IDF must act now to avert return of suicide bombings

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 20.08.2024

Among the questions related to the attempted suicide bombing in Tel Aviv, Shin Bet security agency experts will also try to answer whether this event heralds the return of suicide terrorism to our daily routine.

The "work accident" that caused the explosive device to detonate and the terrorist to die before carrying out his plan shifts the spotlight to the new-old danger lurking at our doorstep: suicide attacks. This pattern can develop today as a result of the combination of four factors: high motivation among Palestinians from the West Bank to harm Israel, availability of weapons, explosives and laboratories for manufacturing and assembling bombs, guidance from command elements on the ground or abroad, and the fourth factor is the many breaches in the defense along the seam zone.

If indeed a decision has been made to return to this pattern of activity, it can be seen as evidence of the success of the IDF and Shin Bet in thwarting the terrorist elements to achieve effectiveness through typical methods. Suicide terrorism is perceived as the "weapon of the weak," and its use is not free from criticism even by supporters of terrorism, given its implications and the damage it causes to the organization's image, especially after the ISIS phenomenon.

To prevent the emergence of this type of terror wave, immediate implementation of the lessons Israel learned after the waves of attacks in the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s, which caused about 700 fatalities, is required.

First and foremost, tightening security and closing breaches in the seam zone – while significantly increasing penalties and administrative sanctions against those involved in bringing illegal residents into Israel, harboring them, or employing them in Israel.

The linkage between these components and their importance was well described by the Haifa District Court in a ruling given in January this year, "The security system invests billions of shekels in building and maintaining a security fence, whose purpose is to prevent the entry of unauthorized persons, in diagnosing the

population requesting entry permits to Israel and issuing permits to those who do not pose a security risk to the state's citizens, in deploying battalions whose task is to catch infiltrators into the country, in deploying police forces responsible for their arrest after entry. When the enforcement policy is not strict, not deterrent and not preventive, the scope of the phenomenon is wide and its spread is expected."

"In this situation, the chances of the security forces succeeding in the mission of thwarting infiltration are significantly reduced. This simple truth is true in times of calm, it is seven times truer in times of war."

An increase in the pace and intensity of proactive operations in cities and refugee camps is also required, to eliminate "laboratories," weapons stockpiles, and armed organizations – the offensive approach of the security forces since Oct. 7 has achieved many successes and forced the heads of terrorist gangs to invest efforts in hiding and protecting their lives, this should be continued and intensified.

In addition, increased efforts to prevent smuggling of weapons and dual-use materials used for explosives production, from Israel or Jordan, into the West Bank. Also, demolishing the homes of terrorists involved in such attacks, regardless of the attack's outcome or the terrorist's place of residence and status. This, as a deterrent measure in light of the severity of these attacks and in the absence of other deterrent measures against potential terrorists.

Another necessary step is preventing glorification and inspiration – preventing ceremonies, public exposure of the circumstances of terrorists' recruitment for these missions, as far as it involves their exploitation against the background of personal distress or deception by terrorist elements.

We must not accept a situation where authorities allow early release of terrorists from prisons in Israel or hesitate to carry out security arrests due to the shortage of detention facilities. The State of Israel has known how to deal with greater challenges than the need to quickly prepare detention facilities, and it is certain that it will know how to do so today, in line with the needs of the hour.

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