

# Targeted Killing during the Second Intifada: The Quest for Effectiveness

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## Targeted Killing during the Second Intifada: The Quest for Effectiveness

by  
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### INTRODUCTION

Targeted killing (TK) is the selective execution of terror activists by states. It is about striking terrorists on their way to attack (i.e., “ticking bombs”), and sometimes also the decapitation of terror organizations’ political or military leaders, who account for the ideological or political guidance of terror, or plan terrorist attacks and send others to carry them out. TK has various functions, ranging from prevention, preemption, and deterrence to punishment, revenge, and retribution.<sup>1</sup> It is carried out in various ways: firing missiles from attack helicopter gunships, gunning down activists in the streets, blowing up activists’ cars, using long-range sniper bullets, and other, sometimes highly sophisticated means.

Whereas in the past — for example, during the Reformation — assassinations organized by governments used to be the strategy or the tactic of the weak, the desperate, or the resourceless, and those who adopted it often tried to conceal it,<sup>2</sup> nowadays it is also used by the strong. The moral, legal, and pragmatic problems entailed in TK notwithstanding, this counter-terror method has also been used by Western democracies, such as the US and Israel in the framework of their struggle against terror challenges.<sup>3</sup> Both in the US and Israel TKs are no longer concealed.

When TK is carried out by a liberal democracy, legal and moral questions come under careful scrutiny by both the domestic and international communities. Is TK compatible with the principles of just cause, discrimination, proportionality, or respecting civil liberties such as the right to life and a fair trial? It is no wonder therefore that most of TK literature focuses on the moral and legal dilemmas it raises.<sup>4</sup> The realistic aspects of TK, particularly its effectiveness, are quite neglected. Clausewitz considered the removal of enemy leadership an important center of gravity that could bring about the enemy’s defeat at a relatively low cost, although he believed that three other centers of gravity, i.e. the destruction of the enemy’s army, the seizure of his capital, or the delivery of an effective military blow against his principal ally, were of greater importance or effectiveness.<sup>5</sup> In analyzing TK effectiveness, the debate between airpower strategists John Warden and Robert Pape is very helpful.<sup>6</sup> Although it did not develop in a TK-specific context, it provides relevant insights into the issue, as will be presented, below.

Works by Steven David, Asaf Zussman and Noam Zussman, Gal Luft, Michael Eisenstadt, Chris Toensing and Ian Urbina, Mordechai Kremnitzer, Michael Gross, Emanuel Gross, and Yael Stein are dedicated to the Israeli case, either exclusively or partially.<sup>7</sup> Most of these scholars defend TK on moral grounds, without hiding their skepticism concerning its effectiveness as a counter-terror method. Other works refer to Israeli TK within the framework of a more general discussion of Israel's anti-terror methods.<sup>8</sup> Daniel Byman has recently examined the pros and cons of TK policy for the US based on the Israeli experience, bringing into consideration the difference between the two countries and their circumstances.<sup>9</sup>

Israeli TKs during the second intifada are an ideal laboratory for examining TK policy, as TK has never been implemented in such a systematic, continuous, large-scale, and overt manner elsewhere. Two important characteristics distinguish between the TKs carried out during the second intifada and previous ones. First, Israel successfully targeted more than 203 terrorists, an unprecedented number relative to previous periods. Second, unlike prior TKs, Israel's targets were relatively low-rank operatives.<sup>10</sup>

This article explores whether or not Israel's use of TK during the intifada was an effective counter-terror method. The main arguments put forth are first, unlike the elimination of military leaders, which proved to be ineffective, the decapitation of Hamas's political and spiritual leaders seemed to have accounted for the organization's decision to suspend hostilities against Israel, which essentially meant the end of the second intifada. Second, no direct causal relationship can be proven between TK and the decline in successful anti-Israel Palestinian terror. Other major developments may have affected that decline no less than TK — particularly *Operation Defensive Shield* in mid-2002, when Israel regained control over the West Bank, and the construction of the security fence in the West Bank since late 2003.

The article will first, present Israel's TK policy. It then discusses TK's effectiveness in principle. Finally, it tests the effectiveness against the Israeli experience during the second intifada.

