Escalating to Nowhere: The Israeli-Palestinian War

Rough Working Draft: Circulated for Comment and Correction

IDF Tactics and Methods: Isolation, Containment, and the Selective Use of Conventional Military Power

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Introduction

The reader should be aware that this is an initial rough draft. The text is being circulated for comment and will be extensively revised over time. It reflects the working views of the author and does not reflect final conclusions or the views of CSIS.
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XII. The IDF Focus on Isolation, Containment, and the Selective Use of Conventional Military Power

The previous chapters have shown that the Israel-Palestinian War has been filled with repetitive patterns of violence, but it has also been a conflict in which each side has made important shifts in the ways in which it fights. In the case of Israel, the IDF has shifted from a strategy of containment and isolation to one of invasion, siege, and limited reoccupation. Israel has isolated key Palestinian population centers, while securing access roads and lines of communication, and improving the security of the settlements and military installations in the West Bank.

Israel has built-up its strength in the West Bank, it has entered Palestinian areas in Gaza and the West Bank, it has reoccupied part of the West Bank, and it has isolated and attacked the Palestinian Authority. It has attempted to combine military isolation with economic measures such as like freezing financial operations and transit between Palestinian areas, cutting off communications, and limiting the shipment of goods. Finally, it has sought to use physical barriers and the separation of Israeli and Palestinian to limit the vulnerability of Israel and Israeli settlements.

Some of the resulting shifts in tactics and methods pose general lessons for asymmetric warfare. Others help explain the course and nature of the conflict.

Roadside Attacks and Retaliation

Israel’s problems in securing lines of communication are one such example. At the start of the crisis, Palestinian tactics focused on limited violence, largely consisting of the use of rock-throwing teenage boys oftentimes encouraged to risk their lives by their peers, the Palestinian media, and a deep desire to assist in the liberation of Palestine. These groups primarily appeared to target military outposts and settlers creating tense situations in which the probability for errors in judgment and misassessment of threats was extraordinarily high for both sides. The stone throwers were also frequently accompanied by armed Fatah activists who increased the underlying tension and risk in already volatile and potentially tragic situations and increased the likelihood that the IDF would employ lethal ammunition. Most often this created a political and media environment that easily influenced international public opinion through the martyrdom of
Palestinian young men that served the interests of Palestinian Authority. However, it also propelled both sides toward higher levels of violence.

The end result was that the traditional rock throwing clashes led to a so-called low intensity conflict. Palestinian forces began to make an effort to deny the use of roads to the settler community—with some successes. Netzarim, a settlement in Gaza, was denied vehicular access for two weeks in October of 2000.

Moreover, the use of roadside bombs and ambushes led to increased fears among the settlers that the IDF could not fully ensure their safety when traveling. For example, on November 13, 2000, in two separate incidents, unarmed Israeli female civilians were shot while driving. One week later, on November 20, a roadside bomb killed two Israeli adults and wounded seven children, dismembering some, on their way to school. And then on December 10, Palestinian gunmen ambushed a highly regarded rabbi—he, however, escaped unharmed. These incidents demonstrate how difficult it is for the IDF to control all of the access routes all of the time. It also helps explain why the IDF emphasizes the importance and even necessity of barriers and physically secured routes, even at the cost of the local separation of Israeli and Palestinian.

Attacks on Settlements and the IDF Response

Another example is the Israeli response to attacks on the settlements. At the onset of the war, Palestinians began to conduct low-level attacks on Israeli settlements primarily at night. According to IDF officials, there were upwards of 600 such incidents by December 5, 2000. However these attacks did not pose any significant threat of actually overrunning Israeli settlements and did not inflict as many casualties on the settlers or the IDF as did attacks on the access routes.

The Palestinian attacks became better coordinated as time went on. The IDF expressed its concern over a “very well coordinated and orchestrated attack” on December 4, 2000 against Rachel’s Tomb that was the “most dangerous” event thus far in the conflict.1 The attack involved a coordinated strike from three directions on an Israeli settlement from 1 a.m. to 4 a.m. It was conducted on such a large scale that the IDF forces solicited air support. Palestinians disputed the claim that any such attack was made, and rather claimed that the gunfire was from an Israeli offensive attack against Palestinians in Bethlehem.2

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One area particularly affected by such low-level attacks was the Gilo neighborhood on the southern edge of Jerusalem. Beginning in early October 2000, Palestinian gunmen regularly fired shots from the adjacent Arab village of Beit Jala, hitting targets inside the homes of Israeli families.

In response to these attacks, Israel escalated its response. IDF troops increasingly fired back, frequently using helicopter gunships, machine-gun fire, and tank shells, as it did for the first time on October 22 and 23, 2000. In the process, the IDF unintentionally hit several private Palestinian homes in Beit Jala. After a week of shooting in mid-February 2001, Israeli shelling for the first time killed a Palestinian resident of Beit Jala.³

In early May 2001, the IDF conducted its first incursion into Beit Jala to battle Palestinian gunmen. Israeli troops killed one Palestinian militia officer and injured twenty others, qualifying that they pushed into the village in an attempt to stop Palestinian gunmen who were firing on Israeli army positions and on nearby roads used primarily by settlers. Fires and drive-by shootings had killed several settlers since the outbreak of the Israeli-Palestinian War. Another round of fierce fighting on the Gilo-Beit Jala flashpoint occurred May 14, 2001 when four residents of Gilo were wounded by shooting that originated in Beit Jala.⁴

Settlers have remained primary targets throughout the war. Regular shooting incidents have occurred at various settlements and outposts, particularly near densely populated Palestinian areas such as: Adora, Kfar Darom, Gush Katif, and settlements near and within the city of Hebron. As a result, the IDF has frequently responded to such incidents by shelling Palestinian areas near the attacked settlements and reoccupying areas under Palestinian control.

