

# Motivation or Capabilities? Israeli Counterterrorism against Palestinian Suicide Bombings and Violence

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**ABSTRACT** Scholars have expressed doubts about the ability of counterterrorism to cope with suicide bombings, resulting in tit-for-tat or loop-like and repetitive violence and counter-violence without meaningful, let alone decisive results for the stronger side. Such skepticism may explain why so much of the recent literature on terrorism and insurgency is focused on the factors motivating the challenger rather than upon the insurgent's capabilities. This article demonstrates the extent to which Israeli offensive measures have reduced considerably the impact of Palestinian violence on the Israeli protagonist corroborating research that counterterrorism should adopt an offensive escalating strategy against the insurgent.

**KEY WORDS:** Israel, suicide-bombings, terrorism

Is it really true that counterterrorism leads to aimless and repetitive conflict as many scholars claim? Mia Bloom in a widely-cited article argues that Israeli counterterrorism motivated the Palestinian factions to increase terrorism and the support insurgents receive from wider society: 'Surprisingly enough, Israelis rallied around the extreme right, thinking that hawkish policies would deter future attacks. In fact, the long-term ramifications on the Palestinian polity will encourage rather than deter future attacks.'<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere in the article, Bloom is even more disparaging of Israeli offensive measures to reduce Palestinian terrorism: 'The Israelis and Palestinians appear to be in a dead-locked battle of assassination-suicide bombing-assassination-suicide bombing in an unending causal loop...encouraging yet more "martyrs".'<sup>2</sup> She

<sup>1</sup>Mia M. Bloom, 'Palestinian Suicide Bombing: Public Support, Market Share, and Outbidding', *Political Science Quarterly* 119/1 (Spring 2004), 80.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 84.

concludes, 'in the long run, the number of attacks will increase because groups vying to lead the Palestinians will use violence as their main source of recruitment and mobilization'.<sup>3</sup>

Bloom is hardly alone in focusing on the motivation of the insurgent as being crucial in explaining the intensity of violence and in questioning the presumed effectiveness of Israeli counterterrorist actions. According to Scott Atran, 'repeated suicide actions show that massive counterforce alone does not diminish the frequency or intensity of suicide attacks'.<sup>4</sup> Even Richard Boucher, then US State Department spokesperson under the hawkish Bush administration doubted the value of Israel's offensive moves, primarily targeted killings, when he stated in July 2001 that 'Israel needs to understand that targeted killings of Palestinians don't end the violence, but are only inflaming an already volatile situation and making it much harder to restore calm.'<sup>5</sup>

If counterterrorism indeed breeds more violence because it increases motivation among the insurgents in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as Bloom and others predicted, why then did suicide attempts decline from a peak in 2003 to 2004 by over one-third (from 184 to 119 attempts) and successful suicide attacks by over 40 percent (from 26 to 15)? Even more dramatically, why did the number of Israelis fatalities from suicide bombing and other forms of Palestinian violence drop by 75 percent (!) from its peak in 2002 within two years, leading, as the article will demonstrate, to a turn around in the Israeli economy?

The following article claims that it is not motivation among the insurgents that counts militarily or politically as much as their organizational capabilities. These in turn are largely determined by the opponent's counterterrorism moves. More specifically, it sets out to demonstrate the validity of the four following claims:

1. That Palestinian violence declined dramatically since its peak in 2002.
2. That none of the competing explanations that identify motivation as the chief cause behind the intensity and efficiency of the Palestinian insurgency – relative deprivation, vengeance, outbidding or motivation to spoil a peace process – sufficiently explain the decline both in the intensity and efficiency of Palestinian violence.
3. That what was at stake was a reduction of Palestinian capabilities.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>4</sup>Scott Atran, 'Mishandling Suicide Terrorism', *Washington Quarterly* 27/3 (Summer 2004), 67.

<sup>5</sup>Richard Boucher, State Department briefing, 2 July 2001, available at <[www.state.gov/t/pa/prs/dpb/2001/4656.htm](http://www.state.gov/t/pa/prs/dpb/2001/4656.htm)> quoted in Gal Luft, 'The Logic of Israel's Targeted Killing', *Middle East Quarterly* 10/1 (Winter 2003), 4.

4. And that the reduction in these capabilities was directly linked to successful Israeli counterterrorism.

Even if Israeli offensive moves, such as the killing of the two Hamas leaders Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and his successor Abd al-Aziz Rantisi in March and April 2004 increased the desire to engage in terrorism, Hamas and the other factions, battered by Israel, were forced to operate at a reduced level of efficiency. Eventually they were induced to accept unilaterally the *tahdiya* (a lull) in the fighting in March 2005, vindicating the argument that the insurgent's capabilities are far more important than motivation in explaining the damage wrought to the Israeli side or the political dividends achieved, and that these capabilities are largely determined by successful counterterrorism measures. Israel, by reducing Palestinian terrorism, was able to stop the contraction of Israel's economy, a potentially macro-strategic threat, and to rebound economically.

The article begins with a review of the literature assessing the importance of motivation relative to capabilities. It then proceeds to analyze the basic trends regarding Palestinian violence and its efficiency both in terms of the casualties the organizations suffered in carrying them out and the damage wrought to the Israeli side. To what extent motivation explains the decline in Palestinian terrorism is covered in the third part. The fourth section looks at how Israeli counterterrorism measures, mainly denying Palestinian insurgents in Judea and Samaria a sanctuary, affected the insurgents' organizational capabilities.

### Capabilities, Motivation and Terrorism

'Our revenge will come a hundredfold for the blood of Rantissi and Yassin.' promised a Hamas official after the killing of Hamas leader Abd al-Aziz Rantissi in April 2004.<sup>6</sup>

Though vengeance questionably might be the major rhetorical and propaganda device used by the terrorists themselves, psychological factors related to deprivation are often identified as the key reasons for collective violence. According to Attran, 'rising aspirations followed by dwindling expectations particularly regarding civil liberties are critical factors in generating support for suicide terrorism'.<sup>7</sup>

Vengeance, tit-for-tat dynamics and escalation have been suggested by Barry Weingast and Rui de Figueiredo, who have argued that

<sup>6</sup>'A Volcano of Vengeance – Fury as Israel Assassinate Second Hamas Leader', *The Australian*, 19 April 2004.

<sup>7</sup>Attran, 'Mishandling Suicide Terrorism', 67.

violence is often retaliatory. Palestinian suicide bombings are closely linked to Israeli actions: the massacre at the al-Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron by an Israeli settler killing over 30 worshipers in 1994, the opening of the tunnel beneath the western wall of the Temple Mount in 1996 that led to week-long clashes between Israel and Palestinian security forces, and targeted assassinations of Palestinian terrorist commanders such as Hamas engineer Yahya Ayyash in early 1996.<sup>8</sup>

If Weingast and de Figueiredo perceive terrorism and suicide-bombing in particular as being motivated by the vengeance, Andrew Kydd and Barbara F. Walter emphasize rationality in proposing that terrorism is largely used by the Palestinian opposition, Hamas and Jihad al-Islami (Islamic Jihad), as a means to spoil the prospects of peace negotiations just as they seem most probable and promising.<sup>9</sup> Terrorism makes the moderates on the Palestinian side seem weak, generating doubts among Israeli negotiators that political concessions will not bring the important dividends of peace and calm, thus reducing their motivations to conclude a deal with the Palestinian side.

