

The first half of April has been characterized by military and political developments, that could signal a worrisome trajectory for Israel: military escalation, indicating the readiness of the Iranian-Palestinian axis for a potential H-Hour scenario of a multifront attack against Israel; and the political "rearrangement" of Middle East axis in light of the Iranian-Saudi rapprochement, also manifesting in the Saudi re-legitimization of Hamas and Assad. For now, the Israeli response has been strategic containment with tactical military retaliation. Some prominent voices in Israel call for the preservation of silence, but without the pre-emptive initiative, Israeli might find itself "dragged" into a military campaign in a disadvantageous timing, which could jeopardize its deterrence.

**First, the recent escalation in Israel during the intersection of Passover and Ramadan on five fronts at once** – Gaza, Lebanon, Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria ("West Bank"), and riots in Arab cities around Israel, as well as terror attacks around Israel – is reflective of the "unification of fronts" strategy schemed by Iran and Hamas.

- Various 'experts' ascribe those attacks to these actors' obligation to retaliate for actions taken by Israel, such as alleged air strikes on Iranian targets in Syria. However, we view them as a "drill" designed to test the quality of all of Israel's defense layers' response and readiness toward a potential carefully-schemed Iranian multifront attack.
  - **Air defense and missile defense systems:** On April 6<sup>th</sup>, 34 mortar shells were fired from Lebanon toward Israel, injuring 2 civilians. Intelligence estimates that the South Lebanon branch of Hamas is responsible for the attack, operated by Iran's Quds Force with Hezbollah's acquiescence. In parallel, 44 rockets were fired from Gaza by Hamas. Two days later, three rockets were fired from Syria.
  - **Border defenses:** A terrorist crossed the border from Lebanon and penetrated more than 70 km into Israel. He activated an explosive charge that severely injured an Israeli civilian, while carrying an explosive belt, planning a large attack. He was eventually neutralized by the IDF. A group dubbed "Lone Wolves Galilee Force" claimed responsibility on Telegram. Clearly, the attack was carried out with the approval and full knowledge of Hezbollah, which is the de facto sovereign in southern Lebanon. The last time a similar attack took place was in 2002.
  - **Undermining Jerusalem stability:** Hamas used the sensitive period of Ramadan to fuel the Palestinian grassroots "resistance", mobilizing international opinion against Israel with carefully-planned armed entrenchment on the Al Aqsa compound, attacking worshippers and Israeli police officers with firecrackers, rocks and bats, which resulted in the arrest of 350 militants by Israeli Border Police. International officials, including the United Nations Secretary General, countries in

Europe and the Arab world, falsely accused Israel of attacking innocent worshippers while violating the status quo.

- **Judea and Samaria ("West Bank"):** The Shin Bet announced the foiling of over 200 planned attacks by armed Palestinian groups since the beginning of this year alone, including an Iranian plot to recruit two Palestinians. This is around double the annual average of foiled attacks, that stands at approximately 450. Several terror attacks resulted in the murder of innocent Israelis, such as the shooting attack in the Jordan Valley that killed three members of the same family (two sisters and their mother), and the runover attack in Tel Aviv that killed an Italian tourist.
- **Arab cities:** Low-intensity riots erupted in Arab cities such as Nazareth, Arabe, Sahnin, Umm al Fahm and Baqa al-Gharbia, in parallel to the tensions in Jerusalem and the rocket barrages from the borders.
- **Cyber:** Iranian and Sudanese groups attacked websites belonging to the largest universities in Israel, the post office, cellular services companies, and electrical company.
- **All signs indicate that Iran, its proxies and leading Palestinian actors are well prepared for a scenario in which they could attack Israel on multiple fronts**, either as a response for an Israeli strike in Iran, or when the decision is made to finally follow through on their rhetoric and their long-standing investment in infrastructure designed to annihilate Israel.
- **Proof for their readiness** can be found in their increased velocity and audacity of attacks, testing Israel's response and readiness; and in their public statements, even interpreting the social unrest in Israel caused by its judicial reform proposals as indicative of broad Israeli weakness that could prompt a multifront attack.

