Ready the rapid-response squads everywhere

written by David M. Weinberg | 22.12.2023

On Simchat Torah October 7, the "Black Sabbath," some 3,000 Palestinian terrorists broke through the Gaza border fence in 29 places, swarming into nearby Israeli communities to commit mass murder. The frontline Hamas fighters were heavily armed and penetrated as far as Ofakim. The military and civilian Israeli defenders on hand, sparse and skeletal as they were, fought desperately and heroically until reinforcements arrived, in most cases much too late.

There are hundreds of Israel cities, towns, villages, and neighborhoods along Israel's northern, eastern, and southern borders, straddling the Green Line in the center of the country, in Judea and Samaria, and in the Jerusalem environs that are similarly threatened. Exposed, insufficiently defended, and unprepared.

Therefore, the training and equipping of civilian rapid-response security squads on a massive scale everywhere in this country is more necessary and urgent than ever. This requires both government investment and volunteer civilian mobilization.

The threat is real. Hamas only beat Hezbollah to the punch, with the latter known to have long planned a broadscale invasion of northern Israel. The Jordanian army has been practicing offensive maneuvers right-up on the Jordan River border for months. Israeli Arabs previously have rioted and blocked major arteries in the Negev and Galilee – locking-down Israeli-Jewish townships.

Most stark of all is the threat of Palestinian swarm attacks on settlement communities in Judea and Samaria and on cities straddling the Green Line in the center of the country like those in the Emek Hefer region. This is not an imaginary scenario. It is a clear and present danger.

Just this week, the IDF conducted a drill simulating an October 7-style attack in Judea and Samaria. The drill was dictated by the escalation of Palestinian terrorist attacks over the past two months.

In the nine weeks since Hamas launched its cross-border attack from the Gaza

Strip, there have been 1,388 Palestinian terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria, including 569 stoning assaults, 287 attacks with explosives, 143 fire-bombings, and 70 drive-by shooting attacks. Three Israelis (a civilian, a soldier, and a Border Police officer) have been murdered in Judea and Samaria since October 7 and at least 52 Israelis sustained injuries.

On Monday, 27-year-old Mevaseret Cohen was wounded when terrorists fired on the car in which she, her husband, and their six-week-old baby were traveling near the Jewish town of Ateret in Samaria. Her baby and husband were unharmed. The terrorist, who fired at least six bullets at the car, escaped, despite being fired back at by the bold husband/driver.

(But of course, the international media covers none of this. Like biased UN agencies and hostile so-called "human rights" NGOs, the media is instead obsessed with practically and comparatively non-existent "settler violence" against Palestinians.)

According to investigative journalist Nadav Shragai of Israel Hayom, the Palestinian Authority itself is preparing for battle against Israel, right under our noses. A scenario whereby Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF) turn their guns against IDF troops and Israeli civilians is rapidly developing into actuality.

Dozens of terrorist attacks on IDF forces and the civilian population in Judea and Samaria have been propelled since the beginning of 2023 by Palestinian policemen, by members of the Preventive Security Forces, and members of other PA units.

A similar picture arises in relation to counter-terrorist activity too. Alongside the considerable number of successful targeting operations carried out by the IDF and the Shin Bet security agency against Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) members over the course of the last year, dozens of Fatah "fighters" have also been killed. This has involved Fatah's al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, which since 2021 has taken up arms once again, and prior to the October 7 massacre in the Gaza envelope communities made an express appeal for mass killing of Israeli Jews.

Shragai points out that since the outbreak of the current war some 2,200 Palestinians have been arrested in Judea and Samaria, with 1,100 of them being Hamas-affiliated activists or terrorists. No information is available regarding the

organizational affiliation of the other 50 percent.

One must dive deep into reports on the Palestinian side to understand that alongside members of the PIJ and "unidentified individuals," many of them belong to organizations affiliated with Fatah, the beating heart of the PA, or its security forces.

Israel blurs or covers-up this information because it seeks to preserve what minimally remains of security cooperation with the PASF and to discourage attacks by additional members of the PASF.

But as Palestinian Media Watch has showed, the PA itself makes no attempt to conceal the escalated involvement of its institutional "martyrs" in attacks on Israelis. In fact, it is rewarding them with "pay for slay" stipends and formal PA military funerals. Declarations in support of the October 7 massacre and the express desire for a similar slaughter assault in Judea and Samaria have become standard discourse in the PA-controlled media over the last two months, with top PA officials joining the melee. Palestinian social media are inundated with AI-generated videos of terrorist swarm attacks into Samarian settlements, mimicking the Gaza envelope attacks.

And one cannot just ignore the unmistakable offensive military exercises conducted in recent weeks by PASF battalions, which now number 45,000 men: exercises to conquer installations and infiltrate settlements, commando incursions into urban territory, etc. This is a far cry from the "strong police force" imagined by the Oslo Accords tasked with merely guaranteeing "public order and internal security."

A not-yet-published analysis by Professors Kobi Michael and Gabi Siboni of the Misgav Institute for National Security and Zionist Strategy assesses that Israeli cities and settlements need professionally trained and well-equipped rapid response platoons with the ability to fend-off invaders for up to six hours (before arrival of military troops and helicopter gunships). They attempt an initial mapping and categorization of Israeli cities by level of immediate threat and make a rough estimation of the concomitant force structure required.

Maj. Gen. (res.) Uzi Dayan, a former deputy IDF chief-of-staff and OC Central Command, similarly has written about the need to develop "active defensive capabilities" for settlements and even for "pre-1967" Israeli cities like Kfar Saba

and Rosh HaAyin to initially defend themselves, with serious training and tight incorporation into IDF defense planning.

Again, this will require significant government investment. But also volunteer civilian mobilization. Where will all the volunteers come from? Well, part of the answer ought to be, needs to be, hopefully can be – from the haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) community, which until now has refused any national security service.

But as Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer of The Tikvah Fund haredi division and haredi journalist Yakov Plevinsky have shown, there is an awakening at least on the fringes of haredi society regarding the obligation to contribute to the national security burden, regarding the need to protect their own communities and those beyond haredi community walls too.

Quietly there are many initiatives underway to incorporate haredi men in a range of defense and relief capacities, ranging from rapid-response squads to fire and rescue services, and from the Homefront Command to medical first-responders like Zaka, Hatzala, and Mada – where some haredi men already are involved.

The challenge is to make such service mainstream and "honorable" in haredi society. Plevinsky and others argue that the way to do so is by soft peddling the demand for formal enlistment and "uniforming" of haredi men, instead settling for their volunteer absorption, by osmosis and out of uniform, in the "soft" security frameworks described above.

(Nobody argues that this is fair or equitable in comparison to the national security service burden on non-haredi Israeli society, only that it now might be realistic.)

Success in this endeavor, supremely important in my eyes, requires wise and far-sighted leadership from both government and haredi community leaders alike.

In any case, the necessity of forming hefty rapid-response squads in all parts of the country should be clear, long before Israel's other enemies seek to copycat Hamas attacks.

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