For Pape, suicide bombing is also rational, aimed not necessarily at spoiling peace processes but in achieving strategic gains, primarily the withdrawal of foreign forces from contested territory. He cites numerous examples: the withdrawal of American and French military forces from Lebanon in 1984, Israeli forces from Lebanon in 1985, (more questionably) Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in 1994 and 1995, and the Sri Lankan government's willingness to create an independent Tamil state from 1990.<sup>10</sup>

Another explanation of the increase in suicide-bombing agrees that it is rational but disagrees with the source of that motivation. According to Bloom, violent organizations are not motivated strategically by the external arena as much as they are by the desire to outbid domestic rivals and increase their popularity on the home front. Hamas and the Jihad al-Islami, Bloom argues, used suicide-bombing in the recent wave of conflict to challenge the political hegemony of Fatah.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Rui de Figueiredo and Barry Weingast, 'Vicious Cycles: Endogenous Political Extremism and Political Violence' (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, Sept. 1998).

<sup>9</sup>H Andrew Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, 'Sabotaging the Peace: The Politics of Extremist Violence', *International Organizations* 56 (Spring 2002), 264.

<sup>10</sup>Robert A. Pape, 'The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism', *American Political Science Review* 97/3 (Aug. 2003), 343–61.

<sup>11</sup>Bloom, 'Palestinian Suicide Bombing: Public Support, Market Share, and Out-bidding', 80.

Not all agree with the overwhelming focus on motivation of the terrorists reflected in the recent literature on terrorism.<sup>12</sup> Instead, many scholars seek to focus on the effects and outcomes of terrorism and the reasons for its reduction or augmentation. Sandler and Arce's most recent work, in sharp contrast to the ideas expressed in the opening of the article, suggest that governments may be in error of favoring defensive counter-terrorist measures over offensive policies, especially when terrorists direct a disproportionate number of attacks at one government. Even though offensive policies tend to provide public benefits to all potential targets, they are not as extensively employed as less effective and more costly defensive measures.<sup>13</sup>

Strong offensive measures are also suggested by Arreguin-Toft in an article that tries to understand why in guerrilla or low intensity conflict there is a growing tendency over the past two centuries for the weaker side in the asymmetric conflict to win. He concludes much like Sandler and Arce – though on the basis of inductive rather than deductive analysis of historical data – that strong states should escalate in the form of direct offensive attacks against the guerrillas in order to prevail.<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, Weyland points out that the tough offensive-minded counterterrorism in Peru was very effective.<sup>15</sup> These

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<sup>12</sup>In addition to the articles on motivation already cited, see among others Scott Atran, 'Genesis of Suicide Terrorism', *Science* 299 (7 March 2003), 1534–40; Jean Paul Azam, 'Suicide-Bombings as Intergenerational Investment', *Public Choice* 122/1-2 (2005), 201–17; Eli Berman ' Hamas, Taliban and the Jewish Underground: An Economist's View of Radical Religious Militias', National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper No.w10004, Sept. 2003, available at <[www.nber.org/papers/w10004](http://www.nber.org/papers/w10004)> (accessed 26 Dec. 2004)>; Claude Berrebi, 'Evidence About the Link between Education, Poverty and Terrorism among Palestinians', available at <[www.cprs-alestine.org/polls/94/poll](http://www.cprs-alestine.org/polls/94/poll)>. (2003)>; Basel Saleh, 'Economic Conditions and Resistance to Occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: There is a Causal Connection' (2004), available at <[www.mafhoum.com/press7/197E14.htm](http://www.mafhoum.com/press7/197E14.htm)>; Eyad Sarraj, 'Suicide Bombers: Dignity, Despair, and the Need for Hope', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 31/4 (Summer 2002), 71–77; Yoram Schweitzer, 'Suicide Terrorism: Development and Characteristics', lecture presented at the International Conference on Countering Suicide Terrorism at ICT, Herzeliya, Israel, 21 Feb. 2000, available at <[www.ict.org.il/articles/articleDet.cfm?articleId=112](http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articleDet.cfm?articleId=112)>; Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: HarperCollins 2003).

<sup>13</sup>Daniel G Arce and Todd Sandler, 'Counterterrorism: A Game-Theoretic Analysis', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49/2 (April 2005), 183–200.

<sup>14</sup>Ivan Arreguin-Toft, 'How The Weak Win Wars', *International Security* 26/1 (Summer 2001), 95.

<sup>15</sup>Kurt Weyland, 'A Paradox of Success? Determinants of Political Support For [Peruvian] President Fujimori', *International Studies Quarterly* 44/3 (Sept. 2000), 481–502.

scholars would argue that responding forcefully and escalating the conflict in response to terrorist attacks do not create senseless tit-for-tat or loop-like processes but are likely to lead to reduced capabilities among the insurgents, to fewer human and material resources at their disposal, and finally, to reduced and less effective terrorism.

More specifically in the Israeli–Arab and Palestinian arena, Sprecher and Derouen note that in the context of interstate warfare, Arab military actions appeared to have been driven by Israeli military actions and seem to decrease in response to Israeli actions suggesting the effectiveness of Israeli offensive measures.<sup>16</sup> Steven David was one of the few to foresee the effectiveness of Israeli offensive moves at the peak of Palestinian suicide bombings, when he predicted that Israeli targeted killing would erode the terrorist infrastructure over time.<sup>17</sup> Much earlier, Bruce Hoffman in a specially prescient article published in 1994, warned that the ‘revolution in military affairs’ focusing on conventional and ballistic warfare, would have little if any impact on American military capabilities in countering terrorism, insurgency, or guerrilla warfare motivated by a religious imperative unless the United States military began expending greater resources and mind power to modifying its force structure and techniques for counterterrorism.<sup>18</sup> Catignani acknowledges Israeli counterterrorism but claims that it comes at the expense of long-term strategic thinking.<sup>19</sup> Israelis, in his view, expend far too much effort in scoring tactical points in the conflict with the Palestinians and too little on how to achieve macro-strategic goals.

This article sides with the latter analysts by claiming that Israeli counterterrorism which decreased Palestinian capabilities was more important in explaining *the actual effects of terrorism* than factors related to the insurgents’ motivation. Plotting trends in Palestinian violence in the low intensity conflict between Israel and the Palestinians since 2000 is an essential exercise to compare the salience of Israeli moves compared to Palestinian motivation.

<sup>16</sup>Christopher Sprecher and Karl Derouen, ‘Israeli Military Actions and Internalization-Externalization Processes’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46/2 (April 2002), 244–59.

<sup>17</sup>Steven R. David, ‘Fatal Choices: Israel’s Policy of Targeted Killing’, *Mideast Security and Policy Studies* No. 51 (Ramat-Gan: Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan Univ.), 7–8.

<sup>18</sup>Bruce Hoffman, ‘Responding to Terrorism [by the US] Across the Technological Spectrum’, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 6/3 (Autumn 1994), 366–90.

<sup>19</sup>Sergio Catignani, ‘The Strategic Impasse in Low-Intensity Conflicts: The Gap Between Israeli Counterterrorism Strategy and Tactics During the Al-Aqsa Intifada’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28/1 (Feb. 2005), 72.

## Measuring the Cost of Palestinian Violence

Overall Palestinian violence between September 2000 and March 2005, when all the major Palestinian factions accepted a 'lull' (*tahdiyya*) in the fighting, increased sharply in the first two years and then declined precipitously in 2003 and 2004. The sharpness of this rise and subsequent decline depends on the phenomenon being measured. It was most dramatic in those measures that assess the costs to the Israeli side. Looking at Israeli fatalities over the years one sees a surge in 2001, a dramatic peaking of fatalities in 2002 when Israeli deaths nearly doubled, followed by more than a halving of that number in 2003 and once again a further 50 percent decline in the subsequent year. Thus, Israeli fatalities (and casualties) were reduced from 452 fatalities in 2002 to 112 in 2004, a 75 percent reduction (see Table 1).

