Summary

Since its establishment, the State of Israel has been required to deal with terrorism that has taken the lives of many victims. Terrorism has changed tactics and methods of action mainly to terrorize and harm civilians and soldiers within the country, on its borders and even overseas. The government of Israel and the various security bodies have faced new challenges over the years. They have been required to frequently re-examine the reality and develop policies and tools to combat terrorism. In 2000, with the outbreak of the second intifada, the Israeli government and the security establishment faced a deeply complex challenge. The demonstrations on the Palestinian street and the violent riots were swiftly replaced with terrorist activity by terrorist organizations culminating in indiscriminate suicide attacks. As part of the struggle against terrorism, the use of targeted killings developed.

This study examines the question of how Israel's targeted killings policy developed in the years 2000-2012 as part of the struggle against Palestinian terrorism throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The study examined the roles involved in policymaking, the decision-making process; the importance of targeted killings in all counter-terrorism activities; the legal and political criticism of the policy and even targeted killings in the United States after the 9/11 attacks during the period of President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama.

The central research hypothesis is that the targeted killings carried out by Israel were tactical and strategic weapons in the campaign to stop Palestinian terrorism.

The research question was examined by analyzing dozens of cases of targeted killings carried out by Israel against the Palestinian terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank between 2000 and 2013. To analyze the cases, I developed a model of eight variables that served as the basis for the development of the targeted killings policy: Intelligence gathering; interoperability, intelligence and operational cooperation between IDF units, the Israel Security Agency, the Israel Police and the Mossad; the process of selecting targets for prevention; unique attack cells and creative joint operations; the method of action chosen and the reactions of the terrorist organizations to targeted killings in various time periods. This study examines the development of the targeted killings policy chronologically, the manner in which the security establishment and the political echelon in Israel operated, and the activities of the terrorist organizations.

The field of targeted killings has not been studied in an analytical, academic way until now. Studies on the subject dealt with periods of up to a few years, and examined a very small number of targeted killings. The innovation of this study is the comprehensive review over a period of more than twelve years, while examining decision-making processes, processes that policy has undergone including changes and integration of military, security, political, and legal considerations, over dozens of case studies.

The research methodology is based on primary and secondary sources, books and publications from Israel and abroad, academic articles, a large number of personal interviews I held with senior political and security officials, some of whom even participated directly in the development of the targeted killings policy. Similarly, I held interviews with senior Palestinian officials and even with a diplomat from a hostile Muslim country.

The first part of the study includes a theoretical review - a background on Israel's targeted killings policy and methods since 1948. The second part of the study includes a detailed review of the targeted killings policy from the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000 until 2012. The following chapters include a chronological review on a thematic basis and include dealing with Palestinian terrorism in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; a description of the targeted killings of dozens of leaders, activists from the political and military echelons; and the co-operation of the various security bodies.

The third part of the study includes a description of the targeted killings policy from the perspective of the legal system; the construction of the separation fence as a component in the campaign against terrorism; and the targeted killings policy in the United States of America. The last part includes a discussion of the findings, conclusions and a summary.

The main conclusion of the study is that the targeted killings policy was a strategic and tactical weapon that greatly influenced Israel's campaign against Palestinian terrorism between 2000 and 2012. The killings of junior activists, including those planning suicide attacks, preparing explosive charges, terrorist recruiters, suicide bombers, and all the way up through the military and political echelons, whose respective leaders worked to contain terror, led to the weakening of the terrorist organizations. On the strategic level, targeted killings created conditions that enabled inter-party dialogue, agreements, and cease-fires. However, as early as the beginning of 2000, the heads of the security establishment emphasized that this was a limited tool and therefore sought to employ additional mechanisms, such as restoring freedom of action to the IDF in Judea and Samaria, arrests and investigations, and the construction of the security fence.

The idea of ​​conventional war between the armies of different countries has disappeared, and in its place new wars have developed in which armies fight terrorist organizations. Some of the actions are open and some are secret. The American case study as examined in this paper reinforces the hypothesis that there are clear similarities between the Israeli and American counterterrorism policies and supports the operational effectiveness of the campaign against terrorism. Former US President George W. Bush approved and promoted the targeted killings policy, and President Barack Obama adopted his predecessor's policy and made it a key tool in the war against terrorism.

This study could serve as a basis for future studies. One proposal is to examine the development of the targeted killings policy in light of the new challenges faced by Israel: Hamas and the other terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip, Da'esh in the Sinai region, global jihad organizations in Syria, and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The methods and technology employed by the State of Israel as part of its policy of targeted killings continue to develop with time. So, too, do new weapons systems that are being integrated and integrated into various IDF units and the Shin Bet. In accordance with the knowledge accumulated in the field, the IDF has developed special command bases in the Southern Command and the Northern Command, known as the “Hupat Esh” [Canopy of Fire]. The purpose of these special emergency units is to use real-time intelligence information to identify terrorist cells during attempts to penetrate Israeli territory, as well as rocket launchers, anti-tank missiles or other terrorist hostile activities which necessitate a speedy and accurate military response.