



Incitement and the Fall 2015 Wave of Terror

Introduction

In September 2015, a wave of Palestinian terror broke out in Israel. According to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, since the beginning of October there have been 77 terror attacks, including 62 stabbings, 7 shootings and 8 car rammings. As of November 9, 2015, 12 people have been killed and 158 wounded.

What are these terror attacks about?

The central theme of the latest round of terrorism and violence against Israeli Jews has been the claim by Palestinians that the Israeli government seeks to change the status quo on the Temple Mount. This claim has festered and grown, despite Israel's assertions that it has no intention of altering the current status. In an address on October 24, 2015, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that, "Israel re-affirms its commitment to upholding unchanged the status quo of the Temple Mount, in word and in practice...Israel will continue to enforce its longstanding policy: Muslims pray on the Temple Mount; non-Muslims visit the Temple Mount."

Who is behind the recent violence?

In spite of Israel's continuing assertions and actions to safeguard the status quo of the Temple Mount, Palestinian leadership encourages a culture of hate and incitement against Israeli Jews. The Palestinian Authority and Fatah, including its leader Mahmoud Abbas, as well as Hamas and the Islamic Movement in Israel, continue to instigate the recent violence through speeches, television and radio, and social media outlets.

This incitement against Israel has inspired young "lone wolf" terrorists, many of them from eastern Jerusalem, to carry out deadly knife attacks against Israeli Jews. Israeli Arabs and Palestinians in Judea and Samaria have also carried out attacks. Many of these terrorists, some as young as 13, have been motivated by the lies spread in the Palestinian media and on social media, as well as through general frustration, desperation and anger among the Arab youth. In general, many of these terrorists do not have any formal association with established terror organizations, but instead have been inspired by the intense campaign of hate and incitement by their leadership.



What role has social media played in the violence?

The latest wave of terrorism in Israel has been exacerbated by the spread of hatred and incitement on social media among young Palestinians. “We are seeing a situation in which Osama Bin Laden meets (Facebook founder) Mark Zuckerberg,” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in October. “The incitement on the social networks is what is causing the wave of terror.”

According to the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), popular hashtags in Arabic such as “The Intifada Has Started,” “The Third Intifada,” “The Jerusalem Intifada,” “The Knife Intifada,” “Poison the Knife before You Stab,” and “Slaughtering the Jews,” have been launched recently on social media in Arabic to spread propaganda and encourage attacks. Additionally, images shared on social media advise potential stabbers on how to make their attacks as deadly as possible by using anatomical charts. Other images posted and shared on social media feature bloody knives with captions like “O son of the [West] Bank, rise up! Do not leave [the Jews] alone.”

Hamas has also produced viral videos designed to show Palestinians how to conduct knife attacks. In one such video, Jewish characters, dressed in stereotypically religious clothes, are portrayed as bullies, knocking over Palestinian boys. The actions of these “Jews” upset a nearby Arab man with a keffiyeh, who brandishes a knife and stabs one man in the heart and then slashes the other in the throat.

What is being done about the incitement on social media?

In late October, the Shurat HaDin, the Israel Law Center, gathered 20,000 signatures on a petition and submitted a lawsuit against Facebook in a New York court alleging that the social media site is ignoring incitement and calls to murder Jews by Palestinian users. It seeks an injunction to require Facebook to block all racist incitement and calls for violence against Jews in Israel. The Israeli government has asked Facebook and YouTube to remove videos that it says are encouraging Palestinian terrorism.

One of the leader plaintiffs is the family of Israeli-American Richard Lakin, 76, who was shot, stabbed, and killed by Palestinian terrorists on October 13. Following the terror attack, Hamas released a “reenactment” video of the Lakin murder that went viral on social media. Lakin was known for his coexistence efforts between Israelis and Palestinians during his time in Israel.