As is discussed in detail in Chapter XIV, these attacks have been a key factor behind the security fence being built around much of the West Bank. Yet, this kind of “security” creates its own problems—both on the ground and in terms of politics. Israeli officials have sought to build the fence in such a way that would surround some settlements—partitioning them off from Israel proper. As a result, settlers have been concerned that they might be “trapped” in the event of an attack by Palestinian militants. They also fear that the line that the fence follows may potentially become the eventual political border of Israel and a Palestinian state. If that would become the case, they would no longer be governed by the state of Israel.
**Israeli Use of Helicopters and Aircraft**

Israeli use of combat helicopters and aircraft has been a topic of debate since the beginning of the conflict. At the start of the war, Israeli forces generally entered Palestinian territory from the air, bypassing the problem of using IDF ground forces to drive through Palestinian areas. Since that time, they have continued to make use of helicopters, fighters and standoff precision weapons, while IDF ground forces have increasingly acted to seize and destroy key Palestinian strong points and facilities that could be used to attack Israel. Caterpillar D-9 bulldozers and additional special ground forces also entered the combat scene as Israeli forces began to infiltrate Palestinian cities and increase their presence in areas of the West Bank and Gaza.\(^5\)

As Chapter X has shown, Israel made its first extensive use of attack helicopters to strike targets in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank during October 2000. AH-64A Apaches were used to hit targets in Nablus and in Gaza, including Chairman Arafat’s compound. The AH-64 was used instead of the AH-1G/S Cobra because of its superior range, sensors, and weapons, and ability to better distinguish between civilians and “combatants.”\(^6\) Between October 2000 and December 2001, Israeli forces used these weapons to assassinate at least 60 Palestinian militants.\(^7\)

“Precision,” however, is always relative and any attack on built up and urban areas risks killing innocent civilians. Unfortunately in some cases, AH-64 Apache attack helicopters failed to hit the desired targets and inflicted collateral damage. One example that occurred in the beginning of the war involved an AH-64 attack against the Fatah in El-Bireh in October 2000 which hit the house next door.\(^8\)

In another case, which occurred on October 20, 2003, an IDF AH-64 launched a first missile towards a vehicle in the Nuseirat refugee camp transporting several members of a terrorist cell. The missile hit the target and the militant’s vehicle subsequently lost control and crashed into what was perceived by the IDF to be a tree. A second missile was launched as the car tried to escape. From the IDF video of the attack, it appeared that no civilian was near the car. However, according to Palestinian sources, before the AH-64 fired another missile, it waited until there were rescue workers and gatherers near the car—in fact, firing the missile deep into the streets of the refugee camp. This notion was adamantly denied by the IDF.
A more likely scenario is that the IDF drone camera did not see the onlookers standing below shop awnings and trees on the sides of the street. To the IDF troops in the helicopter, the street appeared deserted. Eleven Palestinians were killed. Due to the high number of casualties, it is most likely that IDF officials misinterpreted the drone video, which, in turn, led to unfortunate decisions. Regardless of intentions, the attack resulted in substantial collateral damage.

Israeli use of advanced weapons reduces Israeli casualties, but also allows the Palestinians to politically exploit the IDF’s highly visible use of force—and Palestinian military weakness—by charging that the use of fighters and attack helicopters are “disproportionate.” Such charges have uncertain value. The key issue in assessing the use of force is always the result, never the means. The careful use of advanced weapons such as precision guided missiles can be far more humane than IDF ground force incursions or Palestinian suicide bombings in civilian areas. The use of systems like attack helicopters has also almost certainly has allowed Israel to hit key targets with fewer civilian casualties and collateral damage than alternative means of attack in spite of occasional mistargeting and collateral damage.

For example, on February 13, 2001, two Israeli helicopter gunships dropped four missiles on the car of Massoud Ayyad, whom Israel held responsible for a failed mortar-bomb attack on a Jewish settlement in Gaza. Prime Minister Barak, declared that the killing sent the message to those who would attack Israel that “the long arm of the Israeli Defense Forces will reach them.”9 Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh told Israeli radio in regards to the deaths “You can’t beat terror at symposiums at the university. The most effective and just way to deal with terror is the elimination or incarceration of the people who lead these organizations.”10

