



ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

Commentary...

Mahmoud Abbas Reveals his True Colors By Moshe Phillips

Who cares what Mahmoud Abbas said in his eulogy for the late PLO finance director Fuad Shubaki?

We should all care – very much. Because in Abbas's words, we see all too clearly the true attitudes and intentions of the chairman of the Palestinian Authority.

According to the PA's Wafa news agency, Abbas "expressed deep sorrow" at Shubaki's passing last week, at the age of 84. Abbas "praised Shubaki's exceptional life and contributions to the Palestinian cause," Wafa announced.

He "highlighted the late leader's steadfast commitment to the Palestinian Revolution, his leadership role within the Fatah movement, and his tireless efforts in defending the rights of the Palestinian people and their just struggle for freedom and independence."

Abbas also "offered his heartfelt condolences to the family of the deceased" and to "his fellow comrades in the struggle."

So who was this man that Abbas considers such a wonderful hero?

Fuad Shubaki devoted his entire life to murdering Israeli Jews and seeking the destruction of Israel. He started on the path before there were any "settlements" or "occupied territories." Wafa tells us that Shubaki "was one of the first to join the Palestinian fedayeen movement in the mid-1960s."

In other words, the territory Shubaki and his fellow terrorists were trying to "liberate" was pre-1967 Israel.

We may not know exactly which attacks Shubaki carried out, but his Wafa obituary makes it clear that he had plenty of Jewish blood on his hands: "He underwent training in the camps of the Palestinian revolution and participated in its battles."

Shubaki soon rose to the leadership ranks of the terror movement.

He became a member of both the Palestinian National Council and Fatah's Revolutionary Council. Then Yasser Arafat appointed him to manage Fatah's "military financial administration," Wafa reports.

Shubaki followed Arafat from Gaza to Jordan. When the Jordanians expelled them, Shubaki followed Arafat to Lebanon, then from there to Tunisia, all the while devoting himself to financing the bombers, snipers, grenade-hurlers, stabbers, and rock-throwers waging jihad against Israel.

Then came Oslo. Arafat, Abbas, and Shubaki declared they would live in peace with Israel. They signed the first Oslo Accord in 1993 and the second (Oslo II) in 1995. They pledged they were giving up terrorism, promised to arrest and extradite terrorists, and to stop teaching anti-Jewish hatred in their schools.

Those promises didn't hold up very well. Within weeks, terrorism resumed. Arafat set up thinly disguised front groups, such as the "Fatah Hawks" and the "Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade," to carry out the attacks so that he would not be directly blamed.

Israel requested the extradition of terrorists; Arafat ignored them. Israel asked Arafat to stop making jihad speeches; Arafat laughed at them. And Shubaki continued arranging the funds for terror.

On the morning of January 3, 2002, the Oslo myth was shattered, once and for all. That was when Israeli forces intercepted the Karine A, the ship carrying 50 tons of weapons to Gaza. It was Shubaki who arranged to purchase them from Iran.

Fifty tons – 100,000 pounds – of Katyusha rockets, mortar shells, Kalashnikov assault rifles, sniper rifles, anti-tank missiles, anti-tank mines, ammunition, and explosives.

In short, Arafat, Abbas and Shubaki, the "men of peace," were stocking up for war. The Oslo agreements had been a ruse. The Palestinian Arab leader had never intended to live in peace with Israel. The accords were just a way for them to gain control of Gaza and the major Arab cities in Judea-Samaria; to create a de facto army posing as a security force; to shelter fugitive terrorists; and to build up a vast

arsenal of weapons.

If Abbas really wants peace – as J Street and the State Department keep telling us – he would not have heaped praise on Shubaki in his eulogy. He would have said that Shubaki was wrong to participate in terrorist attacks,

wrong to serve as a leader of a terrorist movement, and wrong to arrange the purchase of 50 tons of weapons.

If Abbas is really a moderate – as most of the international news media keep claiming – he would have announced that the PA will not be providing any payments to Shubaki's family. But instead, the Shubaki family will be added to the ever-growing list of families of dead terrorists that receive monthly payments from the PA.

