In recent months, we have witnessed an increase in the number of terrorist attacks in the area of the West Bank. On the surface it appears as if there is relative calm in this arena in terms of security as a result of ongoing security measures, preventative measures by the Shin Bet and security forces, and existing cooperation with the Palestinian security forces. At a meeting of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee of the Knesset held at the end of December 2017, the head of the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet or ISA), Nadav Argaman, noted that approximately 400 terrorist attacks were foiled in 2017, including 13 suicide attacks, 8 kidnapping attacks, 94 self-sacrificing attacks (attacks likely resulting in the death of the terrorist by the security forces), and 1,100 potential attacks by lone terrorists were thwarted.

However, in recent months there seems to have been an increase in the number of terrorist attacks in this arena. Data presented by the ISA indicates that approximately 64 attacks took place in August, 70 in September, 95 in October and 114 in November. To date, no official data has been published for the month of December, but the trend appears to be continuing.

For the purpose of this document, we gathered leading experts from ICT on the West Bank, and inquired about their analysis of the significance of this rise, and if and how it can be stopped.

Organized terrorist attacks are carried out by cells belonging to terrorist organizations that are recruited and trained by them. The recent attacks in the West Bank seem to be “unorganized” attacks (attacks that are carried out by an independent terrorist cell and/or lone wolves). The scope of the attacks in the West Bank is a function of several variables, all of which can be understood against the backdrop of Hamas’ desire to maintain and increase its presence in preparation for the day after Abu Mazen:

1. Hamas’ increasing motivation to enflame the West Bank as a result of its limited ability to carry out attacks from the Gaza Strip.
2. A desire to challenge and embarrass Abu Mazen.
3. An aspiration to demonstrate to the Palestinian public in the West Bank that Hamas still has a great influence on the Palestinian street.
4. The need to maintain the element of violence (“resistance”) as a constant variable in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Terrorist attacks in the framework of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict usually take place in “waves”. The height and frequency of the waves are a function of "wind power," that is, the totality of the incitement, considerations and interests of the terrorist organizations. Despite the above, the recent attacks in the West Bank do not seem to reflect a new wave of terrorism, but rather they are the result of one or two cells that have not yet been arrested. This is far from being a wave.

The West Bank and the Gaza Strip mutually influence one another. It is difficult for young people in the West Bank to ignore the peak moments of the riots in Gaza. On the other hand, a cluster of terrorist attacks in the West Bank may also "ignite" the Gaza Strip.

Mahmoud Abbas (aka Abu Mazen), in contrast to Arafat, understands that terrorism is contrary to the Palestinian national interest. Therefore, he has been making efforts for many years to reduce prevent terrorism against Israel and Palestinian Security Forces are cooperating with their Israeli counterparts. At the same time, Abu Mazen is also deeply involved in the Palestinian political arena. He both influences and is influenced by the atmosphere on the Palestinian street. Abu Mazen’s top goal is self-preservation, and therefore, he cannot act contrary to the Palestinian ethos and narrative of the "resistance", violence and terrorism. His strategy is ambiguous - the struggle against terrorism and the prevention of terrorist attacks on the one
hand, and payment of lip service and money to terrorists’ families on the other hand. This strategy should not be accepted by Israel. Moreover, Abu Mazen “shoots himself in the foot” by adopting this strategy, and he is sending a dangerous message to the Palestinian street.

Israel is dealing with three arenas that differ in nature from one another:

The northern arena (Lebanon and Syria) pose a strategic threat to Israel, a threat that is not existential but is liable to cause the Israeli home front severe damage greater than we have known in the past.

The southern arena (the Gaza Strip) constitutes an operative threat to Israel, as reflected in the possibility of high trajectory fire at the Israeli home front in limited scope and range.

The eastern arena (Judea and Samaria) constitutes a tactical threat to Israel as it is characterized by “lone wolf” attacks, independent networks and organized attacks.

It is difficult to decide which arena is most important to deal with because, in the Middle East, a small match can ignite a large fire and, as mentioned above, the arenas have a mutual influence on one another. Israel must, therefore, act simultaneously in the three arenas and use the means at its disposal to deter its enemies, led by Hezbollah and Iran in the north and Hamas in the south, from the possibility of using violent means against it. To this end, Israel has at its disposal various effective intelligence, military, economic, and political capabilities.

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The recent rise in the number of terrorist attacks in the West Bank stems from several reasons (in descending order):

1. The struggle over Abu-Mazen’s successor is worsening, even within Fatah but mainly between Fatah and Hamas. An example of this can be seen in the Hamas takeover of a Fatah radio station in the Gaza Strip by Hamas supporters.

