

Palestinian Wave of Terror Wanes, but Shin Bet Warns to Be Leery

Is the current wave of Palestinian terrorism waning? The Israeli Shin Bet security agency's latest data says yes.

But the agency maintains that the Islamic Movement in Israel is still trying to stir violence on the Temple Mount holy site, and that terrorist groups plan to perpetrate large attacks against Israeli targets in the coming weeks. One of the chief concerns, the Shin Bet says, is that the current lull in violence is designed to conceal preparations for the next large wave of terror.

Speaking at Israel's weekly cabinet meeting on Sunday, the head of the Shin Bet research division told government ministers that there has been a dramatic decline in the number of Palestinian terrorist attacks in recent weeks. He added, however, that efforts to perpetrate complex attacks such as suicide bombings or abductions of soldiers still pose a concrete threat.

"The Shin Bet and the Israeli security forces have thwarted 290 substantial attacks, including 25 attempted abductions and 15 attempted suicide bombings," said the official, who remained anonymous. "Therefore, the success of the security forces is even greater."

Since Sept. 13, 2015, the Palestinian terror wave has claimed the lives of 34 people and injured more than 400 others. The attacks have mainly consisted of stabbings, shootings and car-rammings. Yet there were 20 terrorist attacks in March and there have been only three so far in April, compared to 78 substantial attacks last October, the Shin Bet official said.

"Israel's actions have convinced the Palestinian public that escalation is futile," he said, adding that "most of the terrorist attacks were perpetrated by young people. Some of the attacks were motivated by nationalistic sentiments, but most of them were personally motivated by things like financial distress or personal crises. ... Alongside these attacks, in recent months terrorist organizations, with an emphasis on Hamas, have been trying to perpetrate substantial attacks in Judea and Samaria and inside Israel in an effort to accelerate the escalation of violence."

The official stressed the security agency's "great effectiveness" in preventing Jewish terrorism, citing the arrests of the Jewish group that firebombed a Palestinian home in Duma last July, killing three members of the Dawabshe family.

"This also contributed to calming the escalation," he said.

At Sunday's meeting, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the Shin Bet's success in combating terrorism is evident.

"I say this with great caution because this trend could reverse," Netanyahu said. "But we know this [decrease in terrorism] has been achieved as a result of this government's aggressive, responsible and systematic policy. And I want to commend the IDF, Shin Bet and Israel Police for their implementation of this policy."

Separately, at Israel's annual commemoration ceremony for past presidents and prime ministers on Sunday, Netanyahu also remarked on the security situation, saying that the current wave of terrorism has been characterized by lone wolf attacks Israel is "not allowing terrorists to organize."

Netanyahu said that after Israel's Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, in which then-prime minister Ariel Sharon tried to crush terrorist infrastructure in Judea and Samaria, "the Palestinians realized that we will not hesitate to go deep in

order to restore security for the citizens of Israel. We are adhering to this principle: We will go anywhere, whenever necessary. We do it all the time, and the decline that we are witnessing in the number of terror incidents is, among other things, a result of this policy and the way it is implemented by the IDF, the Shin Bet and the Israel Police.”

Meanwhile, Netanyahu instructed Israeli security forces and the justice minister to “take action to expel Sheikh Raed Salah,” the head of the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel. Salah, a vocal critic of Israeli policy, has been accused of inciting to violence against Israel and has been imprisoned in Israel twice. In Sunday’s address, Netanyahu maintained that Salah was actively trying to stir up violence on the Temple Mount, three months after the Islamic Movement in Israel was outlawed.

“We have identified efforts by Salah to sow dissent in the area of the Temple Mount ahead of Passover. This man is a one-man powder keg,” Netanyahu said, recalling that Salah was supposed to begin serving an eight-month prison sentence last November, but that the sentence was postponed at his request.

“This man should be in prison,” Netanyahu said. {eo}

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