That's what Abbas does for those whom he considers heroes.

So if you want to know what Mahmoud Abbas really thinks about Israel, peace, and terrorism, just read his eulogy for Fuad Shubaki. Everything you need to know can be found there.

(Jerusalem Post Dec 30)

Israel should Strike Iran Now, Paving Way for Trump 2.0

By Seth Cropsey

The recent shift in geopolitical events against Iran and its proxies provides Israel with a clear opportunity — and the second Trump administration with one as well. Israel must strike Iran now, hitting any number of high-value targets within the Islamic Republic. This sets the stage for the second Trump administration to go beyond just maximum pressure, and target the heart of the Iranian regime.

By providing Mr. Trump with an alternative to the first anti-Iranian coalition through a muscular demonstration of Israeli power, Jerusalem can provide Washington enormous leverage over the New Eurasian Axis.

The collapse of the Assad regime should remind observers of international events of two basic facts. First, the strength of authoritarian states can dissipate without any apparent warning. Bashar al-Assad was thought to have won the Syrian Civil War quite handily after 2020. The Gulf States and Europeans, when the Islamist rebel group HTS began its offensive in early December, were in midst of a year-long process to rehabilitate the Assad regime and integrate it back into regional political structures.

Assad was viewed as having options and may have been able to choose between his Iranian and Russian backers in a manner relevant to the broader, ongoing Eurasian crisis. Yet just a few weeks later, the Assad regime has vanished. Despite expectations that Syria's various minorities, from the Assad-aligned Alawites to Syrian Christians, Druze and others would resist an Islamist group's offensive, the entire political-military structure unraveled.

There was no last stand in Damascus. Nor was there a dogged defense of the majority Alawite areas in Latakia and Tartus governorates. Russia in particular has noted the collapse of its most crucial regional partner, under two years after Yevgeny Prigozhin's putsch attempt took Wagner Group columns to the outskirts of Moscow.

Second, international crises intersect in unexpected, largely chaotic ways that produce shocking outcomes — or more accurately, expose extant weaknesses. The Assad regime was never strong enough to withstand sustained opposition absent overwhelming external support. Assad's forces defeated Syria's various rebel groups in the 2010s not because of ideological commitment to Assadist Baathism, or even fear of Sunni Jihadist domination, but because Iran and Russia committed extensive resources to keep Assad in power.

Iran deployed the bulk of Hezbollah's ground forces to support Assad, while providing cash, weapons, and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) operatives to coordinate various proxy forces. Russia initially provided weapons and cash, and from 2015 onward used airpower, naval forces and some special operators to pummel the rebels into submission, while working with Iran to create a full-fledged combined and joint staff.

But Russia's assault on Ukraine has limited its ability to act in the Middle East. The aircraft Assad needed to bomb rebel supply lines

were largely redirected to Ukraine. The airfields from which Russian strategic bombers would launch strikes on Syria are under Ukrainian drone attack. Russian naval forces cannot simply transit the Turkish Straits, given Ankara has closed them since late February 2022.

And the rapid-deployment forces Russia would call on to fight on the ground, whether Russia's paratroopers and special operators or Wagner Group and other mercenary organizations, have been battered after three years of combat in Ukraine. Iran, meanwhile, has experienced significant damage over the past year-plus of war with Israel.

Hezbollah has lost its command structure and taken heavy casualties since September, limiting its ability to deploy in support of Assad. Israel has killed a number of IRGC liaison officers from its strike on Damascus in April onward. Iran was thus in no position to react to a rapidly-developing crisis. In a direct confrontation, isolated from its international backers, the Assad regime thus predictably collapsed.

This opens up a clear opportunity for Israel. It also has direct implications for U.S. strategy.

The Assad regime was crucial to Iran's strategy. Transit of Syrian territory enabled Iran to sustain Hezbollah in Lebanon, threaten Israel from two axes in the north, pressure Jordan through cross-border drug smuggling, and transfer arms to Iran's partners in the West Bank. Critically, Iran could also forward-deploy several air defense and early warning radars in Syria.

