

Defensive Shield Counterterrorism Accomplishments

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Brief Analysis

Operation Defensive Shield—the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF's) counterterrorism operation in the West Bank—aims to confiscate illegal weaponry and bombing materiel; destroy factories producing bombs and missiles; constrict the environment in which terrorists plan, prepare, and execute terror attacks; and, most important, apprehend the operatives behind the current terrorist offensive. The operation has come under increasing international fire for delivering only short-term benefits at what seems to be a disproportionately high human cost on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides. An analysis of the operation's success to date, however, clarifies not only the absolute necessity for such an operation, but also the scope of the operation's success in proactively disrupting terrorists' ability to target Israeli civilians. Moreover, a close look at the operation yields a plethora of disturbing evidence exposing the depth of the Palestinian Authority's (PA's) involvement in terrorism, including its links to terrorist groups such as Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades.

PA and Fatah-Related Groups

The IDF's April 15 arrest of Marwan Barghouti, head of Fatah and Tanzim in the West Bank, is the most recent example of Operation Defensive Shield's success. Barghouti, who served as the most senior official of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, planned or participated in numerous suicide bombings and shooting attacks, and is the highest-level official arrested to date. This development notwithstanding, the discovery of numerous documents tying Yasir Arafat and other Palestinian officials to known terrorists and the uncovering of caches of illegal weapons (that are in clear violation of Israeli-Palestinian peace agreements) yielded groundbreaking evidence of the depth of the PA's connection to terrorist activity. Within Arafat's Mukata'ah compound in Ramallah alone, IDF soldiers found scores of munitions, pistols, automatic rifles, and empty suicide bomber belts. In addition to these items, the IDF found a number of RPG launchers, which the PA is forbidden to possess under the terms of its agreements with Israel. The IDF also captured a large cache of counterfeit 100 and 200 NIS bills, along with the plates and material for creating additional bills and coins.

Also within Arafat's compound, the IDF found official correspondence between the office of Fuad Shoubaki, the PA's

chief finance and procurement officer, and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. The correspondence included procurement requests for bombs and ammunition, revealing that the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades is a bona fide group, with its own terrorist infrastructure and supply chain. Shoubaki, it should be remembered, was the primary PA figure behind the infamous Karine-A smuggling operation. Notwithstanding Arafat's promise to senior U.S. officials, Shoubaki was neither arrested nor interrogated, as reported by the official Palestinian news agency, Wafa.

Two other documents of note were also uncovered in Arafat's compound during the IDF raid. The first was a request for \$2,500 to be disbursed to senior Fatah/al-Aqsa terrorists Ra'ad el Karmi (on the wanted list Israel sent to the PA in June 2001), Zias Muhammed Dias (who perpetrated the bat-mitzva attack in Hadera), and Amar Qadan. The second document requested monetary aid for twelve known terrorists operating in Tulkarm. Both documents were signed by Arafat, highlighting his personal knowledge of and complicity in terrorist acts perpetrated by members of his own faction.

Over the course of Operation Defensive Shield, the IDF also arrested and interrogated a number of mid- and high-level terror operatives belonging to Fatah. For example, on April 10, the IDF arrested Zafer Abdallah Juad Abdallah Ramhan Rimawi, an officer in the Palestinian Preventive Security Services (PPSS). Rimawi, who admitted to being inducted into a Fatah terrorist cell in early 2001 and to remaining in contact with senior Fatah and Force 17 operatives, was personally responsible for a number of shooting attacks against Israeli civilians.

On April 10, Israeli security forces arrested Akram Kassam, a senior officer in Palestinian military intelligence, when the IDF entered Ramallah. During his interrogation, Kassam stated that parallel to his position within the PA, he was also a Hamas activist, serving in a liaison capacity between Hamas cells in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, respectively. Kassam was personally involved in shooting attacks on buses carrying soldiers and received \$12,000 from Hamas members in Gaza to establish a Hamas infrastructure in the West Bank.

In addition to the arrests of top Fatah officials and the discovery of documents linking Arafat to terror operations, the IDF found evidence of the close cooperation of Fatah with Hamas and PIJ, especially in Jenin. PIJ, for instance, provides aid to the families of Fatah activists killed. In a captured document outlining PIJ protocols, the IDF learned that Jamal Switat, Fatah's deputy head of preventive security in Jenin, informed the PIJ commander there of impending crackdowns and arrests, and provided weapons to both PIJ and Hamas.

Hamas and PIJ

On April 5, Israeli forces tracked down and killed a cell of six senior Hamas commanders who had escaped from the Jenin refugee camp to the nearby town of Tubas. The group included: Qais Adwan, responsible for recruiting and dispatching the bombers in the Passover and Sbarro pizzeria suicide attacks; Asraf Tamza Hamza Dragma, the Hamas military commander in Tubas; Sa'ab Hassin Ahmed Alwad, a Hamas operative in Tulkarm involved in the Matza restaurant bombing in Haifa; Magdi Mohammed Hussein Blasme, a chief deputy in charge of Qassam rocket production; Mohammed Ahmed Tawfiq Qamil, a Hamas bombmaker in Jenin; and Munkaz Mohammed Sa'id Soafta, a Hamas member in Tubas who has sheltered terrorist fugitives in his home.

Israeli forces also arrested Salim Mahmoud Salim Hajah, a senior Hamas operative in Bituniya, the site of the PPSS headquarters. Hajah managed the bomb factory responsible for the explosives used in the Sbarro bombing, and was an accomplice in the Tel Aviv Dolphinarium suicide attack. Hamas terrorist Billal Barghouti was also captured, and he admitted that after his participation in the Sbarro attack, he found refuge in the home of Fatah Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti, who armed him with a pistol when he left for another safe house.

Among the PIJ operatives apprehended in the course of Operation Defensive Shield are: Mahmoud Ahmed Mahmed Tawalbeh in Jenin, who masterminded a series of suicide bombings targeting Israeli civilians; and Tabaat Mardawi, a senior PIJ operative in Jenin wanted for carrying out at least twelve attacks, including suicide bombings, drive-by

shootings, and car bombings. Ali Zafour, a senior PIJ operative and leader of the organization in Jenin, was also arrested. Zafour, responsible for preparing explosives and mortar shells for the Tanzim cell directed by Abdel Karim Awais, is a close accomplice of Tawalbeh.

A document uncovered by the IDF also explains the mechanism for financial disbursement within PIJ. According to the document, Ramadan Shallah, the PIJ secretary-general in Damascus, transferred funds to Bassam al-Saadi, a senior PIJ activist in Jenin in charge of finances, who then distributed the funds to active terrorists and to the families of terrorists killed or arrested.

Analysis

Although Operation Defensive Shield has yielded an extraordinary amount of intelligence about Palestinian terrorist activities; destroyed factories fashioning explosives, mortars, and missiles; and confiscated many arms, its most significant accomplishment has been the taking of key terrorist operatives off the street. Documents seized in Arafat's compound prove that despite his multiple promises to U.S. officials, he not only refused to detain the thirty-six terrorists requested by Gen. Anthony Zinni, but authorized payment for some of them from PA coffers.

The current Israeli operation is a far cry from ending terror; if the Palestinians do not resume security cooperation with Israel and the United States, then terrorist groups will simply build new bomb factories, smuggle in new weapons, and recruit new commanders and operatives. Counterterrorism, however, is a form of conflict management, not conflict resolution. To bear any fruit, counterterrorism techniques must be employed as comprehensively, consistently, and cooperatively as possible.

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