Authority (NIS 10,000-15,000 per month). Although Israel prevents the rebuilding of the homes of terrorists that were demolished, new homes have been built alongside the piles of rubble, and thus families are not left out in the street. Therefore, while home demolitions may provide the Israeli public with a sense of revenge, they have not contributed to deterrence. Perhaps expulsion of the families of terrorists to the Gaza Strip would produce a degree of deterrence, but for the moment, this idea has been blocked by Israel’s Attorney General.

Israeli policy has thus far managed to contain the phenomenon and prevent its spread, in part by allowing 120,000 Palestinians to continue to work in Israel and the settlements. The government likewise recently decided to grant work permits to 40,000 additional Palestinians. Overall, these individuals, who have no interest in losing their income, join

the 170,000 state employees of the Palestinian Authority and the 38,000 Palestinians serving in the PA's security apparatus. To be sure, three of the latter carried out attacks, but the majority – notwithstanding their being armed – simply wish to continue living their lives. Nonetheless, because the terrorist attacks are the product of atmosphere, the terms “wave of terrorism” or “round of violence” used by the media and the IDF to refer to the attacks are irrelevant. The violent atmosphere remains and will not dissipate anytime in the near future.

A look at Fatah's *Tanzim* organization, which is the largest armed group in the West Bank, is fascinating. For a few days, Tanzim members participated in the demonstrations taking place north of Ramallah. However, Palestinian Authority Chairman Abu Mazen quickly assembled the Fatah leaders in the West Bank and underscored that such events were not in the interest of the Palestinian struggle. Since then, tens of thousands of armed Tanzim members have remained outside this circle of violence, engaging in firefights with the IDF during the arrests in Qalandiya and the Jenin refugee camp, but not taking part in the attacks themselves. However, if the Tanzim does join the clash, Israel will find itself facing an armed intifada that will require it to reoccupy the cities of the West Bank and disarm the Tanzim. As of now, this has not happened. However, a number of chance incidents or the outbreak of a war of succession over the position of Abu Mazen could motivate the Tanzim to launch a campaign against Israel.

Hamas in Gaza has also remained outside the violence. Hamas has funded and glorified perpetrators and made instructional films on how to carry out stabbings, but has not initiated action from the Gaza Strip. Although the idea of resistance to Israel has not been abandoned, Hamas is in search of an arrangement that will fortify its position in the Gaza Strip. In the meantime, it continues to dig tunnels to be used when the right day arrives, and Israel attempts to develop the technological means to contend with the threat. Still, the longer Israel ignores the calls for an arrangement emanating from Gaza, the shorter the countdown to the next round of fighting will be.

Another group that may enter the clash comprises Arab citizens of Israel. Since the beginning of the events, nine Israeli Arabs have either carried out or attempted to carry out attacks. In addition, in 2015, 36 Arabs attempted to join the Islamic State; ten individuals are currently fighting in its ranks, and no doubt more will join them. However, most members of Israel's Arab population, who voice what they regard as obligatory calls of identification with the attackers, watch with sorrow as the Arab world descends further into a huge puddle of blood, and seek their futures within the framework of the Israeli state.

Who leads in the clash against Israel? First and foremost, this role is played by Palestinian residents of Jerusalem. Jerusalemites were those who initially set out to stab Jews in the struggle over the Temple Mount, and since then the attacks have continued, in part because carrying them out is not overly complicated. In the city that Israel has declared as eternally united, there is no separation between the Israeli and Palestinians populations. This means that every Palestinian from Kafr `Aqab or Sur Baher is capable of arriving armed to West Jerusalem. By annexing 20 Palestinian villages and towns around Jerusalem and granting their inhabitants Israeli identity cards, Israel incorporated 300,000 Palestinians who do not identify with the state and enjoy full freedom of movement. Some live in neighborhoods that are completely devoid of civil infrastructure and governance. Indeed, the Shua`afat refugee camp, which has 60,000 residents and lacks social services, an education system, and even trash collection, is just a ten minute drive from the Knesset. Yet this population are ticking time bombs.

What can Israel do? First, it can improve the separation between Israelis and Palestinians, which will serve to reduce the friction and the opportunities for attacks, primarily in Jerusalem and within the Green Line. Second, it can take measures vis-à-vis the Palestinian Authority aimed at changing the atmosphere: the IDF has pointed to northern Samaria and Jericho as two places where Israel could allow full Palestinian control. Third, it must improve its deterrence against lone individuals through expulsion to the Gaza Strip of the families of terrorists who express support for the attacks. This is a severe punitive measure that raises weighty legal and moral issues. However, if terrorists are aware that their actions will cause misery to their families, they will be more likely to refrain from carrying them out.

To date, the Israeli government has pursued a policy comprising aggressive rhetoric, containment, and minimal action. In the absence of an Israeli initiative that changes the atmosphere and results in separation between the populations in the main areas of friction, Israel's back will remain vulnerable to the knives of lone individuals.