Given Saudi Arabia concluded a *modus vivendi* with Iran in 2023, Israel cannot strike Iran by transiting Saudi airspace. It must follow a corridor over Syria and Iraq instead. When combined with long-range radars based in Iran, Iraqi air defenses, and a variety of aging but numerous anti-air systems, the Syrian early-warning radars allowed Iran to detect an Israeli strike at any significant scale, particularly because of fuel consumption issues if Israeli aircraft were to fly at low altitudes for such a distance.

Without Syrian-provided early warning, a strike against targets in Iran becomes much more practical. Israel is surely considering this today. Iran's hold on Iraq may also be in jeopardy. Once one proxy falls, others will begin to chafe under Iranian domination, particular actors like the Iraqi Sadrists who opposed the U.S. in Iraq but also view Iran with extreme suspicion.

If Israel could pull off a strike on the Iranian nuclear program in the coming weeks — or against other critical targets in Iran from arms factories to intelligence and security institutions — then the Iranian state may well face a broader domestic and regional backlash, with each actor it has contained sensing weakness.

Israel may be tempted to wait until Trump's inauguration to move against Iran. This is a mistake. The president-elect's administration will take a distinctly hawkish stance towards Iran, particularly because amongst its personnel, pressure on Iran is a natural point of strategic, ideological and prudential-political agreement — especially because Iran took the extravagantly imprudent step of trying to assassinate the president-elect.

However, once the Trump administration sets U.S. Middle East policy on a more rational bent than that of the past few years, it will face a distinct challenge. It cannot simply resurrect the anti-Iranian coalition of the late 2010s, enshrined through the Abraham Accords. Nor will the levers of the previous maximum pressure campaign be entirely available given the resilience Iran has cultivated through its relationships with Russia and China.

Instead, the U.S. needs a new strategy to apply pressure on Tehran, one that incorporates sanctions, threats and action against proxies, and intelligence operations to degrade what remains of Iran's Axis of Resistance.

Creating this strategy will take time. An Israeli attack on Iran directly, whether against the nuclear program or other critical targets in the country, will help set the parameters for U.S. policy towards Iran, and open other possibilities for American action to end the radical clerics' rule.

The departing Biden administration can be counted on to oppose any effort by Israel to topple Iran, the source of the warfare that has engulfed the Middle East since Oct. 7, 2023. But Trump possesses a clearer understanding, and his administration should welcome a new approach, one that redefines maximum pressure on Iran.

(The Hill Dec 29)

Iran Weakest Since Revolution, Ripe for Regime Change

By David Isaac

Its "Axis of Resistance" cracking, most recently with the toppling of the Assad regime in Syria, Iran has never been as vulnerable since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, observers tell JNS.

With Iran's leadership facing an emboldened Israeli military, the second coming of Donald Trump, internal fissures and a crisis of confidence among its people, experts say here lies a chance for regime change.

The extent of the damage to Iran's drive for regional domination is evidenced by the remarks of its Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who in a speech on Dec. 11 admonished supporters to "not become depressed, hopeless or heartbroken," and on Dec. 22 denied that Iran even had proxies.

Tehran has lost Hamas and Hezbollah, its major ally—Syria—and its primary air defenses to Israeli airstrikes, making any Israeli attack potentially even more effective. Moreover, despite its wealth of energy resources, Iran is in the midst of an energy crisis.

"This is a golden opportunity," Janatan Sayeh, a research analyst with the Washington-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), told JNS on Tuesday, outlining the possibility of a one-two punch, with the U.S. imposing economic sanctions and Israel delivering military blows.

A U.S. prepared to inflict "Trump maximum pressure 2.0" and a newly confident Israel tackling Iran militarily "puts us in a good position," he said.

Majid Rafizadeh, a Harvard-educated political scientist and expert on U.S. foreign policy and the Middle East, agrees. "Iran is currently at its weakest point since the 1979 Islamic Revolution," he told JNS on Tuesday. It's "vulnerable both internally and externally."