Over time, the use of helicopters has also become part of a broader IDF effort to deal with extremist violence by attacking the leaders of the groups rather than conducting broad attacks on their members. Other examples include Hamas and Fatah leaders. Israel first implemented its policy of selective assassination of known terrorists on November 9, 2000. An Israeli helicopter attacked a truck carrying Hussein Abayat, a local Tanzim commander. Then on December 11, 2000, a PIJ bombing suspect, Anwar Hamran, was the target of an attack while he was waiting for a taxicab. Prime Minister Barak acknowledged Israel's responsibility for these and other such attacks and pledged to continue with similar operations if Israeli citizens continued to be attacked.11 According to a report by Agence France Press, Israel killed approximately 31 Palestinians in the period between November 9, 2000 and May 5, 2001.12
The IDF has since used helicopters in the West Bank and Gaza to carry out the “targeted assassination” policy of the Sharon government. Once reserved for rare occasions and to stop suicide bombers, targeted assassinations have been used far more frequently than in previous times of war. This policy, following its application in Jenin and Nablus, was deemed successful at decapitating terrorist groups’ leadership so that future terrorist attacks in Israel proper could be prevented. In 2002, Israel assassinated 72 suspected militants, 37 more than the previous year. In 2003, one Tel Aviv lawyer asserted that “The main weapon the Israeli army has in its arsenal against terrorism is the assassination policy.”

This tactic has led to widespread international criticism and some domestic criticism. In October 2003, 27 Israeli active and reserve fighter pilots and instructors, including Brigadier General Yiftah Spector, one of the most decorated pilot in Israel’s history, signed a letter that derided the targeted assassination policy in urban areas as “illegal and immoral.” The nine pilots that were active at the time were grounded and the instructors, including Spector, were relieved of their duties. It is uncertain, however, that their actions will have much impact on the Israeli government’s policy and on the public’s, and rest of the armed forces, perception as well. See Chapter VI for more information on the growing disillusionment within the IDF.

**Ground Raids by the IDF**

Israel only made limited use of ground forces at the beginning of the war. In October 2000, the IDF deployed special anti-guerrilla units that were designed to carry out aggressive penetration and counter-guerrilla missions. Despite the inherent difficulties of commando raids, Israel achieved a good success rate by November 2000, and combined such raids with the use of airpower and standoff weapons.

Israel found the use of commando raids, and selective attacks from the ground sometimes offered Israel advantages in public relations terms over attacks and killings using advanced weapons like the AH-64 and tanks. Such raids may not reduce civilian casualties and collateral damage, but they seem to have a lower profile, are easier to deny or to confuse with internal Palestinian conflicts, and a slip-up involving an M-16 rifle leads to much less publicity than a mistracked missile.

Such raids depend heavily on good intelligence for their success, however, and do place Israeli forces directly at risk. Israel’s ability to obtain human intelligence had diminished
during the peace process as the territory under the control of the Palestinian Authority expanded. Fewer informers cooperated, while the dangers to such informers increased. It became more difficult for Israeli agents to disguise themselves as Palestinians and infiltrate Palestinian areas.

These problems increased after the outbreak of the fighting. The deep-seated anger that existed during the first Intifada and peace process also increased as the war went on, and made intelligence-gathering operations more risky. Even though Israel was still able to achieve significant successes, parts of its informer network weakened over time, infiltration became more difficult, and Israel was forced to rely more on signals intelligence and UAVs as substitutes for HUMINT sources on the ground.

The political impact of such raids also varied from raid to raid. The majority of raids were successful, and did not result in many Israeli or Palestinian casualties or much collateral damage. However, others did produce more Palestinian casualties, resulted in serious collateral damage, and/or were later admitted to be mistakes. For example, on April 30, 2001, an explosion that targeted a member of Fatah accused of the entrapment and murder of an Israeli youth killed two nearby children. Less than a month later on May 14, Israeli troops shot and killed five Palestinian officers stationed at a West Bank roadblock at Beitunya. The IDF later admitted that it had killed the wrong persons as a result of an intelligence error.16

At the same time, it soon became apparent that limited use of ground forces could not defeat Hamas or the PIJ, and that “decapitation” strikes had serious limits. Each successful small raid or killing seemed to create martyrs and lead to new groups of volunteers. In many cases, the end result was revenge rather than success in deterring and defeating the enemy, and the loss of trained leaders and cadres oftentimes encouraged the recruitment and use of young Palestinians as suicide bombers. Moreover, Hamas, the PIJ, Fatah, and other such groups learned how to improve their security, create cells separate from known leaders, and shelter in civilian areas and facilities where it was harder to strike without creating additional casualties. As is the case in most forms of asymmetric warfare, there is always a counter tactic. Enemies always learn from experience if they are given the chance.

**The IDF Begins Drives into the West Bank**

As the chronology in Chapter X has revealed, Israeli ground tactics became increasingly aggressive as the war progressed. IDF forces began to enter, exit, and re-enter Palestinian cities
in the West Bank – extending the scale of operations and the length of their stays as the situation escalated.

Prime Minister Sharon ordered an incursion into the Gaza Strip, shortly after taking office on March 7, signifying a new trend of entering Palestinian-controlled territory. In April 2001, bulldozers were used for the first time since the start of the Israeli-Palestinian War to level Palestinian civilian and security buildings and clear trees to create “free-fire zones” nearby the Khan Younis and Rafah refugee camps in Gaza—areas determined to be the source of gunfire and mortar attacks on Israeli troops and settlements.

