30 June 2020

Research Proposal

 **The Threat of Terror Organizations Assassinating Political and Military Officials of Enemy States – Lessons from the Case of Lebanese and Palestinian Terror Organizations' Struggle with Israel**

**Netanel Flamer**

Assassinating officials is one of the main methods used by states as a part of their counterterrorism efforts. Some of the best-known examples are the assassination of Al Qaeda leader Osama Bin laden (2011) and ISIS leader Abu bakr al Baghdadi (2019) by Unites States and Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin (2004) as well as Hizballah leader Abbas al Moussawi (1992) by Israel. While this phenomenon is at the center of the discourse,[[1]](#footnote-1) its opposite, official's assassination operations conducted by terror organization, has not been sufficiently studied. The history of terror organizations shows that the "targeted killing" tool, i.e. hitting political and military officials as well civil key figures, has been widely used by them in their struggle with enemy states.

Through the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, terror organizations tried to assassinate Israeli officials. A few dozens of such cases in the recent decades are known. The successful attempts included gathering information, operational planning, and the execution of it, but some of them were countered without getting to an action. some of the famous cases are the assassination attempt in London of the Israeli diplomate Shlomo Argov by Abu Nidal's organization (1982), brigadier Erez Gerstein By Hizballah in South Lebanon (1999), and the Israeli Tourism minister Rehavam Ze'evi by the PFLP in Jerusalem (2001). These successful operations, followed by dozens unsuccessful attempts, had significant influence on the dynamic of the conflict. As an example, Argov's assassination was the main trigger that led to the 1982 Lebanon War, that turned into a long stay of the IDF in south Lebanon and the foundation and rising of Hizballah.

The purpose of the proposal research is to explore the phenomenon of assassination operations conducted by terror organizations. by examining the case of the Palestinian and Lebanese organization, this phenomenon will be described and analyzed, and categorized: The motivation and goals for these operations, the methods for gathering information and conduct the assassination, and the influence of the assassination on the conflict dynamics.

The Israeli-Arabic conflict is an appropriate case study for exploring this phenomenon for tow main reasons: First, the number of events is large and spans a period of several decades. Second, this conflict involves great diversity of terror organizations as well as different kinds of assassination operations.

The research is based on various sources, both in Hebrew and Arabic, which includes official publications of Palestinian and Lebanese terror organizations together with official Israeli sources, such as judicial proceeding – some of them have not yet gotten a serious attention in the research field. Some of the secondary literature and journalistic sources will be used to complete the picture and as necessary background.

The research will allow to raise this important threat to awareness and expand its base of knowledge as a base for formulating a policy by NATO states to treat this threat. Furthermore, at the academic view, the research will provide a unique opportunity to explore an interesting aspect that has not been gotten sufficient attention in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict as well as in the terror research field.

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. 224-245, DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2012.657280; [↑](#footnote-ref-1)