Hezbollah Secretary General Nasrallah quoted the Israeli President and leaders of the Israeli protest movement including former generals, and claimed Israel is on the brink of civil war, that its end is near, and that Hezbollah succeeded in creating a new deterrence equation vis-à-vis

Israel. Similar statements were made by Iranian Leader Khamenei and Hamas leader in Gaza, Sinwar.

- **The current Israeli response can be summed up as strategic containment, with tactical military retaliation.** It included measured airstrikes in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria; restraint in Jerusalem, including banning Jewish visitors on Temple Mount during the last 10 days of Ramadan; arrests around Judea and Samaria; and defensive measures such as Iron Dome and cybersecurity.
- However, **if it continues to moderately retaliate, Israel could find itself “dragged” into military campaigns at disadvantageous timing, and if it continues to avoid taking the pre-emptive initiative on the strategic level, the force build-up by its enemies will only continue to ramp up, and its deterrence effect will be gradually jeopardized.**

**Second, the recent realignment of the Middle East axis, undermining the solid Shi’ite-Sunni rift that dominated the spirit of the Abraham Accords, could result in several consequences for Israel.**

- **Iranian-Saudi reproachment** brokered by China, alongside restoration of ties between Abu Dhabi and Tehran after cutting ties in 2016, is now joined by the warming relations between KSA and the Assad regime and the Hamas terror group, both Iranian proxies.
  - Arab Foreign Ministers have convened in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to discuss the reacceptance of Syria to the Arab League. In parallel, Hamas is expected to re-open its Damascus offices after more than 12 years of rift with the Assad regime.
  - This week, both President Abbas’s Fatah and Hamas are invited to Riyadh for official meetings, breaking over a decade of hostility with Fatah and 15 years with Hamas. A major topic between KSA and Hamas is Saudi-held Hamas prisoners. **Abbas remains extremely dissatisfied with this new Saudi attitude toward his rival Hamas.** Saudi officials said they are “interested in settling disagreements with their neighbours, and Hamas constitutes a central pillar that enjoys popularity among Palestinians.” He added, **“Saudi Arabia has no issue with these actors today** – the Houthis, the Iranians and the Lebanese, even Hezbollah after recent understandings have been reached.”
  - **A Saudi re-legitimization of Hamas is a worrisome symbolic victory for Iran, and repositions the Hamas terror group as a**

**sought-after regional political actor**, after years of being rejected in Saudi Arabia and qualified as an Iranian terror group. **Hamas leaders are among the only ones now able to visit KSA, Iran, Syria, Qatar, Gaza as well as Russia.**

- By so doing, **Saudi Arabia is signalling to the United States its disapproval of the lack of American leadership in the region**, its soft hand toward Iran and its quest for a nuclear bomb. This includes the American offer for a partial nuclear deal with Iran rather than a full resumption of the JCPOA, a very far position from the initial departure point, “longer and stronger deal.” The same Saudi official also signalled their disapproval of Prime Minister Netanyahu and his “inability to effectively strike Iran,” as well as his “disinterest” in retreating to the 1967 lines.
- **Iran’s novel political status in the Middle East could reinvigorate it either to stage a multifront attack against Israel** as a “show of force” signalling its long-reaching arm to other Middle East actors and to world superpowers, and affirming its position as a powerful regional force; and/or motivate it to **break out to 90% uranium enrichment as part of its military nuclear program**, a step it has chosen to avoid until today. According to the recent IAEA report, Iran needs no longer than 2-3 weeks to reach sufficient fissile material for its first nuclear device, and its warhead technology could be much more advanced than most Western estimates.

**Recently, the Israeli Intelligence Corps issued its assessment to the political echelon, warning that there are higher risks leading to a potential war in the coming year.** This relates to Iran’s growing motivation to pressure Israel, to the Al Aqsa-related tensions that contribute to the “reunification of fronts,” the incitement on social media, and to the enemy’s interpretation of the American policy as shifting away from the Middle East, which could leave Israel more vulnerable.

**Israel must boost its defensive and offensive layers of protection:**

- **Air and missile defense** (Iron Dome and development of laser)
- **Ground defense** (rehabilitate its IDF reserve forces and establish a National Guard as part of its Border Police force)
- **Political coalition – lead a deeper Western involvement in the region** to summon moderate Sunni countries, chief among them Saudi Arabia, to the Israeli-Sunni-Western axis against Iran and its rapprochement to the East, to counter its warming relations with Iran and its proxies.