According to the Washington Post, the Israeli press criticized Sharon for ordering an invasion of Gaza and then pulling back “under U.S. pressure.” The launching of mortar attacks on Israeli military posts and settlements continued well after the IDF withdrawal from Gaza. As the months passed and the fighting on both sides intensified, the frequency of such ground incursions escalated, despite original disapproval from the international community. The first incursion into Palestinian-ruled territory led to “international outcry, including . . . criticism from Secretary of State Colin L. Powell. Over time, however, the incursions became routine.”

On August 27, 2001, Israeli forces employed both armored vehicles and helicopter gunships to enter the West Bank town of Beit Jalla in order to seize structures. These structures, according to the IDF, were sites where militants were launching mortars into the Israeli settlement of Gilo. After entering Beit Jalla with a combination of armored units on the ground and helicopters in the air, the IDF withdrew on August 31. On October 19, 2001, Israeli infantry forces and armored units again entered Beit Jalla after incidents of renewed launching of mortars on nearby Gilo. Israeli forces seized a number of buildings in the area and returned fire.

On October 17, 2001, Israeli Tourism Minister, Rehavam Zeevi was killed by four PFLP militants in revenge for Israel’s assassination of PFLP leader Mustafa Ali Zibri in August of that year. Later that evening, the IDF responded by tightening its security around the West Bank cities of Ramallah, Nablus, and Jenin. Access routes to Jenin were closed and placed under the control of Israeli forces. As the conflict escalated, IDF forces continued to enter, exit, and re-enter Palestinian cities.

On the evening of February 27, 2002, Israeli Forces entered the Balata refugee camp near the city of Nablus in the north of the West Bank. Following the IDF incursion into Balata, the
IDF entered other camps and Palestinian cities including Bethlehem and Beit Jalla in the West Bank, and Jabalya in Gaza. Many of the Palestinians highest on Israel’s most-wanted list escaped capture, yet the three-week operation that began on February 27, 2002, and ended on March 18 with the withdrawal of troops from Bethlehem and Beit Jalla, captured thousands of Palestinians.

**Operation Defensive Shield**

Those incursions were followed by a much larger IDF ground force attack termed Operation Defensive Shield. This operation had the following chronology:

- **March 29** – Israel launches Operation Defensive Shield. Israeli forces enter Ramallah, including parts of Arafat’s compound. Arafat and several of his advisors are confined to the leader’s West Bank headquarters. Hundreds of Palestinians are detained for questioning.

- **March 31** – Over 100 Israeli tanks enter Qalailiya. Prime Minister Sharon says Israel is at war.

- **April 1** – A bulldozer and 5 Israeli tanks enter Tulkarem in the West Bank. Israeli forces enter two villages near Bethlehem – Al-Khader and Beit Jalla. Before Israeli forces arrive, Palestinian militants kill 10 suspected collaborators.

- **April 2** – In Ramallah, Israeli tanks and helicopters attack Palestinian Preventative Security Services headquarters – this Palestinian security service had been “well-known for having stayed out of the resistance so as to implement whatever crackdown might be needed later.” 400 Palestinians trapped inside are allowed to surrender and walk free while the IDF captures 6 Hamas detainees who had been kept there. Sharon proposes the idea of exile for Arafat. Israeli troops enter Bethlehem and an estimated 200 Palestinians - including several dozen gunmen – escape to the Church of Nativity.

- **April 3** – Israeli tanks enter Nablus – the West Bank’s largest city. Israeli troops also encircle the West Bank refugee camp of Jenin. Once the IDF enters Jenin, the fighting lasts 9 days.

- **April 5** - In his besieged Ramallah headquarters, Arafat meets with U.S. mediator Anthony Zinni. Israeli troops enter the city of Tubas in the West Bank, 12 Palestinians are killed.

- **April 9** – Israeli forces pull out of Qalailiya and Tulkarem. In Jenin, 13 Israeli soldiers are killed upon entering a booby-trapped building.

- **April 11** – In Jenin, the last Palestinian gunman surrenders to Israeli forces.

- **April 18** – In Jenin, the Israelis pull back to the edge of the city.

- **May 2** – Arafat emerges from his headquarters after the IDF ends his 5 months of confinement.

- **May 10** – At the Church of Nativity, the 39-day siege ends in a deal that sends 26 Palestinian gunmen to Gaza and exiles 13 wanted Palestinian militants to a number of European countries. According to the deal, the IDF is expected to withdraw troops once the church is emptied. Operation Defensive Shield comes to a close.

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While the three-week operation involved deeper incursions into refugee camps, it did not represent a major shift in IDF strategy as much as a more intense implementation of tactics that were already in use. According to IDF Col. Nitsan Alon, “targets were . . . prioritized to achieve as much as possible before international pressure culminated.” Israeli air, ground, and naval forces were used to conduct simultaneous operations in cities and camps across the West Bank. Several joint task forces based on infantry and armored units, and including Special Forces, engineer corps, and intelligence units moved into the areas. The IDF had already been moving in and out of Palestinian cities for months. Operation Defensive Shield did, however, involve an Israeli attack on six major Palestinian cities in the West Bank: Ramallah, Bethlehem, Tulkarem, Qalqilya, Nablus, and Jenin.

