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Research Proposal

**The Threat of Assassination by Terrorist Organizations of Political and Military Officials of Enemy States:**

**Lessons from Palestinian and Lebanese Terrorist Organizations' Conflicts with Israel**

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One of the main methods used by states in their counterterrorism efforts is the assassination of terrorist leaders. Some of the most renowned examples are the assassinations of Al Qaeda leader Osama Bin laden (2011) and of the ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi (2019) by the Unites Stated as well as Israel’s assassinations of the Hezbollah leader Abbas al Moussawi (1992) and the Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin (2004). While most discourse has focused on states’ assassinations of terror leaders,[[1]](#footnote-1) there has been insufficient research into the reverse phenomenon of targeted assassination operations conducted by terrorist organizations against state enemies. Indeed, the history of terrorist organizations shows that they have made extensive use of the tactic of targeted killings of political and military officials and of key civilian figures in their conflicts with enemy states.

Throughout the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, terrorist organizations have made attempts to assassinate Israeli officials, with information available about a few dozen such attempts in recent decades alone. The successful assassination attempts have involved information gathering, operational planning, and actual execution. However, many other planned assassinations never reached the action stage, often because of Israeli counterintelligence and countermeasures. Some of the more notorious successful cases of terrorist assassinations include the attack on the Israeli diplomat Shlomo Argov in London by Abu Nidal's organization (1982), which left Argov paralyzed and blind, and the assassinations of Brigadier General Erez Gerstein by Hezbollah in South Lebanon (1999), and of Israel’s Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi by the PFLP in Jerusalem (2001). These operations, considered successes by the terrorist organizations, were followed by numerous unsuccessful attempts, and all of this activity significantly influenced the dynamic of the conflict. For example, the attack on Argov was the main trigger leading to the 1982 Lebanon War. As a result of this war, Israel kept its army, the IDF, in south Lebanon for many years, and the terrorist organization Hezbollah grew tremendously in size and strength in Lebanon, with the support of Iran.

The purpose of this proposed research is to explore the phenomenon of assassination operations conducted by terrorist organizations. It focuses on Palestinian and Lebanese terrorist organizations in order to identify and analyze their activities. It will examine the motivation and goals for these operations, the methods for gathering information and conducting the assassinations, and the influence of the assassinations on the dynamics of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Israeli-Arabic conflict is an appropriate case study for exploring this phenomenon for two main reasons. First, the conflict has spanned many decades and has been marked by numerous events, including both attempted and successful assassinations. Second, a great number of terrorist organizations, using different kinds of assassination operations have been involved in the conflict.

This research is based on a variety of sources, in both Hebrew and Arabic, including official publications of Palestinian and Lebanese terrorist organizations and official Israeli sources, such as judicial proceedings, some of which have not yet received serious attention in the research literature. Some secondary literature and journalistic sources will be used to supply the necessary background and to provide a more comprehensive overview of the subject.

By expanding the base of knowledge of this threat from terrorist organizations and by bringing it to public awareness, this research can serve as an important resource for NATO states in formulating policy to respond to such threats. On the academic level, this research represents a unique opportunity to explore an interesting aspect of the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict that has not been adequately studied to date. It also offers new insights in the field of terror research.

1. See, for example: Simon Frankel Pratt (2013), “'Anyone Who Hurts Us’: How the Logic of Israel's ‘Assassination Policy’ Developed During the Aqsa Intifada," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 25:2, pp. 224–45, DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2012.657280. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)