Plotting terrorist attacks rather than Israeli casualties produces a similar but modified curve. Terrorist acts peaked in 7,634 in 2001, declined to 5,176 in 2002 when Israeli casualties soared and declined once again to 3,941 in 2003. What is interesting is that total terrorist attacks hardly increased in 2004 compared to 2003 (3,941 to 3,841) despite the assassinations of Yassin and Rantisi.<sup>20</sup>

Regarding suicide bombings and attacks specifically the type of curve depends on whether one is counting all the attempted attacks, successful attacks and fatalities. Again when looking at the data in terms of the costs such suicide attacks imposed on the Israeli adversary, it is remarkably similar to the pattern registered for the effect on Israeli

**Table 1.** Israeli deaths from Palestinian violence in Gaza, West Bank and Israel

Year	Gaza	West Bank	Israel	Total
2000	11	32	4	47
2001	10	95	102	207
2002	25	196	231	452
2003	18	75	121	214
2004	38*	18	56	112
2005	15	14	24	53

\*Including two deaths in Israel as a result of Qassam rocket attacks from Gaza.

Source: Victims of Palestinian Violence and Terrorism since Sept. 2000 <[www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism+Obstacle+to+Peace/Palestinian+terror+since+2000/Victims+of+Palestinian+Violence+and+Terrorism+sinc.htm](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism+Obstacle+to+Peace/Palestinian+terror+since+2000/Victims+of+Palestinian+Violence+and+Terrorism+sinc.htm)>.

<sup>20</sup>*Palestinian Terrorism in 2005*, available at <[www.intelligence.org.il/eng/eng\\_n/pdf/palestinian\\_terror\\_e.pdf](http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/eng_n/pdf/palestinian_terror_e.pdf)>, 20.

fatalities as a result of all forms of terrorism; a surge of successful suicide attempts from 4 in 2000, 35 in 2001, rising to 60 in 2002, and then a sharp decline in the two subsequent years to the point that in 2004 there were 15 successful attacks, a 75 percent drop from the peak in 2002 and less than one-half the successful suicides carried out in 2001.

Almost exactly the same inverted u-curve appears when plotting for fatalities as a result of suicide bombings with a very sharp rise from 2001 to 2002 (from 85 to 220 fatalities) and then a sharp drop in the subsequent two years to 55 fatalities by 2004. Again one sees a 75 percent reduction in fatalities from suicide bombings at its peak two years later.

Diminishing effectiveness led to declining motivation, but it took time to produce such an effect. Measuring all attempted suicide attacks, one sees a peaking only in 2003 with 210 attempts declining much less steeply to 134 in 2004. The number of attempted suicide acts in 2004 was still nearly three times the number of attempts made in 2001 with 55 attempts. By 2005, however, it was down to 22. All in all, there was a marked drop in terrorist activity and a much sharper drop in damage Palestinian violence wrought against the Israeli side. This is true for violence in general and most of the specific forms of violence employed.

Palestinian insurgency did not only cost lives but also had a major impact on Israel's economy. For the first time since the 1948 war, hostilities and war led to an absolute contraction of the Israeli economy.<sup>21</sup> And although in the 1948 war the contraction lasted only one year, in the present hostilities it continued over two. Israel was transformed by the large-scale violence within the green line from a fast-growth country – in 2000 the gross domestic product (GDP) grew by eight percent, double the world average – to one characterized by absolute contraction during the first two years of the conflict when Israeli casualties from Palestinian violence reached its height (see Table 3). The effects were even more dramatic when measured on a per capita basis, with per capita GDP dropping by over six percent over the two years, from 18,358 US dollars in 2000 to 17,359 in 2002 (see Table 2).

To be sure, some of the downturn could be attributed to the global market crisis the high-technology sector faced towards the end of 2000 which in turn led to a downturn in the world economy. As indicated in the table below, GDP world growth slowed from four to one percent. One can safely assume that the crisis of the high-tech market probably

<sup>21</sup>Even in the 1948 war, GDP declined (by 3.1 percent) but almost doubled the following year in the following year as a result of mass immigration. See Haim Barkai, 'Hapeilut ha-Kalkalit Ha-Realit shel Milhemet Ha-Hatzmaut', in Alon Kadish, (ed.), *Milchemet Ha-Hatzmaut Tashah-Tashat: Diyun Mehudash* (Tel-Aviv: Misrad Habi-tachon 2005), 767.



**Table 2.** Israeli economic performance 2000–2004 and the world economy

World	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
GDP growth (annual %)	4	1	2	3	4
GDP per capita growth (annual %)	3	0	1	2	3
GDP per capita (constant 2000 US\$)	18,358	17,868	17,395	17,298	17,752
GDP per capita growth (annual %)	5	–3		–1	3

*Source:* *World Development Indicators* database.

had an even greater impact on Israel. Yet the high-tech crisis alone could hardly explain the variance between performance of the world economy and the absolute stagnation of the Israeli economy in 2001 and its three percent contraction on a per-capita basis compared to 0 percent growth in the world economy. Such trends could explain even less why Israel's economy worsened in 2002 compared to 2001 when the world economy began to improve. Whereas the world economy stabilized in 2001 and grew by two percent in the subsequent year, the Israeli economy continued to contract in 2002. The discrepancy was greater on a per capita basis, with Israeli per capita income declining by 3 percent in 2001–2002 and continued to decline in 2003 as well. Clearly the devastating impact of terrorism was related to where it took place. If previously, Israel managed to contain the violence to the periphery or even to enemy territory, since 2000, most of the casualties of terrorism occurred against civilians within Israel. This was especially true of suicide bombings: Between 2000 and the end of 2005, 86 percent of Israeli fatalities were civilian and the overwhelming percentage of casualties (89 percent) took place within the green line.<sup>22</sup>

### Gauging Palestinian Capabilities for Waging Violence

Palestinian organizations, judging from survey polls and data relating to violence, were highly motivated to engage in suicide bombings and other forms of lethal violence throughout the period between September 2000 and most of 2004. The problem was not a lack of motivation cited in the literature, but declining capabilities that led to reduced damage on the Israeli side.

Plotting the capability of any organization at war involves various measures of attrition and success. The ratio between killed among one's own ranks and those of the enemy is one such indicator. A worsening of

<sup>22</sup>*Suicide-bombing Terrorism during the Current Israel–Palestinian Confrontation (September 2000–December 2005)*, Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Center for Special Studies (CSS), Israel, 1 Jan. 2006), 21, 23.

the ratio is most likely to increase demoralization and recruitment among one's own ranks and increase morale and resolve on the other side. Attrition is also related to the insurgent's ability to replace the loss of successful combat leaders and fighters. Rapid loss is likely to hurt the organization's capabilities.<sup>23</sup>

*Morale* and *mobilization* are beyond doubt important elements in any attempt to sustain organized violence. So is *effectiveness*. Violent organizations are no different than business firms who seek maximum sales at minimum cost. The ratio between operations and casualties inflicted on the other side should be a suitable indicator.