A report by the Washington Institute describes the impact of these encounters from an Israeli perspective:

“It is estimated that several thousand troops took part in the operation, with two or three hundred tanks alongside the air and naval forces.” In this escalation of force on the part of the IDF, Israeli forces attacked terrorist infrastructure, refugee camps perceived as safe-havens for terrorists, and facilities of the Palestinian Authority. In the camps and towns under attack, Israeli forces seized strategic locations – using armored vehicles to clear the tightly planned streets of refugee camps – and then began implementing curfews, gathering information, and conducting searches. The IDF seized a number of Kassam rockets, demolished about 10 factories where rockets were manufactured, destroyed and seized a number of other weapons and explosives, and arrested and killed several suspected militant activists. After collecting intelligence and damaging terrorist infrastructure, Israeli forces pulled out without accepting the task of overseeing civilian aspects of life. To avoid as much confrontation as possible, the IDF warned the Palestinian security forces in each area. Moreover, though many homes were destroyed in the attacks, the danger to Israeli troops - in addition to civilians – was limited as buildings were demolished to open the narrow streets. After about two weeks of restraint during mediation efforts, tensions escalated again in late March and early April 2002 after an escalation in suicide bombings during the month of March. The IDF did not stop operating while Israel was practicing a policy of restraint, however, the IDF did refrain from responding to suicide bombings with air attacks.

As the previous chronology has shown, however, such escalation on the ground led to new Palestinian asymmetric attacks and further escalation. A suicide bombing took place in Netanya as early as March 27, 2002, and Israeli forces began to use bulldozers, armored units, and Special Forces to an even greater frequency in simultaneous incursions into Palestinian controlled areas.

The Use of Large-Scale Arrests

Israel has long made use of mass arrests, and made this a more aggressive tactic in early 2002. The IDF took an increasingly large number of Palestinians into custody during Operation Defensive Shield—as a means of both gaining intelligence information and arresting those
discovered to have connections with militant groups. Israeli forces also carried out its policy of confiscating weapons on a more expansive scale during Operation Defensive Shield. After three days in Ramallah, the IDF had “arrested 10 wanted men and seized 19 sniper rifles, two mortar shells, [and] four pipe bombs.”

In order to gather intelligence and arrest militant activists, Israeli forces took 700 Palestinians into custody in the first four days of the incursion in Ramallah. Israeli forces strategically operated to isolate the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat. By the summer of 2002, over 8,000 Palestinians had been taken into custody as a result of Operation Defensive Shield and nearly 2,200 still remained.

During this operation, the IDF also began major efforts to destroy civilian facilities of the Palestinian Authority in addition to its security institutions, targeting not only Arafat’s compound and Palestinian police offices but the Legislative Council offices, the Chambers of Commerce, and the Ministries of Agriculture, Education, Trade and Industry as well. Moreover, the Palestinian headquarters for Preventative Security was targeted for the first time by the IDF. Once again, the chronology in Chapter X shows that this form of escalation often did as much to provoke as it did to deter.

Urban Warfare in Jenin

Operation Defensive Shield also provides case examples of a form of urban warfare that has helped establish a pattern for much of the fighting that followed. It instigated serious Palestinian resistance in some areas, and forced Israeli forces to adjust tactics and engage in heated urban warfare. For example, in Ramallah such resistance was minimal, lacked organization, and was over within the first two days. Israeli forces were able to enter the city without fierce battle. Palestinian resistance in Nablus, however, lasted for only five days. Israeli F-16s, tanks, and bulldozers demolished buildings to clear “some 300 booby traps” for IDF ground troops. The IDF operation in the Jenin refugee camp from April 4 to 15, 2002 was conducted nearly simultaneously with the operation in the old city of Nablus from 3 to 22 April 2002.

The fighting was fiercest in Jenin. Militants engaged the IDF in urban warfare - D-9 bulldozers and a special unit of engineers proved essential in clearing mines and defending the front-line in order for other special units and infantry to move forward into the dangerous urban area filled with booby-trapped passageways and buildings. During the fighting in Jenin, 22
Israeli soldiers were killed, including 13 in an ambush. On April 9 alone, 13 Israeli troops were killed. On that day, two squads of reservists had been maneuvering through narrow alleyways in Jenin when an explosion erupted and Palestinian gunmen seized the opportunity to open fire on the soldiers, killing 13.  

Jenin became the first major example of urban warfare in the conflict, and it immediately raised major political issues over how such warfare should be conducted. Approximately 15,000 Palestinians resided in the 90-acre refugee camp, where the resistance fighters held out for 9 days. According to Human Rights Watch, 22 Palestinian noncombatants were killed during the fighting. However, Human Rights Watch stated that Palestinian militants “endanger[ed] Palestinian civilians in the camp by using it as a base for planning and launching attacks, using indiscriminate tactics such as planting improvised explosive devices within the camp, and intermingling with the civilian population during armed conflict.”  

Both the UN and Amnesty International examined the Israeli incursions into Jenin and Nablus. The UN reported that the IDF operation involved extensive curfews on the Palestinian population as well as restriction of movement for international aid workers thus impacting humanitarian and medical personnel in addition to journalists and human rights monitors. The UN accused the IDF of impeding the UN fact-finding committee’s work through delaying their arrival and the eventual cancellation of their mission.  