Bashar Assad's fall is "a catastrophic loss for Iran's leadership," Rafizadeh said, not only because Syria served as a conduit for Iran's proxies, but because the Iranian people now perceive the regime as "increasingly vulnerable, which emboldens anti-government sentiment and protests."

Sayeh, who left Iran in 2013 and remains in touch with people there, confirmed that Syria's collapse made more of an impact on the Iranian people than did the fall of Hezbollah or Hamas. With the end of Assad, Iranians began to see events as having a "domino effect" that could lead to the Islamic Republic's fall, too.

Internal Iranian propaganda heralded the "Axis of Resistance" (of which Syria was a fundamental pillar) as a success that could not fail, bringing "the Zionists and Americans to their knees," Sayeh said. The attempt of regime officials to now distance themselves from the project, with Khamenei even attempting to redefine the "resistance front" as something spiritual, isn't succeeding. Iranians see the project as the failure that it is, he said.

Assad's fall has also sparked rifts within the Islamic Republic's leadership. Iran invested some \$50 billion into propping up Assad, who owed \$30 billion in debt to Tehran.

"Beyond public statements, leaked internal discussions among Iranian officials reveal growing dissatisfaction and blame-shifting," Sayeh said.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' Quds Force is under intense scrutiny. Its commander, Maj. Gen. Esmail Ghaani, who replaced the assassinated Qassem Soleimani, hasn't made a public appearance since Assad's collapse, he noted.

Iran has no choice but to "double down" on its nuclear program, Sayeh said. "They are being more overt about it." On Oct. 8, less than two weeks after Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah's death, the parliament in Tehran announced it had received draft legislation for the "expansion of Iran's nuclear industry."

There are also reports Tehran is developing chemical weapons.

"A weakened Iran is a desperate Iran," Rafizadeh said. "This desperation increases the likelihood of lashing out, either directly or through its proxies, to divert attention from internal weaknesses and project strength to both domestic and international audiences."

How should the West and Israel respond?

Rafizadeh urges Israel to target Iran's nuclear infrastructure and continue whittling down its proxies. The West should back Israel to the hilt, he added. "This includes not only diplomatic backing and economic sanctions but also direct military aid to Israel."

Sayeh questions whether Israel alone could take out Iran's nuclear sites, and if that is the best strategy. He suggests Israel would do better targeting Iran's oil infrastructure. And that is what Israel may be planning to do, he noted, as it has hit air defenses around the oil industry in the south and southwest of Iran.

"The way Westerners and Israelis perceive the Iranian Achilles' heel is the economy," Sayeh said. "To bring about an economic collapse is critical," he added, noting that not every government bureaucrat or IRGC member is ideologically devoted to the Islamic Republic. Some are just mercenaries. "Once the regime runs out of cash, they're likely to turn on it," he said.

The West should provide "maximum support" for the Iranian people by helping via intelligence and technology to pull together "scattered" protests. "These civil acts of disobedience aren't really organized in the way that they should be," Sayeh said.

"The pivotal point is if its own supporters start leaving. And they will leave if: 1) Iran's military proves incapable, as we saw with Assad; and 2) if it can't pay its people due to economic sanctions," Sayeh said.

The potential collapse of the Islamic Republic offers startling possibilities for Israel. Unlike Syria, in which anti-Israel Islamists have filled the vacuum, the end of the ayatollahs could herald the emergence of a pro-Israel Iran—one even more pro-Israel than under the shah—as the people of Iran are siding with Israel against the regime.

In a piece he co-wrote for FDD in early December, Sayeh revealed that "both Iranian and international pollsters consistently show that most Iranians oppose the Islamic Republic's antisemitic and anti-Western foreign policy."

In October 2023, students refused to chant "Death to Israel" as demanded by school administrators, instead chanting, "Death to Palestine." Students at Tehran University refused to walk over a painted Israeli flag on the floor.