## **ISRAELI TK POLICY**

TKs during the second intifada were part of an overall offensive approach applied *vis-à-vis* Palestinian terrorists. Based on the assumption that there was no longer one front or one line of contact, Israel was carrying out dozens of simultaneous operations on the ground and in the air on a daily basis, including TKs, which were supposed to have multi-dimensional effects.<sup>11</sup> According to Byman, TKs were mostly attractive to Israelis as they satisfied domestic demands for a forceful response to Palestinian terrorism. Byman also believes that by bolstering public morale, the TKs helped counter one of the

terrorists' primary objectives — to reduce the faith of Israelis in their own government.<sup>12</sup>

Israeli TK policy could be considered a classical manifestation of post-heroic policy. The IDF (Israeli Defence Force) has been applying such policy since the late 1970s, both in Lebanon and in the territories, long before the concept was formulated by Edward Luttwak in reference to the post-Cold War US.<sup>13</sup> Post-heroic policy has two main rules. The first rule, which Luttwak focuses on, is avoiding casualties to your own troops. The second rule is avoiding the killing of enemy civilians. The roots of post-heroic policy are demographic, social, and moral, and it is characteristic of Western democracies conducting non-existential wars in which their readiness to sacrifice is relatively low. During the second intifada former General Security Service (GSS) head Avi Dichter stressed Israeli ability “to liquidate who cannot be eliminated any other way [ . . . ] without a serious risk to our personnel,”<sup>14</sup> and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon pointed to the need to avoid harm to the Palestinian civilian population that is not involved in terror.<sup>15</sup> Whereas for the Israeli side post-heroic warfare served as a bridge between morality and operational effectiveness, the Palestinians preferred heroic warfare, in which many would be killed on both sides.

In 2002, Israeli officials admitted for the first time that Israel was carrying out TKs as a preemptive counter-terror measure. Israel was trying to persuade audiences both in Israel and abroad that its TK policy was applied in accordance with its right of self-defense and out of necessity, and was both moral and effective. In a meeting of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on 9 January 2001, Chief-of-Staff Shaul Mofaz admitted that Israel had a killing policy. He claimed that this policy was supported by the legal opinion of the Military Advocate General, Brigadier-General Menachem Finkelstein, who determined that, “The IDF has the legal right to fight ‘hostile elements’ in the territories in exceptional and extraordinary cases, when the purpose is to save lives and in the absence of any other alternative.”<sup>16</sup> Following the death of nine Israelis, when a Palestinian terrorist drove a bus into a queue of people on 14 February 2001, Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh promised on behalf of the Israeli government that “we will continue our policy of liquidating those who plan or carry out attacks, and no one can give us lessons in morality because we have unfortunately 100 years of fighting terrorism.”<sup>17</sup> A few months later, Sneh, this time as Minister of Transportation, explained to BBC News: “If anyone has committed or is planning to carry out terrorist attacks, he has to be hit. It is effective, precise, and just.”<sup>18</sup> In late 2001, BBC news reported that Israeli officials had indicated that the Israeli army was being given a freer hand to carry out TKs of Palestinian activists.<sup>19</sup> In 2004, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs offered on its internet site a detailed discussion of the legal aspects of Israeli TK policy, stressing its exceptional and defensive nature.<sup>20</sup>

From a preemptive method of coping with “ticking bombs” during the

early stages of the second intifada, Israeli TK policy became one that also aimed at “ticking infrastructure.” It became a preventive rather than preemptive measure and was applied on a routine, some would say, wholesale basis.<sup>21</sup> In an interview with Fox News in 2001 Prime Minister Sharon said he would stick to TKs, which he referred to as “pinpoint preventive actions against terrorists.”<sup>22</sup> According to former Chief of Military Intelligence Amos Malka, TKs were carried out by opportunity rather than necessity, and were sometimes motivated by emotion rather than cold reason.<sup>23</sup> The GSS had the final word regarding the targets to be executed, with the senior military and political echelon approving its recommendation almost automatically, to the point of almost giving up any discretion regarding the chosen targets and timing of the strikes.<sup>24</sup> In November 2006, it was reported that the Israeli security cabinet had decided that unlike the targeting of activists directly and immediately involved in terror, the execution of senior terror activists would be subject to a “hearing,” albeit in absentia, with the attorney general.<sup>25</sup> This was another indication of the broadening of the TK policy.