The UN’s information sources for its report were its permanent representatives to the Palestinian territories and Israel. The UN report maintains that the IDF used tanks, helicopter gunships and bulldozers in both Nablus and Jenin. According to the UN report, 150 buildings were destroyed in Jenin and the cost of the destruction was estimated to be US$27 million. In Nablus, sixty-four buildings were damaged and reconstruction costs were estimated at approximately US $114 million. The death toll in Jenin, according to the UN report was estimated to be fifty-two Palestinians, about half of which were civilians and twenty-three Israeli soldiers. In Nablus, the UN estimated between seventy and eighty Palestinians died, fifty of which were civilians, and the IDF had four casualties.  

Amnesty International’s report contained some similarities to the UN report, including the description of the prevention of humanitarian personnel from entering and traveling within Jenin and Nablus as well as the estimated numbers of dead and wounded. However, unlike the UN report, Amnesty International’s report accused the IDF of violating the Fourth Geneva
Convention on Human Rights by committing war crimes. Amnesty International mentions specifically that the destruction of most Palestinian property in Jenin occurred between April 11 and 14, even though they maintain that the Palestinians surrendered on April 11th. Amnesty also argues that the dead and wounded were left in the street without access to treatment or burial during the incursions.

The IDF responded to the Amnesty report with its own description of the events that occurred in Jenin and Nablus. The IDF maintained that Jenin was the “capital of suicide bombers,” that the IDF encountered fierce resistance, and that the high numbers of civilian casualties were due to the terrorists’ exploitation of the civilian population for cover, including women and children. It claimed that examples of this manipulation included firing from civilian homes, using human shields, in addition to using children to plant traps for IDF soldiers. It claimed these actions are also human rights violations according to the Geneva Convention. The IDF asserted that ambulances were used for terrorist activities such as suicide bombings and so the delaying of ambulances was required in order to assure they would not cause further casualties. As a result, the IDF report states, medical aid was delayed to the wounded, but this could not be helped and was not an intentional refusal of medical aid to the Palestinians by the IDF.

In balance, the most striking aspect of the fighting in Jenin is not how Israel conducted the operation, but that the cumulative casualties and physical destruction were low compared to urban warfare in conventional conflicts like World War II or Korea, or asymmetric conflicts such as the fighting in the Tet Offensive in Vietnam or in Bosnia. This does not make the human costs less tragic, but charges of massive casualties and economic costs simply did not prove to be true.

The urban fighting that has followed had generally a similar pattern. They have at best imposed serious human and economic costs on the Palestinians, and IDF actions have often paralyzed normal social and business activity. Israel has taken some losses but has succeeded in exploiting advances in sensors, tactics, and weapons technology; the protection and mobility provided by armor; and the ability of helicopters and aircraft with precision munitions to leapfrog defense and strike using limited amounts of fire. In most cases, this has given the IDF advantages in urban warfare and limited the resulting damages to Palestinian communities and
refugee camps, but the exceptions—particularly in Gaza—have sometimes been both bloody and costly in economic terms.

**Countering Palestinian Arms Smuggling and Manufacturing**

Israel has had considerable success in halting both Palestinian militant groups’ and the Palestinian Authority’s arms smuggling operations and arms manufacturing efforts. The IDF has had the advantage in terms of controlling all of the Palestinian “borders” and coasts, intelligence support from the U.S., a modern set of intelligence sensors, and a significant HUMINT network. Under these conditions, it is scarcely surprising that Israel has had more successes than it has had failures.

The Palestinians have been able to manufacture some arms, but relatively few. The IDF has demolished many warehouses in Palestinian cities in addition to many factories where weapons are locally manufactured. The IDF has largely been able to close off air, land, and sea passages granting access into the Palestinian territories.

There have also been some smuggling attempts across land boundaries from Iraq through Jordan, and from Egypt. Most weapons, however, have been smuggled into Gaza by tunnels or the Mediterranean Sea. On January 29, 2001, for example, Israeli forces came across two sealed barrels filled with weapons near Ashkelon, and it is assumed that other barrels from the same shipment reached their destination in Gaza. After inspecting the barrels, the IDF determined that the arms had been carried from Hizballah in Lebanon and were bound for Gaza where the Palestinian Islamic Jihad was to pick up the shipment.

In a more conspicuous case described earlier, the *Karine-A* was intercepted in the Mediterranean Sea by the Israeli Navy, carrying weapons “that have never before been in the PA’s possession.” These included modern missiles carrying Tandem-Charge warheads with the ability to penetrate heavy armor, and 122-mm katyusha rockets that have a range of 12 miles. The *Karine-A* incident shows that control of the sea is as important as control of the boarders and coastline.

**The Israeli Policy of Isolating the Palestinian Authority Leader, Yasser Arafat**

Israel’s greatest problems have occurred in trying to counter the penetration of terrorist attacks into Israel, and in trying to put effective pressure on the Palestinians and Arafat to halt
them. This has been true since the start of the fighting. The Palestinians responded by escalating the number and scale of suicide bombings at the start of December 2001. There were two suicide bombings within the first two days of December— one killing 10 Israelis in Jerusalem and a second killing 15 Israelis in Haifa. Hamas and Islamic Jihad—organizations not loyal to Arafat—claimed responsibility for these attacks. As the previous chapters have shown, this established a pattern of successful attacks that continued into 2004.

