



INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM RESEARCH

A Centre of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

Report on bomb attack in Jerusalem and the recent escalation between Israel and Hamas movement

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25 March 2011

The Incident



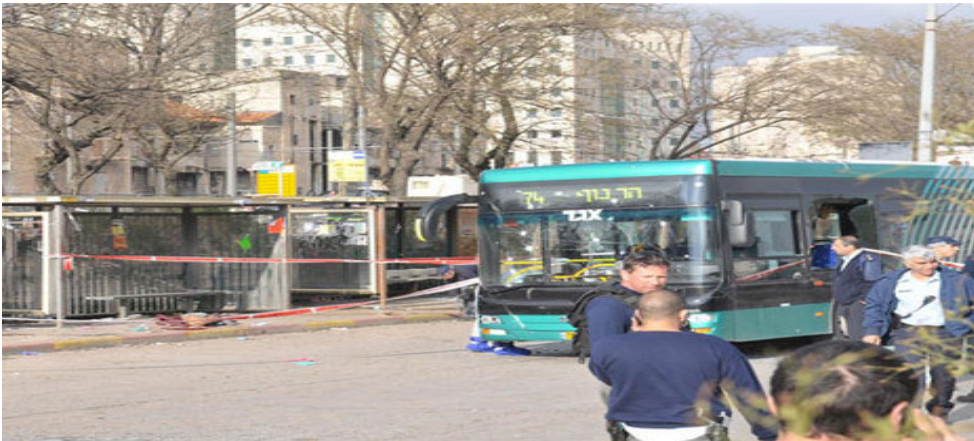
**Figure 1: The explosion occurred in the entrance of Jerusalem near a bus stop
(Photo Credit: Walla.co.il)**

Since 22 March 2011 there has been a deterioration of the security situation in Israel following two years of relative quiet in the region. On 23 March 2011, at 3 pm (Israel local time), a small bomb that was hidden in a suitcase exploded next to a bus stop at the entrance to Jerusalem which resulted in the death of one woman (British tourist) and the injury of more than sixty others. This was the first terrorist attack in the city since 2008.¹

¹ "Terror has returned to Jerusalem", Wallanews.co.il, 23 March 2011.



Figure 2-3: A view from the explosion site
(Photo Credit: Walla.co.il & Reuter)



Tactics

The small bomb (1-2 kilograms) might indicate the operational difficulties faced by the terrorists and the fact that a local group was responsible for the attack. The Israeli authorities did not mention the way the charge was activated or the type of explosive used. According to unconfirmed report, a single terrorist set off the device by a cellular phone. It was assumed that he intended to target two buses arriving at the bus stop at that time of the explosion.

So far no terrorist organization has taken responsibility for the attack. However the Palestinian Authority arrested (24 March) few operatives of the Islamic Jihad (PIJ) in the West Bank, apparently based on information it received from Israeli security services. That might imply that the PIJ infrastructure in the West Bank was involved in the blast. The area of the explosion is usually monitored by cameras, and that probably has helped the security services in the investigation.

Anyway, one of the wounded in Wednesday's terror attack called the police after spotting a suspicious object near the bus station, possibly saving civilian lives and minimizing the number of casualties in Jerusalem by doing that. The man, David Amoyal, informed the police, but the call was interrupted by the explosion.

Amoyal, 52, worked at a kiosk that was completely destroyed when a suicide bomber detonated himself next to it in 1994. The shop was rebuilt and named "*Pitzuz Shel Kiosk*," which literally means "a blast of a kiosk." When he spotted the suspicious bag, Amoyal told some youths who were nearby to stay away while he called the police. However the device went off during his call to the police. There would have been fewer casualties if he had a little more time. The mayor of Jerusalem, Mr. Nir Barkat applauded Amoyal's efforts and vigilance.²

Rockets firing and other attacks

Concurrently, terrorists fired (22-24 March) medium range missiles at the cities of Ashdod and Beer Sheba from Gaza Strip, to targets deep within the Israeli heartland. A number of people were injured and damage was caused to property. The Islamic Jihad has taken responsibility for this bombardment. This was the first time that rockets have been fired towards these towns since the end of the "Cast Lead" operation in December 2008- January 2009.

In fact, the escalation in hostilities started even earlier than the events described here, in a series of actions initiated in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: On 11 March 2011, in an attack for which no responsibility was claimed, a terrorist infiltrated a Jewish settlement in northern Samaria where he knifed to death a family with three small children. On 23 February 2011, a missile was fired in the direction of the city of Beer Sheba; an act for which the Islamic Jihad took responsibility. In response, over the last week the Israeli Air Force attacked Hamas and Islamic Jihad targets in the Gaza Strip killing about ten

²See: "Jihad leaders go into hiding", Yenetnews.com, 24 March. 2011. "Jerusalem blast: Men's vigilance saves lives", 23 March 2011 and "Assessment: We can't prevent terror 100 percents", Wallanews.co.il, 23 March 2011.

terrorists and civilians. Reacting to this, on 19 March the military wing of the Hamas fired about another fifty mortars towards Israeli settlements near the border with Gaza.³



**Figure 4-5 Site of one the rockets that hit the city of Beersheba
(Photo Credit: Walla.co.il)**



**Figure 6: 120mm mortar bomb that Hamas shelled near Gaza Strip on 19th of March
(Photo Credit: Walla.co.il)**

³ See “Rocket threat: Schools in South cancel classes”, 23 March 2011, “A tense morning in the South”, Wallanews.co.il, 24 March 2011, “The PIJ on the rockets: We terrified the invaders”, 23 March 2011 and “On the background of the fire over the South, the IDF attacked again in Gaza”, 24 March 2011.