Before 9/11, the US consistently condemned Israeli TKs, even in ticking bomb situations, such as that of Mohammed Bisharat, who was killed while driving a car full of explosives toward the Green Line in June 2001, and called for an immediate end to its TK policy. After 9/11, the US became increasingly sympathetic to counter-terror measures applied by Israel, including TK. The US itself was now carrying out TKs, for example in Afghanistan.<sup>26</sup> In February 2003, the administration released its counter-terror policy — the so-called National Strategy for Combating Terrorism — which included the targeting of individuals involved in terror among a variety of anti-terror methods.<sup>27</sup>

Reservations regarding Israeli TK policy on moral or practical ground have been expressed not only by scholars but also by Israeli practitioners (e.g., former Chief of Military Intelligence Amos Malka), Israeli politicians (e.g., former ministers of justice Yossi Beilin and Dan Meridor), human rights organizations and activists in Israel and abroad (e.g., B’Tselem<sup>28</sup> and Amnesty International<sup>29</sup>), European politicians and media,<sup>30</sup> and Arab politicians and scholars.<sup>31</sup> Main arguments against TKs have been that Israel was killing people without trial; that innocent lives might be taken during TKs; that TK is likely to provoke more killings of civilians as revenge and makes it more difficult to forge peace.

The danger of intelligence sources exposure, collateral damage inflicted, international and domestic criticism evoked, and greater incentive and motivation of terrorists to retaliate created by the TKs notwithstanding, Israeli TK policy has been consistently supported by Israeli decision makers and the public, despite the widespread understanding that violent means alone could not achieve decisive results.<sup>32</sup> The unprecedented murderous nature of Palestinian suicide bombings strengthened the Israeli public’s threat perception and lent legitimacy to the unprecedented scope of TK of terror operatives and leaders.

## TK AS A WAR-WINNING STRATEGY

The notion that TKs might have a utilitarian value has been rejected by moralists and international law scholars based on the assumption that they may boomerang, i.e., intensify rather than pacify the conflict. This section focuses on the dilemma regarding the targets chosen for elimination. Whose elimination is more effective — the elimination of low-rank military operatives, military leaders, or political leaders, if at all?

### Political Versus Military Centres of Gravity

In a debate that took place in the 1990s between two schools of airpower strategists, different views were presented regarding the effectiveness of decapitation as a war-winning strategy. Although it focused on high-intensity conflict (HIC) rather than low-intensity conflict (LIC) situations in general and counter-terrorism in particular and on physical destruction rather than morale, it nevertheless reflects a basic dilemma between political and military centers of gravity.

According to John Warden, the most effective way of incapacitating the enemy and causing its defeat is to target its decision makers. Warden presents a comprehensive, five-ring model that is reflective of a system of centers of gravity, ranging from the nation's leadership (the innermost target), key production, infrastructure, and a population's support for its government to fielded military forces (the outermost ring), in that order of priority and importance. He considers decapitation of leadership the most effective way of imposing one's will on the enemy, although he recommends simultaneous strikes on each ring's center of gravity.<sup>33</sup> Robert Pape, on the other hand, is skeptical about the chances of eliminating enemy leadership,<sup>34</sup> as "individual leaders are hard to kill, governments are harder to overthrow, and even if the target government can be overthrown, the coercer can rarely guarantee that its replacement will be more forthcoming."<sup>35</sup> He warns that in cases where leadership strikes or strategic bombings fail, the consequences could lash back and even be catastrophic, as happened after NATO's air strikes near Belgrade in March 1999, which were followed by the killing and ethnic cleansing of thousands of Albanians.<sup>36</sup> Instead Pape recommends conventional combat against fielded forces at the operational level. He doubts airpower's effectiveness in terror and guerrilla situations for two main reasons: first, it is difficult to discriminate between guerrillas or terrorists and the population.<sup>37</sup> Second, although decapitation of suicide terrorists can disrupt their organization's operations temporarily, it rarely yields long-term gains.<sup>38</sup> TK usually aims not only at a terror organization's leadership, in accordance with Warden's preference, but also at terror operatives who could be considered military targets. Pape's theory does seem to apply to terror or guerrilla situations, where large fielded forces are not employed, although he may be right regarding the long-term outcomes.