Even as Israeli fatalities were rising, the Palestinians were already showing declining capabilities. Terrorist attacks peaked in 7,634 in 2001, declined to 5,176 in 2002 when Israeli casualties soared and declined once again to 3,941 in 2003<sup>24</sup> If one compares the ratio between total acts of Palestinian violence to Israeli fatalities, that is to say *the effects* of Palestinian violence on the Israeli side, Palestinian overall efficiency peaked radically in 2002 (.09 fatality per act of violence), declined in 2003 (to .05) and plummeted in 2004 (.03), roughly the efficiency rate of 2001.

Though the incidence of total suicide operations, (attempted as well as successful), was slightly different from the incidence of overall terrorist acts, with the number of suicide operations increasing into 2003, nevertheless the efficiency of these operations reveals striking similarities to the pattern of overall terrorism. Both the ratio of

Table 3. Measuring the effectiveness of suicide bombings

Year	Failed Suicides	Successful Suicides	Total Suicide Attempts	Fatalities	Ratio of Successful to Failed Suicides	Ratio of All Suicide Events to Israeli Fatalities
2000	0	4	4	0		
2001	20	35	55	85	1.80	1.6
2002	112	60	172	220	0.50	1.3
2003	184	26	210	142	0.14	0.7
2004	119	15	134	55	0.13	0.4
2005	15	7	22	23	0.47	1.1

Source: *Palestinian Terrorism in 2005*, available at <[www.intelligence.org.il/eng/eng\\_n/pdf/palestinian\\_terror\\_e.pdf](http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/eng_n/pdf/palestinian_terror_e.pdf)>, 20–22.

<sup>23</sup>Amir Oren, 'The Dangers That Did Not Concern the Voter', *Haaretz*, 31 March 2006.

<sup>24</sup>*Palestinian Terrorism in 2005*, 20–22.

successful to failed suicides as well as the ratio to all suicide events to fatalities peaked in 2001, declined precipitously in 2002 and then dropped further in 2003 and 2004. There was a drop in the efficiency of suicide bombing by 75 percent from 1.6 fatalities to attempted suicide bombing in 2001 to 0.4 fatalities in 2004 (see Table 2). In 2005, mostly after the lull, there was a radical drop in the number of attempted and successful suicides. The killing power of suicide-bombing increased once again in 2004 as both attempted and successful bombings decreased in 2004, indicating that a more selective and discriminating policy on the part of the militant groups leads to greater efficiency. It also suggests that terrorism in the absence of negotiations and settlement can perhaps be reduced to the level with which a state and society can cope but not be entirely eliminated.

One of the major indications of the growing human costs borne by Palestinian organizations is the increasing number of top military and political personnel lost targeted and killed in Israeli surgical attacks from the air (mostly in Gaza) and by undercover special forces operating in Judea and Samaria after the two offensives allowed Israeli forces to enter Palestinian localities at will. As a recent study demonstrates, although the suicide bombers were usually peripheral in the organization to which they were recruited, this was the hardly the case of those targeted by Israelis, the overwhelming percentage of whom were not only considered key operatives in the organization by the Israelis but typically acknowledged as such by the Palestinian organizations themselves after they were killed.<sup>25</sup> Rarely did the Palestinians accuse the Israelis of hitting 'the wrong man'. To the contrary, biographical and eulogizing material often enhanced his importance to the organization beyond Israeli justifications for targeting him.

According to a Palestinian source, there were 209 targeted killings until the end of 2004.<sup>26</sup> Though targeted killings reached their peak in 2002 with 78 Palestinians assassinated just as the effectiveness of Palestinian terrorism reached its height, Israel continued to pursue this means as the effectiveness of Palestinian terrorism declined in a manner hardly commensurate with that decline (see Table 4). Thus, if from 2003 to 2004 fatalities from Palestinian terror declined by 36 percent, the number of those killed as a result of targeted killing declined by less than four percent (from 57 to 55 targeted killings). This relentlessness to employ targeted killing also indicates the growing asymmetry between Israeli military and intelligence capabilities, which improved,

<sup>25</sup>Asaf Zussman and Noam Zussman 'Targeted Killings:

Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Counterterrorism Policy', *Bank of Israel Discussion Paper No. 2005.02* (Jan. 2005), 4–5.

<sup>26</sup>See <[www.phrmg.org/aqsa/list\\_of\\_assassination\\_english.htm](http://www.phrmg.org/aqsa/list_of_assassination_english.htm)>.

**Table 4.** Israeli targeted killings 2000–2005

Year	Targeted Killings
2000	9
2001	31
2002	78
2003	57
2004	55
2005	33

*Source:* List of Palestinians who were assassinated during the al-Aqsa Intifada, <[www.phrmg.org/aqsa/list\\_of\\_assassination\\_english.htm](http://www.phrmg.org/aqsa/list_of_assassination_english.htm)>

compared to Palestinian capabilities, which declined. Even after the lull, Israel was reluctant to give up targeted killing and though the number of Palestinians assassinated declined appreciably in 2005 (from 55 to 33), the decline in total Israeli fatalities was appreciably greater (from 115 to 54).<sup>27</sup>

### **The Effect of Palestinian Motivation on Palestinian Violence**

Two questions arise from the brief survey of attempted and actual Palestinian violence: (1) Can Palestinian motivation according to any one of the competing theories focusing on motivation explain the intensity of Palestinian terrorism as described above? (2) Can motivation explain the Palestinians' shrinking capabilities and their effect on the Israeli protagonist?

Least convincing in explaining either the intensity of Palestinian violence or its effectiveness are motivational variables related to frustration and deprivation. One can hardly believe that the collective psychology of Palestinians improved so significantly as to explain so great a reduction in terrorist attempts in general and suicide bombings in particular.

Looking at the significant factors influencing the collective well-being of the Palestinians suggest that there should have been a leveling or even an increase in Palestinian violent operations. According to deprivation theory, resentment soars after an improvement in the situation due to rising expectations. The Palestinian economy in 2003 had improved by six percent after average Palestinian income had dropped by one-third and the overall unemployment rate rose from 11 to 25 percent from 2000 levels before the outbreak of widespread

<sup>27</sup>*Palestinian Terrorism in 2005*, 8.

violence.<sup>28</sup> It worsened once again in 2004. According to the theory, 2004 should have been characterized by an increase in attempted violence. Nor did employment in Israel and the settlements suggest an improvement in the situation to account for why a marked increase in terrorism did not take place. Though employment in Israel had increased after the two offensives in the spring and summer of 2002, it remained constant through mid-2004.<sup>29</sup>

Nor was Israel's military presence in the West Bank/Judea and Samaria significantly less onerous than before. Restrictions on movement create anxiety and frustration for Palestinians. There was, however, little improvement between 2002 and 2004 on that score; 757 barriers of all kinds restricted Palestinian movement in the West Bank in October 2003 dropping slightly to 719 in November 2004.<sup>30</sup> Military forays into Gaza, either into the towns and refugee camps of Rafah and Khan Younis that were located near the soon-to-be evacuated Israeli settlements in the Katif bloc in the south, or into the Beit Hanun area in the northern part of the Gaza strip, in fact increased in response to the growing number of rockets launched at Israeli localities within green line Israel. And even though Palestinian fatalities declined, they hardly paralleled the decline in attempted and successful suicide bombings, particularly between 2003 and 2004 (see Tables 3 and 5). The decline in Palestinian fatalities by less than five percent and a similar reduction in restrictions on freedom of movement between 2003 and 2004, can hardly explain the 36 percent reduction in the total number of suicide attempts during that year.