Impact Analysis

The deterioration in the security situation may be explained on a number of levels: the lack of movement in the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the one hand, and the strengthening of Hamas rule in the Gaza Strip, on the other hand, create preconditions for terror operations. Beyond this, Israel maintains a policy of deterrence towards Hamas (similar to the policy pursued vis-à-vis Hezbollah in the northern arena); it is likely that the severe blow suffered by the organization at Israeli hands about two years ago has contributed to persuading the organization to maintain quiet in the southern sector. Nonetheless, deterrence has a limited effect, particularly when the entity being deterred is a terrorist organization. While initially Hamas ignored attacks launched by small terrorist groups in Gaza against Israel, in recent days it has chosen to participate in them.

Hamas has an interest in undermining stability in the West Bank whereas the Palestinian Authority (PA) has an intense desire to pursue a policy of building an independent state from the ground upwards through peaceful means, without the use of terror. The PA is trying to improve the quality of life of residents of the West Bank while residents of the Gaza Strip live under siege and under the rule of an oppressive regime, thereby creating pressure on the Hamas government in the Strip. This is the backdrop against which one must understand the fierce and immediate condemnation of the attack in Jerusalem which was voiced by the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority, Abu Mazen, and Prime Minister, Salem Fayyad.⁴

Moreover, the actions of the terrorist organizations must be understood in the context of the revolutions that is taking place in the Middle East. In contrast to the majority of the Arab states where the masses are rising up against the dictators governing them and are struggling for democracy, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have remained relatively quiet. The Palestinians are not part of the revolutionary phenomenon launched in the Arab world in the middle of January. One of the explanations for this is Hamas' fear of awakening protest movements against its tyrannical government in the Strip.

On a number of occasions, Hamas security forces in the Gaza Strip have prevented attempts to organize demonstrations in support of demonstrators in Egypt and Libya. At most, Hamas allowed a mass gathering calling for reconciliation between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. It is possible that the escalation in hostilities against Israel is a means of diverting Palestinian public opinion from events in the Arab world. In this context, the renewed violence also reflects the dynamic nature of the revolutionary wave. It wears a different garb in different arenas and in the Palestinian-Israeli arena; it leads to deterioration in the security situation.

⁴ "The PO condemned the terror attack in Jerusalem", Wallanews.co.il, 23 March 2011.

At an operational level it is an expression of the asymmetrical conflict between a regular army and a non-state actor/terrorist groups. Rockets are a flexible weapons system which could be easily used and concealed. Although they are relatively imprecise in terms of targeting, they are capable of reaching deep into the heartland of the enemy and causing damage to the civilian population. The terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip fire the rockets from heavily populated areas in order to make it more difficult for Israel to target them.

The use of the rockets and mortars reflects a number of principles in guerilla fighting – attrition of the enemy state, operational flexibility and taking the initiative. Particularly important is the principle of patience. Since the end of the war with Israel in 2008, Hamas and Islamic Jihad have succeeded in smuggling in hundreds of short and medium range missiles which are capable of blanketing the south and center of Israel (in addition to other higher quality weapon systems, such as anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles). The source of these weapons is Iran and they are brought into the Gaza Strip by a network of smugglers. The huge quantity of weapons enables the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip to conduct a prolonged war against Israel and wear down the civilian population.

In this context it should be recalled that on 15 March the Israeli navy captured a cargo ship flying the Liberian flag, which was on its way from Syria, through Turkey, to Egypt. Vast quantities of armaments had been concealed on the vessel, including C-704 land-sea missiles, with a range of 35 kilometers, manufactured by China or Iran. The cargo, which was concealed between containers of cotton and beans, was apparently sent from Iran to Syria and loaded there onto the Liberian vessel. The armaments contained inscriptions in Farsi and handbooks for operating the weapons were also found on board, written in Farsi. Iran denied involvement with the vessel. Concurrently, Egypt stated that it had captured a shipment of weapons which apparently had been on its way from Sudan to the Gaza Strip. It was likely that behind these smuggling attempts was the Iran and Hamas' joint desire to exploit domestic instability in Egypt in order to increase the amount of weapons being brought into the Gaza Strip.

In recent years Israel has devoted considerable efforts to developing systems for intercepting missiles, albeit these are still not operational. At the same time, through its Air Force, Israel has improved its technological might and intelligence capabilities. Therefore it is a pattern of mutual escalation: each of the parties reacts to the actions of the other side and each time the response is of a more powerful nature. Even if at first neither party has an interest in a worsening security situation, the mistaken manner in which they interpret the acts of the other party would inevitably lead to such deterioration.

In conclusion, what are the choices open to the parties? So far Hamas has exploited the quiet condition in the area to reinforce its sovereignty within the Gaza Strip and build up its strength prior to the next clash with the IDF. Accordingly, it would appear that Hamas aspires to prevent further deterioration which might expose it to a more painful Israeli response, such as the targeted killing of senior Hamas members or even IDF ground forces taking action within the Gaza Strip. For its part, Israel has an interest in containing

the violence and preventing excessive responses, in order to restore calm to the southern towns and prevent a connection being drawn between the uprisings in the Arab world and the Israeli-Palestinian dispute (and indeed, so far Israeli response to the terror attacks were fairly limited- aerial attacks against tunnels and terrorists that planed to fire rockets). At the same time, continued terrorist attacks and rockets fire towards its territory, would force Israel to initiate a ground operation in the Gaza Strip, even if one of smaller scope than that which took place at the end of 2008.⁵

⁵ "Bibi vows wise response", Ynetnews.co.il, 24 March 2011.