"The fall of the Islamic regime in Iran would be transformative for Israel and the region," Rafizadeh agreed. "As the primary sponsor of terrorism and the ideological driver behind groups like Hezbollah and Hamas, the regime's collapse would significantly reduce the threat of attacks against Israel. It would also pave the way for a more stable and peaceful Middle East, where Iran could potentially shift from being a destabilizing force to a constructive regional actor." (JNS Dec 27)

Iran's Push for a Nuclear Bomb: 'A Wounded Animal is Most Dangerous' By Shimon Sherman

On Oct. 7, 2023, Iran's fortunes were on the rise. Tehran had a vast and powerful arsenal of radicalized proxies spreading wider and wider through the Middle East. The Islamic Republic had ever-warming ties with Moscow and Beijing and found itself on the leading edge of the globally significant conflict in Ukraine.

In the background, passively facilitating all these developments, was a docile administration in the White House, which seemed intent on ignoring Iranian ambitions and even occasionally forwarding them (such as by freeing billions of dollars in previously frozen assets for Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's use).

Fast forward to today and the Iranians find themselves in a starkly different reality. The Axis of Resistance lies in rubble as one pawn after another has been removed from the board by the Israel Defense Forces. The only reliable proxy left to them is the Houthis in Yemen, which seem destined to be taken off the board in the coming months.

Russia, meanwhile, seems bogged down in Ukraine and has demonstrated a lack of interest in the Middle East after allowing its long-term ally, Bashar Assad of Syria, to be toppled by a group of ragtag rebels. Furthermore, the incoming U.S. president, Donald Trump, has vowed to reinstall the "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran, which is certain to include crippling sanctions and likely military force.

"The Iranians are facing a dilemma that they have never faced before because their entire strategy has been based on the Axis of Resistance and that strategy is now collapsing," Alexander Grinberg, an expert on Iran at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS), told JNS.

Grinberg further explained that the regime in Iran is plagued with

rigid thinking.

"The Iranians have a fundamental strategic problem. They do not know how to plan for unexpected circumstances. They have a plan A but can't even talk about a plan B or a plan C, because even considering the option that the original plan won't work would be to question the wisdom of the ayatollah, which is unacceptable," Grinberg said.

"You can see that the Iranian elites are in disarray and are blaming each other, pointing fingers because they know something is wrong, but they can't point their finger at the only person who is truly responsible."

Regional developments have placed Iran in the dangerous role of a wounded animal desperately looking for a way out of its predicament. This new reality is particularly menacing considering Iran's nuclear ambitions. Dueling analytical narratives have emerged regarding Iran's future, with some arguing that Tehran's feeble condition will force it to dial back its aggression, and others claiming that it is likely to attempt a nuclear breakout in the near future to secure the regime.

There is strong evidence that the Iranians are likely to push for a nuclear weapon instead of embracing a more moderate approach.

"You have to understand whom you're dealing with. The ayatollahs in Iran are a criminal regime that is incorrigible and dead set on destroying the West and Israel," former Israeli Ambassador to the United States Danny Ayalon told JNS.

According to Grinberg, rumblings of a shift towards the nuclear option have been increasing in Iran ever since the war began to go badly for the ayatollahs following the first direct Iranian attack on Israel in 2024.

"Ever since April, they have been hinting that this option may be on the table because from their perspective the situation is changing very rapidly," Grinberg said.

The most recent of these "hints" came just last week when Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told reporters in Beijing that "2025 will be an important year regarding Iran's nuclear issue."

In practical terms, Iran has clearly ramped up its efforts to produce a nuclear weapon in recent weeks. According to Grinberg, the development of a nuclear bomb requires several components: sufficient enriched uranium, a fissile explosive that can detonate the bomb, a precise delivery platform and a nuclear test.

On the uranium front, the United Nations chief nuclear inspector reported that Iran has quadrupled its production of 60% enriched uranium, which is considered near-bomb-grade material. Rafael M. Grossi, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, called it "a dramatic acceleration" and added that "our inspectors are on the sites confirming that the process has indeed started."

Furthermore, the Iranian regime has recently ramped up efforts to produce a fissile explosive for nuclear detonation. According to the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), multiple embedded sources have confirmed significantly increased activity from METFAZ, the Iranian research group responsible for developing the detonation technology.