**Table 5.** Palestinian deaths, 28 September 2000 to 25 September 2004

Year of Intifada	Dates	Number Killed
1	Sept. 2000–Sept. 2001	714
2	Oct. 2001–Sept. 2002	1,195
3	Oct. 2002–Sept. 2003	727
4	Oct. 2003–Sept. 2004	698
Total		3,334

*Source:* <[www.palestinemonitor.org/new\\_web/4\\_years\\_intifada\\_anniversary.htm](http://www.palestinemonitor.org/new_web/4_years_intifada_anniversary.htm)>.

<sup>28</sup>World Bank Report: Palestinian Economy Remains Stagnant After Four Years of Intifada' (2004), available at <<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWESTBANKGAZA/Resources/wbgaza-4yrassessment.pdf>>, 11.

<sup>29</sup>World Bank Report: Palestinian Economy Remains Stagnant After Four Years of Intifada', 12.

<sup>30</sup>Figures derived from maps accessed from <<http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/opt/>>.

Deprivation theory is even less useful in explaining the effectiveness of Palestinian violence. As noted, Israeli casualties of Palestinian violence had declined by 75 percent by 2004 from its peak in 2002. Palestinian frustration remained constant or perhaps even increased until at least the death of Yasser Arafat in November 2004.

The 'spoiler' thesis fares only slightly better in explaining the variation in the intensity of Palestinian violence. As we saw, overall Palestinian violence declined from its peak in the spring of 2002 and then stabilized in 2003–2004. Bloom had already critiqued the failure of the explanation during the upsurge of violence when 'a significant increase in attacks in March 2002 took place against a political backdrop with few substantive peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority – limiting the explanatory power of the spoiler rationale to explain this phenomenon as a whole'.

According to spoiler thesis, violence, principally by Hamas and the Jihad al-Islami which objected to any peace process, should have *increased* beginning with the summer of 2002 when President Bush for the first time committed the United States to the establishment of a Palestinian state in June 2002. This commitment became the basis for a peace process called the Road Map in September 2002, undersigned by United States, the United Nations, the European Union and Russia, which aimed at establishing a Palestinian state within three years. The opposition should have been especially keen on increasing terrorism since the Road Map stipulated the suppression of such activity as a prelude to advancing in the negotiation process.

Political developments within the Palestinian Authority (PA) as well should have spurred the opposition faction, Hamas and the Jihad al-Islami into increasing terrorist attacks and play the role of the spoiler. In September 2003, Arafat bowed to international pressure and agreed to create the new position of prime minister for Mahmoud Abbas, who had been both a serious opponent of a violent uprising and an ardent dove. One could claim in defense of the thesis that Abbas was perceived as weak and that therefore terrorist actions would not have harmed the trust of the target government in Abbas, which in any way was very low.<sup>31</sup>

Violent attempts by both Hamas and the Jihad did increase in 2004. Hamas in that year perpetrated 555 terrorist attacks compared to 281 in 2003, an almost 200 percent increase. Islamic Jihad perpetrated 106 attacks compared to 71 the previous year.<sup>32</sup> Of course some of the increase in attempts at violence by Hamas may have been motivated by vengeance as well, especially the killing of its leaders leaders, Yassin

<sup>31</sup>Kydd and Walter, 'Sabotaging the Peace: The Politics of Extremist Violence', 265.

<sup>32</sup>'2004 Terrorism Data', available at <<http://www.imra.org.il/story.php3?id=23521>>.

and Rantisi. Yet even if the theory does have credibility in explaining motivation, it can hardly account for declining performance levels, especially after the Arafat's death and the staging of elections to the presidency in January 2006, when Hamas and Jihad al-Islami should have been worried about the possibility of the renewal of the peace process. Instead, they accepted the lull (*tahdiyya*) and Hamas at least, more or less maintained it despite repeated Israeli strikes against Palestinian factions.

Even less can such striking increases in Hamas and Jihad attacks in 2003 and 2004 be explained by internal competition and outbidding at least according to the indicators Bloom proposes – support for suicide bombing and the popularity of the factions over time. Regarding the first indicator, support for suicide attack, there was in fact a slight reduction of support in suicide bombing registered in June 2004 (62 percent) compared to 65 percent in October 2003 so that this indicator can hardly explain the *increase* in violent attacks by Hamas and Jihad al-Islami. Nor does the second indicator explain the radical increase. To recall, according to the outbidding argument, factions, particularly, Hamas and Jihad, should have increased suicide attacks during periods of declining popularity, yet the popularity (in reality trust) of Hamas only dropped slightly (from 23.0 percent in 2003 to 21.7 percent in 2004, while the popularity of Jihad remained constant or even increased (5 to 5.5 percent).<sup>33</sup>

Even more critically, trust in Fatah, the major opponent of Hamas, declined even more than the trust for Hamas itself (29 to 26.4 percent). In other words the gap between those trusting Hamas most compared to Fatah actually narrowed, reducing the incentive of the former to engage in terror in order to outbid its opponent. In any event, neither of these indicators can explain why Hamas terrorist attacks nearly doubled from 2003 to 2004 or why in light of this decline in support for Fatah, the number of attacks it perpetrated actually declined from 117 in 2003 to 97 in 2004 when the organization should have increased the number of attacks to outbid its religious opposition on the Right.<sup>34</sup>

A somewhat related argument that Hamas increased terrorist attacks to assert its predominance in Gaza in light of pending Israeli plans to withdraw from Gaza would hardly be convincing. If that were so, why did Hamas accept the *tahdiya* six months before Israeli troops were scheduled to withdraw from Gaza?

<sup>33</sup>JMCC polls June 2002–June 2004 available at <[www.jmcc.org/publicpoll/results.html](http://www.jmcc.org/publicpoll/results.html)>.

<sup>34</sup>*Palestinian Terrorism in 2005*, 18.

Vengeance may have been part of the reason for the dramatic increase in attacks by Hamas. It aimed at harming the Israeli economy as well.<sup>35</sup>

How aware the Palestinian factions were of the economic impact of terrorism is attested by the articles which appeared on the unofficial Hamas Internet site. Articles entitled 'Zionist official says Israel was on verge of economic collapse'<sup>36</sup> and 'Zionist writer: Palestinian intifada exhausted us',<sup>37</sup> demonstrated the organization's intimate knowledge that terrorism was indeed punishing the Israeli economy. The economic facts that came to light in the course of 2002 and 2003 should have motivated the Palestinian movements even more in continuing their offensive against Israel. Yet the effects of Palestinian terrorism began to decrease just as these and other articles were disseminated, suggesting that the decrease was not due to lack of motivation but rather to sharply reduced Palestinian capabilities as a result of effective Israeli offensive and defensive moves against Palestinian organizations.

### **Denying Sanctuary: Israeli Counterterrorism and Palestinian Capabilities**

Analyzing Israeli fatalities on a monthly basis in 2002 when Palestinian terrorism peaked offers one of the most telling indicators of the effectiveness of Israeli counterterrorism in reducing Palestinian capabilities (see Table 6). A turn of the tide in terms of the effectiveness of Palestinian violence was registered after the two Israeli offensives conducted in March ('Shield') and June 2002 ('Determined Path') in areas 'A', during which the major West Bank towns under the jurisdiction of the PA were temporarily reoccupied and then continuously penetrated and policed.<sup>38</sup> Palestinian fighters lost any temporary sanctuary they formerly enjoyed as Israeli troops pursued them without respite.