After more Palestinian suicide attacks in late November and early December, the IDF, on December 3, 2001, destroyed Arafat’s three Mi8 helicopters in Gaza with air-to-land missiles. On December 4, 2001, the IDF imposed a siege around Arafat’s West Bank compound with armored vehicles and troops. On December 4, Israelis also launched air strikes against offices of the Palestinian Authority in both the West Bank and Gaza—one missile was fired near an office where Arafat was working. In response to a question regarding whether Israel was targeting Arafat himself, US Secretary of State Powell said, “Israel says they are not targeting Arafat.” Nonetheless, attacking targets close to Arafat and part of his administration’s infrastructure indirectly made Arafat a target of Israeli military force. Israeli tanks positioned “only a few hundred meters from his office” confined Arafat to Ramallah.

Israel held Arafat responsible for not keeping militant organizations under control and for the terrorism in Israel. The tactic of “Isolation” marked a major shift in IDF strategy. Until December 2001, Israel still treated Arafat as a potential peace partner. After December 2001, Israel showed little interest in preserving the relationship Rabin had forged with Arafat when they co-signed the Oslo accords. Israel publicly associated Arafat with the terrorist attacks and armed struggle, and as a man so committed to armed struggle that he could no longer be trusted in ceasefire negotiations or treated as a true partner in peace.

Demolishing Arafat’s helicopters, and surrounding the leader’s headquarters, confined Arafat by preventing him from traveling to places outside of Ramallah. By confining Arafat, the IDF hindered his ability to mobilize his forces, curtail extremist forces, and engage in dialogue with internal political opponents, as well as international political leaders. In maintaining this policy, Israel aimed to weaken his power and diminish the legitimacy of his rule in the eyes of the international world, as well as in the eyes of the Palestinian people.

According to a statement by Prime Minister Sharon in the first week of December 2001, the aim of attacking Arafat was to “force him to take responsibility.” The Israeli cabinet did
not label Arafat a terrorist but, nonetheless, it did take steps to delegitimize his security forces. The Israeli cabinet also publicly “declared Force 17, one of Arafat’s security units, and the Tanzim, the militia wing of his Fatah Party, ‘terrorist organizations’ that will be acted against accordingly.”

On December 12, 2001, the Israeli government announced its decision to cut off ties with Yasser Arafat. Prime Minister Sharon declared, “Yasser Arafat is no longer relevant to the state of Israel, and there will be no more contact with him.” Sharon enforced Israeli military isolation of Arafat with this political statement, cutting him off from engaging in “normal” political relations with Israel and putting his political clout into question internationally.

These steps established a pattern of Israeli behavior that deprived Arafat and the Palestinian Authority of the ability to use their security forces effectively. It also led to a pattern of escalation that eventually destroyed the Palestinian Authority’s infrastructure when Israel attempted to remove Arafat from power, and prevented terrorist attacks with a series of barriers and forced separations of Israelis and Palestinians.

Attacks on the Palestinian Authority’s Infrastructure and Calls for Arafat’s Overthrow

Israeli forces have steadily escalated the intensity of their attacks on the infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority. For example, the IDF demolished the runway at Gaza International Airport with bulldozers. They also continued to scout out Palestinian militants with secret-service units. In early December 2001, they fired missiles on to the headquarters of the Palestinian Military Intelligence in the West Bank town of Safit and attacked police stations in Jenin, as part of the trend to attack the Palestinian infrastructure.

These attacks dealt significant blows to the security infrastructure of the Palestinian governing body that continued throughout the war. They also raised questions as to whether Israel’s motive was to diminish the ability of Palestinian Security forces to operate effectively in order to weaken Arafat’s regime, or if it was acting because Arafat clandestinely was promoting terrorist organizations and thus countering the effectiveness of his own security forces.

In any case, the Israeli cabinet stated that Arafat was “directly responsible for the terror attacks” on December 13, 2001 and began to take over much of the “policing” of Palestinian areas. The chronology of Israel’s escalating shift from taking over policing to calling for Arafat’s overthrow can be summarized as follows:
2001

- December 3 – Two of Arafat’s three helicopters are destroyed in Gaza City by an Israeli helicopter attack while Arafat is in Ramallah.
- December 13 – Israel declares Arafat “irrelevant” and cuts ties with the Palestinian Authority.
- December 24 – Sharon bans Arafat from traveling to Bethlehem for Christmas midnight mass.