Asaf and Noam Zussman's approach integrates Warden's and Pape's ideas. On the one hand, they recommend the targeting of senior leaders with specialized knowledge and skills, based on their belief that it will have the strongest effect on the terrorists' capabilities. At the same time, however, they distinguish between military and political leaders, preferring the targeting of the former. Underlying their preference is the claim that the targeting of political and spiritual leaders will not significantly decrease the capability of the terrorist organization and will only increase the motivation to carry out terrorist attacks. Targeting low-rank terrorists, in their view, is not likely to disrupt seriously the operation of the organization, whereas the targeting of senior military leaders will generate little increase in the motivation of the organization to carry out attacks and will evoke less rage and fewer calls for retaliation than the killing of political leaders. It also has the potential to severely disrupt the organization's operations, as military leaders are involved in planning operations and recruiting, training, arming, and dispatching terrorists.<sup>39</sup> As much as this thesis seems logical, the Israeli case does not support it, as will be shown below.

### **Effectiveness and the Sensor-to-shooter Loop**

Due to the elusiveness of terrorists, the process of spotting a new target, assigning a weapon to hit it, and finally hitting it, must be as short as possible. Advanced command and control systems, as well as improved intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities could shorten this process considerably — from days to minutes.<sup>40</sup> Not only does this require technological capability; it also makes it necessary to implement a high degree of inter-service jointness, which means that bureaucratic and organizational affiliations and loyalties must be overcome.

One of the most famous examples of failure to close the loop is probably the missed opportunity to kill Taliban leader Mullah Omar Mohammed in Afghanistan in October 2001, when a CIA-controlled unmanned Predator reconnaissance aircraft identified a group of cars and trucks fleeing the capital as a convoy carrying the Taliban leader. As the CIA did not have the authority to "push the button," the decision had to be made by officers on duty at CENTCOM (US Central Command) headquarters. As a legal officer in CENTCOM did not like the idea of possible collateral damage, it was impossible to strike immediately. The convoy was not targeted and Omar survived.<sup>41</sup>

### **WAS TK EFFECTIVE DURING THE SECOND INTIFADA?**

According to former IDF Chief-of-Staff Dan Halutz, TK policy proved to be extremely effective in curbing terror activity against Israel.<sup>42</sup> In this section, I will first present some TK statistics, and then examine the difference between the effectiveness of eliminating military as opposed to political operatives.

## Descriptive Statistics<sup>43</sup>

In the period September 2000-April 2004, Israel carried out 159 TK attempts, dozens of attempts each year, with the highest rate — 56 attempts (35 percent) — in 2002, after 40 attempts (25 percent) in 2001 and 44 attempts (28 percent) in 2003. The decline can be explained by the fact that in mid-2002 the IDF regained control of the West Bank and could afford to arrest rather than kill in this area. Most of the strikes — 69 percent — took place in the West Bank.

TK methods included shooting from close range or by snipers (47 percent), launching missiles from helicopter gunships (34 percent), explosive devices, such as booby-trapped vehicles (14 percent), and other methods (5 percent).

Since in some cases members of more than one organization were targeted simultaneously, division by organizational affiliation is difficult. It is estimated, though that some 50 percent belonged to Hamas, some 31 percent to Fatah, 17 percent to Islamic Jihad, and the rest to other organizations.

Eighty-five percent of the attempts ended up with the targets killed; the rest were injured or saved. These high rates of success were achieved thanks to high-quality intelligence, based on a combination of SIGINT, HUMINT, and a variety of vision devices, such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), which led the Israelis to their targets. Additionally, increased joint inter-service (ground forces-military intelligence-air force-police-GSS) activity allowed the IDF to overcome the problem of targeting an elusive enemy,<sup>44</sup> after overcoming bureaucratic and organizational affiliations and loyalties.

Jointness also helped shorten the sensor-to-shooter loop. Joint Computerized Command Control Communications and Intelligence (C<sup>4</sup>I) operation centers were established, working for the first time in IDF history as joint operational entities,<sup>45</sup> providing visual monitoring to all command levels, down to the tactical leaders, or helicopter gunships — all being able to see the same evolving battle picture on their computer screens. The GSS provided real time intelligence through its channels, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) extended and verified information through its UAVs and other aerial platforms, IDF's Field Intelligence supplied updated combat resources from its observation units, and once the intelligence picture had been completed, the field commanders decided on the best way to carry out the mission that was then monitored throughout by the C<sup>4</sup>I command centers, which also debriefed the mission commanders once the mission was terminated.<sup>46</sup>