"Our information shows that METFAZ has expanded its activities, and their main focus is the detonation of the nuclear bomb," Alireza Jafarzadeh, deputy director of the NCRI, said in a recent interview with Fox News. "It's important to see what METFAZ does and follow its activities, because that is sort of like a gauge on figuring out where the whole nuclear-weapons program is."

The NCRI report also noted severely increased activity at the Sanjarian nuclear site, located roughly 25 miles east of Tehran. While the site was mostly abandoned since 2009, NCRI reported consistent sightings of METFAZ-affiliated nuclear scientists at Sanjarian since April 2024.

The pressure on Iran to develop a weapon is further compounded by an unstable home front. The Iranian economy finds itself in free fall, with the Iranian rial dropping 18% compared to the dollar since Nov. 5 and the inflation rate standing at 35%. General dissatisfaction with the regime is at an all-time high. "The people of Iran are angry at their government and regimes can fall very fast when the people turn against them," Ayalon explained.

Grinberg pointed out that the regime in Tehran may see a nuclear

weapon as a form of security against regime change: “The best way to truly secure invincibility for the regime would be to go nuclear. You can see a similar model in North Korea.”

Despite clear steps to reinvigorate its nuclear program, there are also some signals that Iran may prefer a more passive approach to weather the storm it currently finds itself in. Iran has already put out feelers to the incoming Trump administration in an attempt to reduce the chance of direct military confrontation with the United States over the nuclear issue.

In mid-November, Iran’s U.N. ambassador met with Elon Musk, a top adviser to Trump, in an attempt to reduce tensions between the two countries.

“They are terrified of Trump, but they never lose hope that perhaps some arrangement can be made. They are testing the waters and are working in several directions, as can be seen in their meeting with Musk,” Grinberg explained.

Iran may also choose to focus on rebuilding its broken proxy network, rather than gambling everything on a last-ditch attempt to push for a nuclear weapon.

As Ayalon explained, “Iran has less control over the Houthis or the Iraqi militias than it does over Hezbollah. Their proxy policy in Yemen and Iraq is therefore more complicated and not as dependable for the regime in Tehran.”

In that context, Grinberg believes, Iran may choose to focus on reinvigorating Hezbollah and repairing its broken Syrian corridor for supplying the Lebanese terror group with munitions.

“Iran can conceptually in the long term try to rebuild their bridge to Hezbollah through Syria by establishing some kind of relations with the new Syrian government. This is a very long process. It is pretty unlikely and very complicated, because HTS [Hayat Tahrir al-Sham] and Iran have been fighting each other in a bloody war for many years. However, if you look at a case like the Taliban you can see that the Iranian regime is capable of establishing some sort of relationship even with extreme groups that are not naturally aligned with Iran,” Grinberg explained. “You can already see some hints from Iranian media of ideas of establishing relationships down the road with HTS.”

Other reports indicate that Iran may try to build out an air corridor to Lebanon, rather than shipping supplies overland through Syria.

In any case, investing in projects of this nature may indicate a more long-term strategy for the regime in Tehran.

Regardless of Iran’s intentions, in recent months, Jerusalem and the incoming Trump administration have signaled that they will not tolerate Iran’s nuclear program for much longer. As Iran’s breakout window contracts, pressure is building to deal a decisive blow. The collapse of the Assad regime in Syria, the destruction of Hezbollah and the re-emergence of potentially eager U.S. partners have presented a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to end the existential threat of a nuclear Iran.

Despite the favorable conditions, carrying out such an operation would be complicated to execute.

“Iran is not just Israel’s war, but the entire Western world’s,” Ayalon told JNS. “Israel can take out Iran’s nuclear program alone, but it would be a lot more difficult. It would be much better to do this in a unity coalition led by the United States and with other partners. The Iranian nuclear program is very advanced and very complicated, with many underground bunkers and sites, and to take all of it out may require a long campaign.” (JNS Jan 1)

Israel Cannot Again Leave Gazan Areas for Months

By Yaakov Lappin

The Israeli military’s extensive operations in northern Gaza over the past few months and the terrorist infrastructure that it uncovered make one thing clear: Leaving areas in Gaza without sustained security operations for extended periods invites Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) to move back in, ultimately increasing the cost of restoring order.