# THE MONITOR

H1 April 2023 in Numbers



## TERROR VICTIMS:

- ❖ **Murdered:** 4 [3 Israelis, 1 Italian tourist]
- ❖ **Injured:** 11

## ATTACKS:

- ❖ 81 rockets
- ❖ 1 stabbing
- ❖ 3 shooting
- ❖ 1 car ramming
- ❖ Violent riots on the Al Aqsa compound

## ON THE PALESTINIAN SIDE:

- ❖ At least **6 militants killed** in fire exchanges with IDF soldiers
- ❖ At least **32 militants arrested** around Judea and Samaria, in addition to **350 arrested armed rioters** who initiated confrontations with Israeli Police on Temple Mount and entrenched themselves inside the mosque, most released on recognizance

## Rockets: Rare rocket barrage from three different fronts during Passover/Ramadan

- ❖ 44 rockets from Gaza (8 intercepted, 23 landed in open fields, others misfired or landed in the sea) | Various Palestinian factions claimed responsibility, including the Fatah's Al Aqsa Brigades; Israel considers Hamas responsible for all Gaza-related activity.
- ❖ 34 rockets from Lebanon (25 intercepted, 5 landed, others yet to be known) | Israeli intelligence showed Hamas's South Lebanon branch, under the auspices of the Iranian IRGC's Qods Force. Israel considers the State of Lebanon and Hezbollah responsible for any activity in their territory.
- ❖ 3 rockets from Syria (1 intercepted, 2 landed in open fields) | Responsibility claimed by various groups, including the Al Quds Brigade. Israel considers the Assad regime responsible for any activity in its territory. Iranian cells are active all around Syria.

**Israeli response:** Air strikes of 10 Hamas-related targets in Gaza and 3 in Tyre, Lebanon, as well as a

series of Syrian military installations (IDF spokesperson). While Prime Minister Netanyahu hinted at a different kind of military retaliation in Lebanon, that "focused Hezbollah's attention" on allowing Palestinian groups' activity in their territory, Hezbollah Secretary General Nasrallah claimed no Hezbollah targets were hit, but a handful of "empty hills and banana plantations". Press reports in Israel claimed Israeli special units made a ground operation that affected a target close to Nasrallah, in a way that only him and a handful of Hezbollah officials were aware.

## Terror attacks – selection

- ❖ **April 4 | Temple Mount, Jerusalem** | 350 rioters entrenched inside the Dome of the Rock Mosque on the Al Aqsa compound, armed with stones, rocks, firecrackers and bats, attacking both Israeli Border Police officers and Muslim worshippers. Israeli police arrested all rioters with no casualties. These rioters were partially funded, armed and incited by Hamas, the Jordanian Waqf, and Turkey-related associations
- ❖ **April 4 | Nir Zvi, near Lod** | 21-year-old Palestinian illegal infiltrator stabbed 2 soldiers, injuring them
- ❖ **April 5 | Hebron** | Israeli soldier injured from shooting by a Palestinian terrorist during riots
- ❖ **April 6-7 | Arab cities such as Umm al-Fahm, Shanin, Arabe and Baqa al-Gharbie** | Dozens of rioters threw stones and shot firecrackers at police officers, and blocked roads with burning tires
- ❖ **Jerusalem** | Several incidents of Arab civilians from the Arab neighborhoods (At-Tor\Mount of Olives) throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails over Jewish houses in the area
- ❖ **April 7 | Hamra Junction, Jordan Valley** | 3 Israeli-British family members, two sisters and their mother, murdered in a drive-by shooting attack followed by a verification of death by Palestinian terrorists
- ❖ **April 8 | Tel Aviv promenade area** | 1 Italian tourist murdered and 7 tourists injured in a car ramming attack conducted by an Israeli Arab citizen from Kafar Qasem



- ❖ **April 18, Holocaust Memorial Day | Shimon HaTzadik, Jerusalem** | 2 Israelis injured in a shooting attack by a 15-year-old Palestinian, an illegal infiltrator from the Nablus area, who documented the attack on his Facebook Story. He was arrested the following day