Seventy-five percent of the attempts were carried out against low level local military leaders or operatives. The rest were senior leaders — either senior military leaders in charge of planning terror operations, and recruiting, training, arming, and dispatching terrorists, like Raad Karmi (September 2001), Atef Abayat (October 2001), Salah Shehadeh (July 2002) (some 17 percent), or senior political-ideological leaders responsible for funding, political and spiritual



guidance, and direction of the organization's strategy, like Ibrahim al-Makadme (August 2003), Ahmed Yassin (March 2004), and Abdel Aziz Rantisi (April 2004) (some 8 percent).<sup>47</sup>

**Table 1: TK: Descriptive Statistics, September 2000-April 2004**

	Number	Percent
<i>TK Attempts</i>		
Total	159	100
2001	40	25
2002	56	35
2003	44	28
<i>Location</i>		
West Bank	110	69
Gaza Strip	49	31
<i>Method</i>		
Shooting from close range or by snipers	75	47
Launching missiles from helicopter gunships	54	34
Explosive devices, such as booby-trapped vehicles	22	14
Other	8	5
<i>Terrorists' organizational affiliation</i>		
Hamas	80	50
Fatah	49	31
Islamic Jihad	27	17
Other	3	2
<i>Success rates of attempts</i>		
Killed	135	85
Injured or saved	24	15
<i>Targets classified according to seniority and political/military role</i>		
Low-level local military operatives	120	75
Senior military leaders	27	17
Senior political/ideological leaders	13	8

**Sources:** Zussman and Zussman, *Targeted Killings*; Luft, "The Logic of Israel's Targeted Killing."

### **Greater Effectiveness for Targeting Senior Political Leaders**

Zussman and Zussman were right in claiming that the emphasis on low-rank operatives would be ineffective.<sup>48</sup> The "lawn mower" method applied by the IDF, that is, killing those who assumed senior positions in a local cell each time, did not seriously disrupt the terror organizations' operation. "Keeping the lawn

mowed” permanently required continuous, routine, “automatic pilot”-style, not to say Sisyphean, TK of operatives.<sup>49</sup> In an interview to *Haaretz* in September 2003, even Deputy Chief of the GSS, Yuval Diskin, who was considered the father of the TK method, expressed his doubts regarding its effectiveness.<sup>50</sup>

When Zussman and Zussman suggested that it would be mostly effective to target Palestinian military rather than political leaders, they believed that targeting senior political leaders would only increase the motivation of their organizations to carry out terrorist attacks due to two factors. First, political leaders were typically far better known to the Palestinian public than military leaders. Second, targeting Palestinian military leaders was considered by both Palestinians and Israelis as part of the “rules of the game,” whereas attempts to kill political leaders constituted crossing a “red line.”<sup>51</sup>

In September 2001, shortly after the killing of Secretary-General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Abu-Ali Mustafa, Chief of Military Intelligence Amos Malka claimed that the targeting of a senior political level was both illegitimate and ineffective in thwarting terror attacks.<sup>52</sup> Former minister Dan Meridor recommended that Israel should limit itself to targeting those directly involved in terror attacks — the suicide bombers and the ones who planned the attacks — and refrain from targeting leaders, not only because international law hardly allowed it but also because of the danger that retaliation would be aimed at Jewish communities abroad, as was the case after the killing of Hezbollah Secretary-General Abbas Mussawi in 1992.<sup>53</sup> Steven David identified great concern on the part of the leaders of the terror organization that they would be eliminated, as well as signs of readiness on their part to modify or cease attacks against Israeli civilians if Israel would suspend its practice of targeted killings.<sup>54</sup> But he too preferred upholding the norm against killing political leaders.<sup>55</sup>

Zussman and Zussman, Malka, and Meridor had it wrong. Targeting military leaders and operatives failed in affecting the stability and morale of the terrorist organizations, in increasing tensions and personal competition among heirs, in thwarting planned terror attacks, and in forcing the organizations to waste time and energy in protecting leaders and finding hiding places for operatives.<sup>56</sup> It rather elevated specific individuals to martyrdom, strengthening their resolve.<sup>57</sup>