<sup>35</sup>In fact, the analysis I presented on the impact of the Palestinian violent Intifada is basically summarized in a special report the Hamas publicized at the end of Sept. 2003 commemorating the third anniversary of the outbreak of violence. See 'Qira'a Daqiqa li-A'thar al-Intifada 'ala al-Ihtilal al-Sahiyuni', available at <[www.palestine-info.net/arabic/spfiles/4th\\_year/intefada1.htm](http://www.palestine-info.net/arabic/spfiles/4th_year/intefada1.htm)>. September 26>. The report estimates correctly that GDP per capita declined by six percent in the first two years of the Intifada.

<sup>36</sup>See [www.palestine-info.co.uk/am/publish/article\\_757.shtml](http://www.palestine-info.co.uk/am/publish/article_757.shtml), dated 19 April 2003.

<sup>37</sup>See <[www.palestine-info.co.uk/cgi-bin/am/exec/search.cgi?keyword=israeli%20economy&cat=&template=search%2Fsearch\\_results.html&perpage=10&start=11](http://www.palestine-info.co.uk/cgi-bin/am/exec/search.cgi?keyword=israeli%20economy&cat=&template=search%2Fsearch_results.html&perpage=10&start=11)> dated 23 Feb. 2003.

<sup>38</sup>For an excellent analysis of the March offensive and indeed on the tactical novelties of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), see Catignani, 'The Strategic Impasse in Low-Intensity Conflicts', 63–67.



**Table 6.** Israeli casualties (dead and wounded) October 2001 to September 2002

	West Bank		Gaza		Israel Proper		Total	
	Dead	Wounded	Dead	Wounded	Dead	Wounded	Dead	Wounded
Oct. 2001	3	5	2	14	10	40	15	59
Nov. 2001	3	2	2	5	8	101	13	108
Dec. 2001	12	27	0	5	26	78	38	110
Jan. 2002	3	2	0	0	13	39	16	41
Feb. 2002	20	40	6	4	5	12	31	56
March 2002	26	30	13	26	91	486	130	542
							135*	
6 month total	67	106	23	54	153	756	243	916
April 2002	33	40	2	8	16	106	51	154
May 2002	6	5	1	0	23	191	30	196
June 2002	9	9	3	4	46	155	58	168
July 2002	16	16	1	0	13	118	30	134
Aug. 2002	4	2	1	0	11	67	16	69
Sept. 2002	6	8	0	0	7	51	13	59
6 month total	74	80	8	12	116	688	198	780

These offensives allowed a substantial increase in preventive arrests. As long as the total number of detainees increased moderately (from 1,446 detainees in January 2001 to 1,969 the following year, a 36 percent rise), both the incidence of terrorism and the efficiency of suicide-bombings increased. When, however, preventive arrests shot up to 2,682 by April 2002 just after the first offensive and to 4,694 by January 2003, a 128 percent increase within a year, the incidence of Palestinian terrorism began to decline and so did the efficiency of suicide bombings largely because of increased accessibility to the suspects.<sup>39</sup>

A comparison between violent attacks in the West Bank and Gaza offers an even more striking confirmation of the importance of Israeli offensive and preemptive measures of denying Palestinians a sanctuary. In the West Bank, where Palestinians were denied a sanctuary, terrorists attacks more than halved from 2,089 to 1,025 from 2002 to 2003. The number of attacks dropped to 841 in 2004, just over one-third of the number that took place two years previously. By contrast, in Gaza, where Palestinians enjoyed a continuous though porous sanctuary, there was almost no decline in the number of attacks from 2002 to 2004 (2,906 to 2,771 attacks).<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Data from <[www.btselem.org/english/Statistics/Detainees\\_and\\_Prisoners.asp.asp](http://www.btselem.org/english/Statistics/Detainees_and_Prisoners.asp.asp)>

<sup>40</sup>*Palestinian Terrorism in 2005*, 18.

Comparing Israeli fatalities in the West Bank to those in Gaza between 2002 and 2004 demonstrates in even starker relief the importance of offensive moves and the denial of sanctuary (see Table 1). Whereas Israeli fatalities during this period declined by over 90 percent, from 196 to 18 (!), in Gaza Israeli losses actually increased from 25 to 38 fatalities.

Not all offensive measures were equally effective, at least in the short term. Contrary to the expectations of the Israeli military, the use of targeted killing was uniformly distributed between Gaza and the West Bank. Thus, between the outbreak of hostilities and 25 September 2004, 44.8 percent of the targeted killings took place in Gaza, roughly proportional to Gaza's share of the total Palestinian population in Gaza and the West Bank.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, violence increased in Gaza and decreased precipitously in the West Bank during this period, indicating that targeted killing cannot explain the variation in trends of violence between these two areas. Daniel Byman, however, suggests that in the long run, targeted killings, especially those directed against the political leadership, have a major effect. After all, Hamas leaders made reaching a ceasefire contingent on stopping targeted killings and then went on to accept a unilateral 'lull' even in the face of an escalated Israeli response against the Palestinian factions.<sup>42</sup>

### Comparing Offensive and Defensive Measures in Reducing Palestinian Capabilities

Israel, however, did not only react offensively but also hardened its defenses, raising the question as to how much the reduction of Palestinian capabilities was the result of offensive as compared to defensive measures.

Some of the decline in casualties within Israel could also be the result of defensive measures, principally the building of the barrier in Judea and Samaria, which though adumbrated by (Israeli) Minister of Police Shahal in 1995,<sup>43</sup> reached the construction stage only in the summer of 2002 after Palestinian terrorism reached its zenith. All of the prime

<sup>41</sup> <[www.palestinemonitor.org/new\\_web/4\\_years\\_intifada\\_anniversary.htm](http://www.palestinemonitor.org/new_web/4_years_intifada_anniversary.htm)>. See also Edward Kaplan, Alex Mintz, Shaul Mishal and Claude Sambani, 'What Happened to Suicide Bombings in Israel? Insights from a Terror Stock Model', *Studies in Conflict and Terror Studies* 28/3 (May-June 2005) 234.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel Byman, 'Do Targeted Killings Work?' *Foreign Affairs* 85/2 (March-April 2006), 101-2.

<sup>43</sup> Orit Galili, 'The Ministry of Police Has Drawn Plans to Separate Israel from the Territories', *Haaretz Supplement*, 26 Jan. 1995.

ministers from the time the plan had been introduced – Rabin, Peres, Netanyahu and even Barak (who first introduced the concept of separation) procrastinated in its implementation. Many Israeli politicians, especially on the Right, felt that the creation of a continuous barrier would compromise Israel at the negotiating table with the Palestinians.<sup>44</sup>

Work began on the first part of the route, running from Salem, the northernmost point of the Arab Triangle, an area inhabited within the former armistice line by Israeli Arab Palestinians and to the east by Palestinians under the Palestinian Authority, to Elkana, east of the northern reaches of the Dan region, Israel's most populous zone.<sup>45</sup> The choice to begin with this section of the route (about 100 km) in length, as part of a much longer 500 kilometer project was obvious. Northern Samaria, principally Jenin, Nablus and Tulkarm, were the major centers of terrorist operations, especially suicide bombings, while the inhabitants of Israeli towns closest to the former green line (Netanya and Hadera) were their principle victims.<sup>46</sup> A further extension running northeast to close off the West Bank from northern Israel was completed in December 2003 creating a barrier between the two towns of Nablus and Jenin which produced the most suicide bombers and two Israeli towns, Afula and Beit Shean that had suffered several suicide attacks.<sup>47</sup>

Nevertheless, one must note that a greater reduction of fatalities occurred among Israelis living on the West Bank (from 196 deaths in 2002 to 18 in 2004 amounting to 90 percent) where they did not enjoy a continuous barrier with sensors than within Israel (from 231 to 56 or 75 percent), suggesting once again the effectiveness of offensive actions over defensive actions (see Table 1). As Ben-Israel, Setter and Tishler point out: it is more important to act against the leadership of terrorist organizations than against the activists in the field, and it is more effective to act against key activists playing a role in producing terrorism than against the terrorists who actually carry it out. By the same principle, it is more effective to prevent a terrorist from entering

<sup>44</sup>For more general analysis on these aspects see Michael Kobi and Amnon Ramon, *Around Jerusalem: General Background and Ramifications on the Functioning of the Metropolitan Zone Surrounding It* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for the Study of Israel 2004) in Hebrew.