#### IDF counterterrorism activity

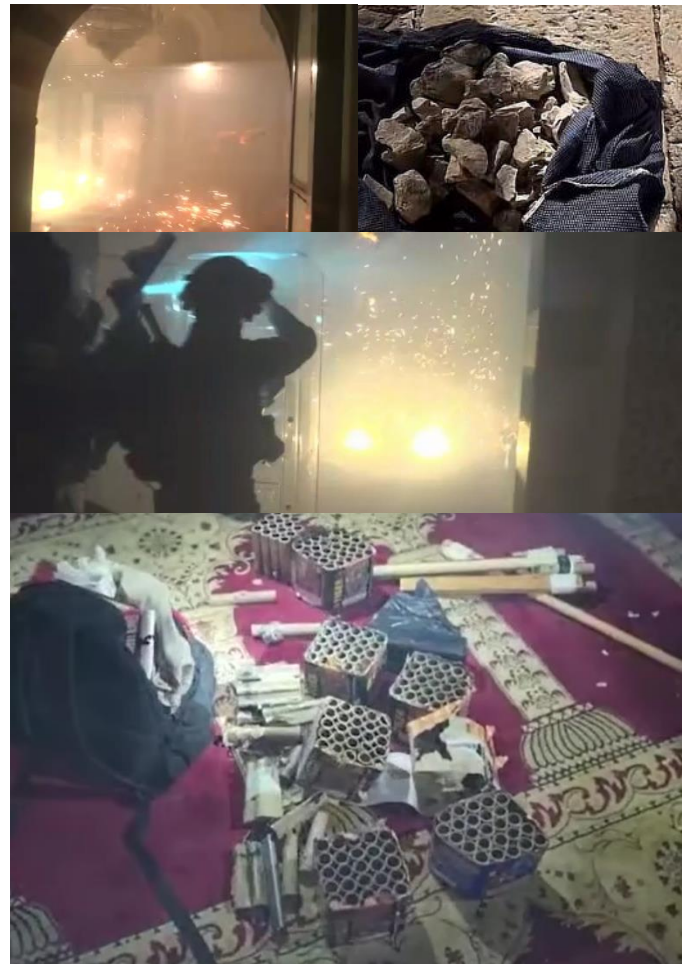
- ❖ IDF forces arrested dozens of Palestinians in Judea and Samaria cities and towns following clear intelligence on planned mass attacks around Israel.
  - On April 18, three Palestinian were arrested in the Jenin Refugee Camp
  - On April 11, seven Palestinians were arrested in Jenin by the IDF, Border Police and Shin Bet, following a fire fight between the soldiers and the militants
  - On the same day, militants in the A-Ram village near Ramallah shot at the soldiers who came to carry out arrests, threw IEDs, rolled burning tires and threw rocks

#### Technology and arm deals

- ❖ **March 29 | Israeli satellite Ofek 13 was successfully launched into space** from central Israel, a product of Tomer and Rafael, and will be operated by the Air Force and the Intelligence Corps' 9900 Unit. It is able to take photos on night time and cloudy weather due to its unique electro-optic radiation.
- ❖ **April 3 | Rafael Advanced Defense Systems published its 2022 financial sheet, with 35.6 billion NIS aggregated orders**, a 24% year-on-year increase
- ❖ **April 7 | One day after joined NATO, Finland announces that it will purchase David Sling from Israel** (Raphael industries) in a €316 million deal. The system is the next long-range air defense system according to the Finnish Ministry of Defense
- ❖ **April 10 | Greek purchases Raphael's SPIKE (anti-tank) missiles** in a €370 million deal with Israel



**Left: Lucy, Rina and Maya Dee, victims of the Jordan Valley terror attack | Right: Alessandro Parini, the Italian tourist who was the victim of the Tel Aviv terror attack**



**The riots on Temple Mount, falsely presented as violence on innocent Muslim worshippers, that preceded the mass arrests by Israeli police. Stones, bats, firecrackers and other means of assault were aimed at the officers. Jerusalem District Commander decided on the break-in following intelligence on the preparation of IEDs on site**