Additionally, several United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) employees have been suspended for inciting violence and anti-Semitism on social media. Their suspension comes after two revelations by the watchdog group UN Watch documented at least 22 UNRWA employees inciting anti-Semitic violence. This included UNRWA staff members, such as school teachers and principals, encouraging Palestinian stabbing and shooting attacks against Israeli Jews on social media, with one staffer issuing a call on Facebook to “stab Zionist dogs.”



Wasn't there similar terrorism in Jerusalem last year?

The current tensions can be directly traced to Palestinian incitement and violence that goes back to 2014, following the failure of peace talks in April, the murder of three Israeli teens in June and Operation Protective Edge in Gaza in July and August.

On October 30, 2014, a Palestinian terrorist tried to assassinate Jewish activist Yehuda Glick, a well-known advocate for greater Jewish access to the Temple Mount. Following the attack, in an attempt to calm tensions, Israel closed the Temple Mount to all visitors. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas claimed that the closing the Temple Mount amounted to a “declaration of war.” Further Palestinian riots and protests followed.

Notable terror attacks in late 2014 included: a car ramming attack at a Jerusalem light rail station on October 22 that killed a three-month-old Jewish girl and a 22-year-old Ecuadorian immigrant, another car ramming attack on a light rail station on November 5 by a Hamas terrorist that killed three people including a Druze Border Police officer and a 17-year-old, and the Har Nof synagogue massacre that left six Israelis dead.

Key Terms

Temple Mount – The Temple Mount, located in the Old City of Jerusalem, is the holiest site in Judaism and the place where the First Temple, destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, and the Second Temple, destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, once stood.

Western Wall – The Western Wall is one of four retaining walls built by Herod the Great in the First Century BCE that was part of the Second Temple complex. Since the destruction of the Second Temple, the Western Wall has been a site of Jewish prayer (when permitted by ruling authorities).

Al-Aqsa Mosque/Dome of the Rock – The Al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock refer to two sites of Muslim prayer that were built upon the ruins of the Second Temple by the Arab Muslim conquerors of Jerusalem in the 7 and 8th centuries CE. Also collectively known as the al-Haram ash-Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary, Muslims consider the site to be the third holiest in Islam.

Status Quo on Temple Mount - Since the 1967 Six Day War, eastern Jerusalem, which includes the Old City of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, has been part of Israel. Shortly after the war, Israel established an arrangement with Jordan, which had previously controlled eastern Jerusalem, where non-Muslim access to the site is restricted and Jewish prayer is forbidden.



Key Groups

Hamas – Founded in 1988 as an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (which was recently declared a terror group in Egypt), Hamas' ultimate goal is the destruction of Israel and the eventual creation of an Islamic state in Palestine. After leading a campaign of suicide bombings and other terror attacks against Israel in the 1990s and early 2000s during the Second Intifada, Hamas won Palestinian elections in 2006 then took advantage of Israel's 2005 disengagement from Gaza to take control of the Gaza Strip. Since then, Hamas has terrorized Israel by launching thousands of rockets at civilians, capturing Israeli soldiers and carrying out terror attacks. In response, Israel has launched military campaigns in 2008-09, 2012 and 2014 to end rocket fire.

Palestinian Authority – (PA)/Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)/Fatah – Founded in 1964, the Palestinian Liberation Organization is an umbrella organization representing several Palestinian factions dominated by the Fatah party. The PLO was long considered to be a terrorist organization by the United States and Israel until 1991. As part of the 1993 Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Authority was established as the interim Palestinian government. Today all three entities are headed by Mahmoud Abbas.

The Islamic Movement – The Islamic Movement is an ideological offshoot from the Egyptian terrorist organization the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. Formed in the 1970s, the group provides religious, social and political services to Israeli Arab communities. About twenty years ago the movement split between northern and southern branches. The more hardline northern branch rejects any legitimization with Israel and calls for boycotts from Israeli elections. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has recently announced an attempt to ban the northern branch of the Islamic Movement.