<sup>45</sup>Diana Bechor, 'The Cabinet Approved the Route of the Separation Fence, *Ynet*, 14 Aug. 2002.

<sup>46</sup><[www.securityfence.mod.gov.il/Pages/ENG/purpose.htm](http://www.securityfence.mod.gov.il/Pages/ENG/purpose.htm)> (accessed 13 Dec. 2005).

<sup>47</sup>'Data on the Separation Barrier – April 2004', available at <[www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org)>.

one's population centers than to attempt to stop him while he is already carrying out his 'mission'.<sup>48</sup>

Another way of evaluating the relative importance of the fence compared to offensive moves is to compare the number of fatalities and wounded during the period between the two large offensives and the completion of the first part of the fence, from June 2002 to August 2003, with a similar period after the completion of the fence. If the reduction in casualties is greater in the first period before the fence was completed than in the second after the completion of the fence, one can surmise that offensive moves are more effective than the fence. The findings are hardly conclusive: fatalities decreased from 274 deaths in the period of the two large assaults to 107 just before the completion of the fence, a 61.5 percent reduction in the course of the year. In the subsequent year after the building of the permanent obstacle it declined from 107 to 42, a 60.1 percent reduction.

Other forms of defensive hardening might have also played a role in reducing Palestinian violence. By early 2002, the overwhelming majority of all public institutions and private businesses in predominantly Jewish areas in Israel who directly serviced clientele provided security guards at the entrances to these establishments.<sup>49</sup> Such an arrangement, however, could not be imposed on each and every bus. Instead, transportation guards move from bus to bus and route to route, while mobile car patrols protect the bus stops. Even less protected are the open spaces – squares or roads – in which the police provide overall protection. One would expect that if such defensive measures were indeed a deterrent, there would be a shift of attacks away from shopping malls, restaurants and other protected spaces to less protected spaces such as buses, and an even greater shift to road attacks and attacks in open spaces over time.

The evidence, however, is far from conclusive; shootings which mostly took part in the open, less protected spaces declined by 77 percent from 2001 to 1,198 in 2004 (until the end of September 2004) compared to a 75 reduction in suicide bombings which usually took place in protected or semi-protected areas.<sup>50</sup> Nor were there many cases in which attackers were apprehended or obstructed by purely

<sup>48</sup>Isaac Ben- Israel, Oren Setter, and Asher Tishler, 'R&D and the War on Terrorism: Generalizing the Israeli Experience', in Andrew James, (ed.), *Science and Technology: Policies for the Anti- Terrorism Era* (Oxford: IOS Press forthcoming).

<sup>49</sup>Dafna Shayek, 'Meavtehim beMosdot Zibbur uveAsakim Pratiim' [Guards in Public Institutions and Private Enterprises], *Hakneset-Merkaz HaMekar vevaMeida* First Draft, April 2003, 5, [www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/docs/m01005.doc](http://www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/docs/m01005.doc).

<sup>50</sup>'Five Years of Violent Confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians: Data and Characteristics', <[www.intelligence.org.il/eng/eng\\_n/pro\\_13\\_10\\_e.htm](http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/eng_n/pro_13_10_e.htm)>.

defensive measures such as roadblocks or guards. This meant that once on the road, the attacker was likely to get to his or her target.

### From Suicide-Bombing to Less Effective Qassam Rockets

Forcing the enemy to undertake less effective means of violence is one more indication of the effectiveness of Israel's counterterrorist tactics. As Ender and Sandler's seminal work pointed out over a decade ago, perpetrators of organized violence substitute with new techniques of violence to replace those that are no longer efficient.<sup>51</sup>

Looking at data regarding the means of violence employed by the Palestinians in the Gaza arena clearly demonstrated that suicide bombings declined in the face of both offensive and defensive measures such as the barrier completed along the green line in Judea and Samaria and Gaza. And as suicide bombings became more difficult, Palestinian short-range missile and military mortar activity increased significantly compared to the other means (roadside bombs, suicide and car bombings, road side shootings). From 2003 to 2004, Qassam rocket attacks increased by nearly 300 percent (from 105 to 309), mortar attacks by nearly 200 percent (from 708 to 1,231) with declines registered for other types of violence, most notably the aforementioned decline in attempted suicide bombings and the 40 percent decline in successful suicide attacks (from 26 to 15).<sup>52</sup>

This substitution came at the expense of effectiveness. Whereas suicide attacks comprised less than one percent of the attacks between 2000 and 2005, they caused nearly half of Israeli fatalities since the outbreak of widescale violence in 2000 (525 of 1,048 fatalities). Qassam rocket and conventional mortar attacks have proved to be appreciably less effective. Over 610 Qassam attacks on Israel within the green line yielded only two fatalities between October 2001 when they were first fired, up to the end of 2004 and 11 in the following year. Launching Qassams relative to the fatalities it causes has also proven dangerous and costly to the Palestinians themselves; tens of Palestinian fighters have been killed launching them and some Palestinians have been killed when they misfire.<sup>53</sup> Significantly, all but one of the Qassam

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<sup>51</sup>Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, 'The Effectiveness Of Antiterrorism Policies: A Vector-Autoregression-Intervention Analysis', *American Political Science Review* 87/ 4 (Dec. 1993), 829–44. Isabelle Duyvesteyn, 'The Paradoxes of Terrorism: an Attempt at Theory' (paper presented at WISC Conference, Istanbul, Aug. 2005), 12.

<sup>52</sup>'2004 Terrorism Data', 7.

<sup>53</sup>For a recent article by a Palestinian analyst describing the use of Qassams as detrimental to Palestinian interests, see Umar Hilmi al-Ghawl: 'Su'al al-Yawm: Ayu Muqawama Nuridu?' *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 13 April 2006.

attacks have been launched from Gaza where Palestinian insurgents continued to enjoy the benefits of a sanctuary area.

Not only were hundreds of lives of Israelis saved as a result of Israel's successful offensive against Palestinian terrorism in general and Hamas terrorism in particular, it proved crucial in stemming continued economic contraction of the Israeli economy. The Israeli economy rebounded only when Israel succeeded in stemming the rise of terrorism in 2003, soon followed by a spurt of growth of four percent in absolute terms, and three percent on a per capita basis in 2004. To recall, in 2004, Israeli casualties more than halved once again.

### **Short- and Medium-Term Gains and Israel's Strategic Problem**

Israel might have prevailed against the insurgency in compelling most of the Palestinian factions to accept a unilateral lull in February 2005 in the short run, but it has far from eradicated Palestinian sources of violence in the long run, either militarily or politically. Militarily, the Palestinians have been far less successful in 2005 than in previous years at waging successful suicide-bombing but those they did carry out were more effective than in the previous year. This suggests that the infrastructure to plan and carry out acts of violence sufficient to engage much of Israel's standing army remains intact.