New terrorists replaced eliminated ones, proving that it was difficult to effectively destroy a highly motivated, decentralized, and compartmentalized organization. TK of military leaders and operatives also provoked murderous retaliations, with unprecedented numbers of Israeli civilians being killed, which only stimulated further escalation and riots. For example, following the January 2001 killing of Fatah military leaders in Tulkarm Raad Karmi, Tanzim and al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades launched terrorist attacks that claimed the lives of 57 Israelis. Perpetrated suicide bombing from 2001 to 2003 intensified from 54

cases in 2001 (34 carried out, 20 thwarted) to 167 in 2002 (55, 112, respectively) to 209 in 2003 (25, 184). Only in 2004 did the number drop to 130 (14, 116) (see Table 2).<sup>58</sup> The number of Hamas attacks grew steadily as the intifada progressed, despite Israeli TKs: 19 attacks in 2001, 34 in 2002, 46 in 2003, 202 in 2004, and 179 in 2005 (most of them in the first half of that year, before Hamas agreed to suspend hostilities against Israel temporarily).<sup>59</sup> A study by Edward Kaplan from Yale University on the suicide bombing attacks on Israel during the second intifada found strong statistical evidence that TKs as a counter-terror tactic were associated with an increase in suicide bombing attempts; each additional hit appeared to invite an additional 7.75 attempts.<sup>60</sup> This should not have come as a surprise. Earlier, in 1996, the killing of Yihya Ayyash (“the engineer”) was followed by a wave of suicide bombings that claimed the lives of 59 Israelis and wounded 250. TKs also resulted in informers uncovered, intelligence resources diverted, and international condemnation of Israel.<sup>61</sup>

**Table 2: Suicide Bombings, 2001-04**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Perpetrated</i>	<i>Carried out</i>	<i>Thwarted</i>	<i>Ratio</i>
2001	54	34	20	1:0.6
2002	167	55	112	1:2
2003	209	25	184	1:7
2004	130	14	116	1:8

**Sources:** David, *Fatal Choices*; Rubenstein, “[Targeted] Killing as Boomerang”; Shelach, “Killing without Sense”; Ynet; IDF Spokesperson’s Unit.

As for as the killing of political leaders, it is true that the killing of Abu-Ali Mustafa, Secretary-General of the PFLP, in August 2001 accounted for the killing of Israeli Minister of Tourism Rehavam Zeevi as revenge two months later. However, the PFLP was a small organization, and as such Mustafa could not be considered a significant center of gravity as far as the Palestinian struggle against Israel as a whole was concerned. The elimination of Islamic Jihad leader, Fathi Shikaki, in Malta in October 1995 did paralyze the organization for a few years,<sup>62</sup> although it had only a limited effect on Palestinian anti-Israel terror activities because of the relatively small size and limited significance of Islamic Jihad at the time.

However, one cannot disregard the correlation between Hamas’s consent to the unilaterally announced Palestinian *hudna* (temporary suspension of hostilities) of 29 June 2004 and the killing of its spiritual leader Sheikh Yassin in March 2004 and the killing of the organization’s leaders in the Gaza Strip, Abu Shanab in August 2003, and Abdel Aziz Rantisi in April 2004. Not only were Yassin and Rantisi not replaced by a new chief leader, which both reflected and

created a leadership vacuum, but Mahmoud al-Zahar — one of the two remaining top Hamas leaders in the Gaza Strip who had escaped an attempted TK (the other one was Sheikh Isma'il Haniyya) — for the first time expressed the organization's interest in taking part in the political system following Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.<sup>63</sup>

Hamas' leadership feared TK so greatly that when in September 2005 Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz warned two of its leaders, Mahmoud al-Zahar and Isma'il Haniyya, that should they or any of the other Hamas leaders continue firing Qassam rockets to Israeli territory, "we will send them to place where Rantisi and Yassin are,"<sup>64</sup> Hamas announced its decision to stop firing the rockets. These findings seem to support John Warden's view on the effectiveness of the decapitation of political leadership.

The new policy of targeting senior political leaders seems to have permeated Israeli thinking. In February 2006, former GSS head Avi Dichter warned that if Israel should find itself obliged to retaliate after a Palestinian terrorist attack, Hamas leader Haniyya could constitute a legitimate target killing even if he becomes prime minister.<sup>65</sup> In mid-2007, it was reported that following the Second Lebanon War a special branch in AMAN (Israeli military intelligence) was established for collecting real-time intelligence from various sources on enemy senior leaders in order to be able to spot them and assign a weapon system to hit them shortly after being identified, if necessary.<sup>66</sup>

