

Israel's 'Wild West' of weapons is a growing national security threat

written by David M. Weinberg | 09.01.2026

One month before the Hamas assault on southern Israel in October 2023, I warned in these pages of the insanely widespread availability of weapons in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) and Gaza, and especially in Arab and Bedouin communities in Israel.

The gargantuan wave of terrorist and criminal violence that Israel experienced all that year clearly was powered by the unbearable ease of obtaining weapons - increasingly advanced, sophisticated, and professional grade weapons, largely funded by Iran and smuggled into Israel across almost every border.

Since then, the crisis has escalated many times over. Hundreds of thousands of weapons are smuggled into Israel every year through the Egyptian and Jordanian borders via organized smuggling networks that are now using sophisticated drones. The weapons flow into mixed Jewish-Arab cities and from there penetrate Judea and Samaria, fueling both organized crime and terrorist activity and blurring the line between them.

Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) activity in Judea and Samaria over the past year clearly illustrates this. In Hebron and Bethlehem, broad Hamas terrorist organization infrastructures have been thwarted, involving dozens of operatives, firearms training, explosives production, and stockpiling of weapons. From the terrorists interrogated, it is clear that weapons smuggled as criminal transactions ultimately end up in the hands of terrorists. This could fuel a next Arab/Palestinian hybrid uprising against Israel, like the massive May 2021 Arab riots during Operation Guardian of the Walls.

The scale of the threat is vast. According to Hodaya Busheri and Yotam Deshe of this newspaper, 160,000 weapons are smuggled into Israel each year, about 14,000 a month. This amounts to 300,000 weapons over the past two years, with 100,000 illegal weapons estimated to be circulating in the Negev alone, with Bedouin criminal and terrorist gangs in the lead.

Just how much unlicensed and illegal weaponry is on the loose overall in Israel

and in Palestinian-dominated areas? Nobody knows for sure, with estimates that vary from “mammoth” to “berserk” and “unlimited.” More than a decade ago, police estimates stood at half a million weapons, and since then, well, only G-d knows how many more weapons are out there.

The IDF admits that there are dozens of smuggling incidents across the Egyptian border each night, with each drone shipment averaging four long guns and several pistols; and it further admits that it intercepts one in four such “aerial packages,” at best.

The US Army at West Point estimates that for every smuggling attempt identified, thwarted, or disrupted by Israeli authorities, a vast number of other smuggling forays get through successfully without authorities ever learning about them!

In October 2025 alone (which is the last month on which there is published data), the IDF’s 80th “Edom” Division foiled 130 drone-assisted weapon (and drug) smuggling attempts across the Egyptian border; meaning that 500 attempts to smuggle weapons may have made it “successfully” into Israel.

The weapons smuggling situation across the Jordanian border – Israel’s longest and least protected – may be even worse, which is why the IDF is now beginning to deploy camera arrays, ambushes, and extensive area operations aimed at identifying smugglers and thwarting weapons transfers. Israel also is speeding up the building of a NIS 5.2 billion (\$1.4 billion) 425-kilometer (265-mile) security barrier along the Jordan border from the Sea of Galilee all the way down to Eilat.

Nevertheless, despite the enormity of the problem, only one division of IDF troops holds down the entire Jordanian border from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea, and only one division patrols the Arava from the Dead Sea down to Eilat.

Where does all the weaponry come from? Well, in August 2022 Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Hossein Salami (who has since been assassinated by Israel) bragged how he was driving weapons to Palestinians engaged in “jihad” against Israel, adding that just as Iran managed to send weapons to Gaza in the past, “the West Bank can be armed in the same way, and this process is happening.”

Also, ammunition and auxiliary weapons continue to be stolen from Israeli depots with alacrity. The IDF admits to about 200 theft incidents from its bases over the

past two years. For example, last October, 30,000 bullets were stolen from ammunition warehouses in the IDF's Sde Teiman base in the south. In November, 70,000 bullets and 70 grenades were stolen from an IDF base in the Golan Heights in the north.

Sure enough, most of the weapons smuggled into Israel by drone in recent times specifically match the types of weapons that the IDF uses and the ammunition the IDF stocks on its bases. The smugglers and criminal/terrorist gangs aren't stupid.

THE VAST smuggling effort and widespread availability of weapons is no longer a marginal criminal phenomenon but an ongoing strategic threat that urgently demands a national response.

This requires designation of the threat as a high national security priority (the government seems to have done so, at least rhetorically), and establishment of task forces at the ministerial level and at executive levels managed by the National Security Council to coordinate between the police, army, intelligence services, justice ministry and prosecution, etc. This requires operational and technological resources, with budget for manpower that is both beefy and brainy.

Otherwise, none of the above agencies will make the countering of weapons smuggling a top priority. They each have so many other tasks to handle and will unsurprisingly point the finger of blame at one another. (That is the nature of such large security bureaucracies.)

The Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee should establish a dedicated subcommittee to ride herd on this matter.

If Israel can figure-out which exact window in a Tehran apartment building to fly a nearly invisible explosive drone through, launched from a secret base inside Iran, in order to clobber an Iranian Revolutionary Guard commander - then it should be able to get a handle on drone smuggling of weapons into the Negev and Jordan Valley spawned by Iran, too.

Attack the smugglers in neighboring states, interdict the drone flights, and aggressively prosecute the local gangs receiving and distributing the weapons on our side of the borders.

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