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- January 2 - Sharon announces that Arafat will remain confined in his headquarters until he places those responsible for Minister Zeevi’s murder under arrest.
- February 20 – Israeli military forces target Arafat’s Gaza City headquarters.
- February 25 – The Israeli cabinet eases its restrictions on Arafat, allowing him to leave his compound, but not Ramallah.
- March 6 – Israeli helicopters fire rockets that hit a building next to Arafat’s offices in Ramallah. While the building is being attacked, Arafat is meeting with Miguel Angel Moratinos – an envoy from the European Union.
- March 10 – The IDF raids Arafat’s compound in Gaza City, completely destroying the leader’s headquarters.
- March 11 - Prime Minister Sharon’s office releases a statement allowing Yasser Arafat to travel freely in the West Bank and Gaza. There is no mention in the announcement that restrictions will be lifted regarding Arafat’s travels abroad.
- March 15 – In Ramallah, US envoy to the region Anthony Zinni meets with Arafat even though Israeli forces have evacuated the city.
- March 18 - EU envoy to the Middle East, Miguel Angel Moratinos, meets with Arafat.
- March 19 – According to a statement by Sharon, Israel will allow Arafat to leave the Palestinian territories once the Tenet ceasefire agreement is implemented.
- March 29 - The IDF encircles Arafat’s headquarters in the West Bank after entering into Ramallah. The Palestinian leader’s offices are spared when buildings are demolished. This marks the beginning of Operation Defensive Shield.
- March 31 - Ramallah is declared a closed military zone and journalists are ordered to leave after an estimated 40 peace activists surround Arafat in his headquarters.
- April 4 - A meeting between a European Union mission and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is opposed by Sharon.
- April 13 – After a suicide attack in Jerusalem, Arafat condemns "all terrorists acts against civilians, whether Israeli or Palestinian."
- April 14 - US Secretary of State Colin Powell meets with Arafat, and then with Sharon.
- April 21 – The siege on Arafat’s offices is maintained even after Sharon announces “the end of the first phase of the military operation in the West Bank”
April 25 - Four Palestinians are sentenced to prison terms ranging from one to 18 years - by a military court in Arafat's compound - for the assassination of Minister Zeevi. Sharon demands that the four Palestinians be extradited.

April 28 - A US and British delegation led by US consul to the Palestinian territories Ronald Schlacher meets with Arafat. Israel and the Palestinians accept a US plan that provides for the siege on the Palestinian leader to be lifted when Zeevi's killers are under US and British custody in a Palestinian prison. The deal also calls for the imprisonment of the head of the PFLP, Ahmed Sadaat, and Fuad Shubaki, an Arafat advisor accused of engineering arms-running schemes.

On April 30, US and British experts hammer out technical aspects of the deal with the aim of lifting the siege on Arafat within 24 hours.

On May 1, after final discussions between Arafat and the security delegation, the six wanted men are transferred one at a time into an armored motorcade to transport them to jail in the West Bank town of Jericho where they are to be held under international guard. Israel begins its withdrawal from Arafat's base.

On May 2, Israel completes its withdrawal from Arafat's compound early in the morning. Arafat makes his first comments to reporters denouncing the Israeli army for a late night gun battle with Palestinian militants who have been trapped in Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity for one month. A few hundred Palestinians celebrate outside Arafat's compound.

On June 5, the Palestinian branch of Islamic Jihad announces it is responsible for the suicide bombing of a bus near Afula, Israel that killed at least 16 Israelis, 13 of whom were soldiers. Israeli armored vehicles attack Arafat's compound in Ramallah entrapping him for the second time this year.

On June 24, US President Bush delivers a speech calling for the establishment of a Palestinian state before reforms in the Palestinian Authority. At the same time, Bush announces that the US will no longer deal with Yasser Arafat or recognize him as the Palestinian's leader. Also in late June, Israel announces that it is responding to a new wave of Palestinian suicide attacks by reoccupying sections of the West Bank.

On June 30, US Secretary of State, Colin Powell forced to renounce doing business with Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat.

On July 15, Israel renewed its efforts to banish Yasser Arafat from the political arena when its defense minister, Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, met the Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak to urge him to forget Arafat.

On September 1, Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, is refusing to allow Yasser Arafat to return if he leaves the Israeli-occupied West Bank, as part of his policy to undermine Arafat's credibility.

On September 19, Israeli tanks attack Yasser Arafat’s compound in Ramallah, hours after a suicide bomber killed five people in an attack in Tel Aviv.

On September 23, Israel ceased its destruction of Yasser Arafat’s compound but maintained its five-day siege around the last remaining building until those inside surrendered.

On September 29, Israel pulls its tanks and soldiers out of Yasser Arafat’s West Bank compound, under intense American pressure to end the 11-day siege because it was undermining its coalition building efforts for an attack on Iraq.

On October 14, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, in advance of a White House visit, urged Palestinians to overthrow their leadership.
Israel’s Evolving Tactics and the Fence

The most serious shift in Israeli tactics and methods is the shift towards separation and barriers that is described in detail in Chapters V and XV. Israel has successfully exploited its conventional military and tactical superiority over the Palestinians, and its ability to largely isolate them. The Palestinians have perceived no other option than asymmetric attacks, many of which have been directed against Israeli civilians. If the peace failed in part due to “settlements for terrorism,” the war has substituted “conventional warfare for terrorism,” bringing Israel many tactical victories but no higher degree of security. Much now depends on the impact of Arafat’s death, and how Israel reacts as the Palestinians debate their political and military future in the interim.

2 Camiel, Deborah. “Israeli Copters Attack Palestinian Gunmen” Washington Post December 5, 2000
4 Tracy Wilkinson, “Israeli Armor Storms West Bank Town in Fierce Attack on Gunmen,” Los Angeles Times, May 7, 2001, p. 3. See also “Seven Palestinians Killin; In Gilo, Four Israelis Hurt by Gunfire,” Ha’aretz, May 15, 2001
11 Larry Kaplow, “Barak Vows to Increase Attacks; Palestinians Demand Revenge for Killings,” The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, November 11, 2000, p. 3A


60 “Arafat’s Five Month’s in Ramallah,” Agence France Presse, May 2, 2002.