The 162nd Division of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), which entered Jabalia in mid-October 2024 after an eight-month absence, has faced newly entrenched Hamas and PIJ networks, exposing the consequences of prolonged inactivity in the region.

While the IDF was previously stretched along two fronts, Lebanon

and Gaza, should the ceasefire in the north continue to hold, Israel will be able to mobilize sufficient forces southwards to prevent such an outcome again.

During the eight months leading up to the 162nd Division’s return to Jabalia, Hamas and PIJ took full advantage of the IDF’s absence to reestablish their infrastructure for recruitment, training and operational planning.

According to military sources, Hamas has recruited untrained individuals, paying them to join its ranks and equipping them with basic weaponry, including AK-47s and RPGs. These recruits, though minimally skilled and instructed to attack IDF units on sight, are willing to engage in dangerous missions, posing serious threats to Israeli forces.

The operational vacuum also allowed Hamas to strengthen its control over civilian areas and transform critical infrastructure into military assets.

IDF International Spokesperson Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani highlighted the extent of Hamas’s militarization efforts at the Kamal Adwan Hospital. Despite repeated warnings and operations in 2023 and earlier in 2024, terrorists operated command centers from within the medical facility, stored weapons there, and used patients and staff as human shields. The area was heavily booby-trapped, with explosives and anti-tank weaponry posing a significant threat to advancing IDF forces.

Over 240 terrorists were apprehended in and around the hospital in the IDF’s latest operation. Many of them attempted to escape disguised as patients or using ambulances, while others were caught with weapons such as grenades and RPGs.

According to IDF data, terrorists who participated in the Oct. 7, 2023, attacks on Israel, including senior operatives, were among those neutralized and captured during the current ongoing operations in Jabalia. They had been consolidating control, hoping to turn the city into a heavily fortified stronghold as part of an unyielding strategy to exploit civilian cover.

Hamas’s hope was to lay the foundations for rebuilding its terror army and once again threaten the people of Sderot and Gaza-envelope communities in Israel’s western Negev region with rockets, mortars and cross-border murder squads.

The IDF’s ongoing campaign to clear Jabalia of terrorist elements has proven both time-consuming and costly. By mid-November, after significant progress in civilian evacuations to humanitarian zones, primarily Al-Mawasi on the southern Gaza coast, there were still a few thousand terrorists operating in the area.

Currently, the IDF is dealing with the hundreds of terrorists who remain, demonstrating the scale of the challenge posed by a well-entrenched adversary.

The IDF has paid a substantial price during these operations, with several soldiers killed in recent days. The bravery of the 162nd Division, including combat teams from the 401st Brigade, the Givati Brigade, and the Multi-Dimensional Unit, is a painful reminder of the burden Israel must bear when countering deeply embedded terrorist networks.

The IDF’s current operations in Jabalia reveal a stark reality. Prolonged absence allows terrorist organizations to regroup, rearm and refine their tactics, leading to greater risks and higher costs when security must eventually be restored. The time and resources required to dismantle the Hamas and PIJ networks in Jabalia are a direct consequence of the operational vacuum left by Israel’s previous withdrawal.

Additionally, the IDF’s experience in Jabalia underscores the need for intelligence and rapid response capabilities. Intelligence-sharing between the IDF, the Shin Bet intelligence agency, and Military Intelligence has played a crucial role in identifying and neutralizing key Hamas operatives, including those involved in the October 7 massacre.

These lessons should inform broader Israeli security policy. The IDF cannot afford to leave areas in Gaza free of security operations for extended periods of time. Only by continuously responding to intelligence regarding developing threats, as the IDF does on a nightly basis in Judea and Samaria, can Israel ensure that Hamas and PIJ are unable to reestablish their networks and pose a renewed threat. (JNS Dec 31)