### **TK as Only One Explanation for the Decline in Terrorist Successes after Mid-2002**

Since mid-2002, the terrorists' successes declined significantly, although this did not mark the end of the intifada. For example, after having claimed the lives of 3.9 Israelis per attack in 2001 and 5.4 in 2002, the death toll claimed by Hamas terrorists per attack dropped to 0.98 in 2003, 0.33 in 2004, and 0.11 in 2005.<sup>67</sup> Israeli TK performance notwithstanding, no causal relationship could be proven between TK and this decline. Other factors were involved in decreasing the terrorist successes, such as Israeli strikes into the territories, particularly *Operation Defensive Shield*, in 2002, during which the IDF regained control over the West Bank, and the construction of the security fence since 2003.<sup>68</sup>

During *Operation Defensive Shield* the IDF entered cities, rural areas, and refugee camps in the West Bank, carrying out continuous offensive activity at the tactical level and intensifying TK of terrorist operatives. A sharp decline of over 50 percent in suicide bombings took place in the wake of the operation — from 60 in 2002 to 26 in 2003 and 13 in the period January-September 2005.<sup>69</sup> The number of fatalities declined from 452 in 2002 to 214 in 2003. The number kept declining in 2004, to 97 in the period January-September.<sup>70</sup> In 2003 and 2004,

Israel managed to thwart almost 90 percent of the perpetrated terror attacks (88 percent and 89 percent, respectively), as compared to 67 percent in 2002 (see Table 3).<sup>71</sup>

**Table 3: Operation *Defensive Shield's* Impact**

<i>Number of suicide bombings</i>	
2002	60
2003	26
2004 (January-September)	13
<i>Number of persons killed in suicide bombings</i>	
2002	452
2003	214
2004 (January-September)	97

**Source:** CSS Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center.

Since late-2003, a buffer zone between Israel and the West Bank has been under construction. Troops deployed along the buffer zone have been controlled by the aforementioned C<sup>4</sup>I centers, which have been monitoring all ground, airborne (UAV), and aerostat surveillance assets. Since the creation of the security fence, the number of terrorist attacks dropped sharply — from 73 in the period September 2000-July 2003 (an average of 26 terrorist attacks per year) to 5 in the period July 2003-August 2004. The number of fatal casualties inflicted by terrorist attacks from the West Bank in the period August 2003-August 2004 dropped, too, by some 84 percent as compared to the period September 2001-July 2002 (see Table 4).<sup>72</sup>

**Table 4: The Security Fence’s Impact**

<i>Number of terrorist attacks from the West Bank</i>	
Prior to the fence (annual average)	73
Thereafter	5
<i>Number of fatalities inflicted by terrorist attacks from the West Bank</i>	
September 2000-August 2001	52
September 2001-July 2002	173
August 2002-July 2003 (fence under construction)	68
August 2003-August 2004	28

**Source:** CSS Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center.

Yaser Arafat’s death in late 2004 and the election of Abu Mazen as his successor changed the atmosphere in the territories toward more moderation. PA-Hamas dialogue was resumed and resulted in a new *hudna*. This, however, happened only after the Hamas leadership had been under threat of elimination.<sup>73</sup>

**CONCLUSION**

Targeting military leaders and operatives proved to be ineffective. It failed in affecting the stability and morale of the terrorist organizations, in increasing tensions and personal competition among heirs, in thwarting planned terror attacks, and in forcing the organizations to waste time and energy in protecting leaders and finding hiding places for operatives. It rather elevated specific individuals to martyrdom, strengthening their morale and resolve. New terrorists replaced eliminated ones, proving that it was difficult to effectively destroy a highly motivated, decentralized, and compartmentalized organization. TK of military leaders and operatives also provoked murderous retaliations, with unprecedented numbers of Israeli civilians being killed, which only stimulated further escalation and riots.

The decapitation of Hamas’s political and spiritual leaders, on the other hand, seemed to be rather effective. The correlation between TK of Palestinian political and spiritual leaders and the end of the second intifada speaks for itself. The decapitation of Hamas’s political or ideological leadership in mid-2004 seems to have played a major role in the organization’s readiness to suspend hostilities against Israel, which essentially meant the end of the second intifada. Hamas never elected a new leader to replace Yassin and Rantisi. It decided to participate in the municipal and parliamentary elections in the territories, and moderated its anti-Israel rhetoric. For example, it expressed readiness to respect

previous international agreements signed by the PA, accept Israel as a *fait accompli*, and agree to a long-term *hudna* with the Jewish state. If rumors that Israel had poisoned Arafat are founded, then this, too, proved to be effective, as his successor, Abu Masen, declared that the violent intifada was over.

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### Endnotes

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