Politically, Israel's strategic situation, though it is arguably much better than the situation prevailing in the first stages of Palestinian violence when the United States clearly constrained Israel, remains problematic. The loss of control of the Palestinian Authority to factions and militias, the failure of Mahmoud Abbas to exercise decisive leadership as Arafat clearly possessed in the first years of the confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians and the assumption of Hamas to government coupled with its refusal to accept the existence of the Jewish state, has effectively foreclosed the Palestinian state option. Nor are the prospects very promising for resolving Israel's strategic impasse by 'a newly modified Oslo-type agreement or any other political resolution that will end the conflict', as Catignani in a recent article claimed.<sup>54</sup>

In fact, developments since Hamas taking power – the growing rivalry between the presidency and the government, the violence between the PA security forces loyal to the presidency, mainly Preventive Security in Gaza and the fighting force the Hamas government created, and the fighting between the two factions Hamas and Fatah – has only reduced the prospects of a Palestinian center able to come to an agreement with Israel, and more critically still, to

<sup>54</sup>Catignani, 'The Strategic Impasse in Low-Intensity Conflicts', 72.

implement an agreement once signed.<sup>55</sup> Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's decision to carry out a unilateral withdrawal from Judea and Samaria/the West Bank in addition to the one taken in Gaza in September 2005 is a reflection of this reality.

Yet unilateral withdrawal in the face of a disintegrating Palestinian polity will hardly secure stability as the increased crude ballistic salvos against towns and localities bordering or close to Gaza or the recent kidnapping of Israeli soldiers since the withdrawal from Gaza bear out. No fewer than 418 Qassams and Katyushas alone were fired between January and mid-June 2006 compared to 610 over the first three years they were launched (2001–2004).<sup>56</sup> Unilateral withdrawal from Judea and Samaria/the West Bank runs the risk of creating anew a sanctuary area for Palestinian terrorists when denial of such a sanctuary during the 2000–2005 hostilities had such a massive impact on reducing Palestinian terrorism.

Nor to date have the bordering states, Egypt and Jordan, seriously contemplated reverting to the roles they played before 1967 in administering the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. The prospects are high then that the areas populated by the Palestinians will become staging areas for increased violence in the future.

Looking more broadly, Israel's strategic environment is likely to be more complex than ever before. The threat of interstate conventional war, though seriously reduced since both the demise of the Soviet Union and the removal of Iraq as a potential threat, remains palpable because of Syria. Moreover, the reduced threat in the interstate conventional arena has been partially offset both by the growing nuclear threat Iran poses to Israel and the long-term prospects of increasing Palestinian and Hizballah low-intensity terror and crude ballistic capabilities that would place Israel under a form of perennial rocket siege.<sup>57</sup>

Optimists would say that though the situation is more complex today, it is hardly as grave to Israel as the threat posed by joint action by Israel's

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<sup>55</sup>Many of these issues, principally attacks by Fatah and security service personnel against Hamas cabinet and legislative council members are to be investigated by a special parliamentary committee. See 'Al-Tashri <i>Yuqarir Tashkil Lajna Barlimania li-Taqasi al-Haq'a'ig fi al-Ahdath al-Musifa bil-Diffa wal-Qutta', *Al-Quds*, 14 June 2006; 'Al-Tashri <i>Yabda al-Tahqiq fi Ahdath al-Shaghab fi Ramallah', available at <[www.palestine-nfo.net/arabic/palestoday/dailynews/2006/june06/13\\_6/details6.htm#7](http://www.palestine-nfo.net/arabic/palestoday/dailynews/2006/june06/13_6/details6.htm#7)>. On tensions between the Presidency and the Hamas government, see 'LiMatha Narfudhu al-Istifta' Ala Wathiqat al-Usra fi Sijn Hadarim', available at <[www.palestine-info.net/arabic/hamas/statements/2006/14\\_6\\_06\\_1.htm](http://www.palestine-info.net/arabic/hamas/statements/2006/14_6_06_1.htm)>.

<sup>56</sup>'News of the Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation', 1–14 June 2006, available at <[www.intelligence.org.il/eng/eng\\_n/pdf/t14june\\_e06.pdf](http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/eng_n/pdf/t14june_e06.pdf)> 14.

<sup>57</sup>As the present Hizballah-Israeli conflagration amply proves.

bordering states in the 1960s and 1970s. A comparison between the long-term prospects of increasing Palestinian terrorist capabilities, coupled with a nuclear-weaponized Middle East, with Israel's security challenges immediately after Egypt made peace with Israel in 1978, might lead to a more pessimistic assessment. Unfortunately, the establishment of a completely sovereign state of Palestine headed by Hamas, even if possible in the face of internal and external opposition, might pose greater dangers than the dangers of terrorism.<sup>58</sup> At the very least, effective Israeli counterterrorism provides Israel's leaders with the respite to take up political opportunities, if they arise, in the future.

## Conclusion

Most recent studies on political violence have focused on motivation. This study suggests that capabilities are far more important in explaining both the net effects of Palestinian violence inflicted on the other side and the political losses the Palestinians themselves incurred. Palestinian capabilities were largely dictated by the effective offensive and defensive measures employed by Israel's security forces. The article hopefully has demonstrated Israel's increasingly effective counterterrorism campaign leading to declining Palestinian capabilities. These capabilities declined despite continuously high-motivation levels among Palestinians to engage in terror activities in general, and suicide bombings in particular.

Rather than producing a tit-for-tat or loop-like confrontation, Israeli counterterrorism – mainly denying the Palestinians a sanctuary area in the West Bank – has reduced the effects of Palestinian violence considerably. Within two years of the peak level of Palestinian violence, the costs of such violence to the Israeli state and society dropped by 75 percent. This is hardly a mere statistic. The peak represented an unbearable strain upon a developed economy such as Israel. By 2004, as painful was the level of casualties on those targeted and their families, it was no longer able to prevent the rebound of the Israeli economy.

Theoretically, the Israeli case shows the robustness of arguments raised by Arreguin-Toft and Sandler and Acre and others that advocate strong offensive measures by the stronger side in asymmetric conflict. Not only have the paper's findings demonstrated the existence of a substitution effect Sandler and Enders had previously identified, (in fact a Hamas publication in Arabic extols its versatility in coming up with substitutes), it has also proven true for suicide bombings. Substitution

<sup>58</sup>Efraim Inbar and Shmuel Sandler, 'The Risks of Palestinian Statehood', *Survival* 39/2 (Summer 1997), 23–41.



appears when the efficiency of any particular means of violence declines. Suicide bombing was an especially lethal means of violence, so powerful that one can say that its effect blinded many scholars studying it. Yet Israel concocted remedies – intelligence, striking at key operatives, massive but surgical preventive arrests, building a continuous barrier – that reduced its efficiency. In this sense, suicide-bombing proved no different from any other terror tactic which is sensitive to overexposure in fighting a superior enemy. So far the substitutes the Palestinians have produced are not proving nearly as lethal.

This is not to suggest that the war against Palestinian terrorism can be decisively won and that war can be the only politics around. To the contrary, as the overall intensity and lethality of Palestinian violence in 2005 declined, its efficiency at reduced levels increased. This suggests that only a peace process or Israel's demise can end Palestinian violence. Yet, when such peace seems highly improbable, effective counterterrorism makes the conflict manageable and bearable. This is true not only for the Israeli side but for the Palestinians as well since effective counterterrorism also means in the long term more surgical treatment in targeting the foe.

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