2. Hamas terrorist cells in the West Bank are gaining strength. In the past, it was very difficult to transfer directives/tools/people between the Gaza Strip and Judea and Samaria, but in recent months, due to attempts at dialogue between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, easier pipelines have been opened for the transfer of directives/tools/people between the Gaza Strip and Judea and Samaria.

3. The motivation to injure and kill Jews always exists among terrorist organizations, with
emphasis on Hamas, and once its cells are ready with intelligence and means, it tries to carry out an attack. There are over half a million settlers living in the West Bank as well as many military forces, and they serve as relatively easy targets. Add to this the date of Hamas’ founding, which is a day of celebrations and showcase attacks every year.

4. Recently, security forces have failed to immediately capture terrorists who carried out attacks (for example, in Barkan and Ofra), and continued to wage manhunts after them. Such pursuit and accelerated intelligence activity by Israel "piques" the territory and are followed by attempts at imitation.

**Abu Mazen is and remains against armed struggle.** And he has a role. He knows how to use his security apparatuses against Hamas and maintains their cooperation with the Israeli defense establishment. The recent crisis between the Palestinian Authority and the United States, and the fact that there is a right-wing government in Israel that strengthens the settlements and does not advance a political process, does not provide motivation for calming the area. Therefore, most of the burden is placed on the Israeli security forces.

**Hamas is trying to generate attacks in Judea and Samaria, but Israel, in cooperation with the Palestinian security apparatuses, is able to keep the organization on a low flame.**

The riots in Gaza, encouraged by Hamas and due to the situation that Israel has created there, show Israel’s weakness and loss of its deterrent capability vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip. This is mainly due to Israel’s long absence from the area (since the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip) and the fact that it is not interested in a military operation. As a result, Hamas feels that it can continue to pressure Israel. Hamas is trying to generate attacks in Judea and Samaria, but Israel, in cooperation with the Palestinian security apparatuses, is able to keep the organization on a low flame.

**The most sensitive front facing Israel today is the northern front** – Lebanon, Syria, the Islamic State, Iran and Hezbollah are present there. If there is an eruption against Israel, it will be very significant in the north. However, the daily danger posed to the citizens of the Gaza envelope, and the danger of traveling on the roads of Judea and Samaria, is much more immediate. Israel’s ability to thwart attacks in Judea and Samaria, and its ability to calm the riots in the Gaza Strip, are disrupting the daily lives of the public and the security forces.

The ability to calm the area in the West Bank is a function of more intelligence, enforcement and cooperation between us and the Palestinians. The one percent [of attacks] that were not uncovered creates a media “explosion”. Israel should be proud of the fact that it is conducting a successful struggle against Palestinian terrorism in all its forms. However, it should remember
that intelligence gathering is not a hermetic thing. It is possible to uncover 99% of the attempted terrorist attacks, but the 1% that was not uncovered creates massive media noise.

The recent radicalization in the West Bank stems from, among other things, the increasing restrictions imposed on Hamas in Gaza, which challenge its ability to pose a significant military threat to Israel in the southern arena at the present time. Since Hamas also serves as the civilian government in Gaza, in addition to its military activity, it is exposed to political and economic pressures that usually have less impact on a terrorist organization that functions solely in the military dimension. A state that helps fund the salaries that are so important for the preservation of the Hamas government system has an interest in governmental and civil stability in Gaza.

At the same time, Israeli activities to thwart the penetration of tunnels into Israel in the Gaza Strip and other operational activities are increasingly denying Hamas the ability to implement operational plans against Israel. Thus, Hamas is finding itself increasingly limited in its ability to use military force against Israel in Gaza. Therefore, it was forced to increase its efforts to carry out a terrorist attack in the West Bank in order to maintain what it perceives as an effective deterrence balance vis-a-vis Israel and its place as the leader of the Palestinian resistance.

Indeed, in Judea and Samaria, there are no political or economic constraints imposed on Hamas because it does not hold power there. However, due to the presence and special activities of the Israeli intelligence and PA security and intelligence forces, it fails to establish significant terrorist infrastructures at the level of those that operated before Operation “Defensive Shield”. Rather, it operates lower level infrastructures that may be responsible for the recent attacks.

In addition, since the current period is a one of transition between the existing PA leadership and the one that will replace it, and since the Palestinian cause is presently receiving less attention in the public opinion of Arab countries and the international community than other issues, such as the regional confrontations with Iran, Syria and more, it seems that the majority of the Palestinian public is not willing to carry out a campaign of violent resistance against Israel at the
present time. This trend constitutes an additional restraint on Hamas' ability to establish an advanced terrorist infrastructure and to implement a wave of high quality terror attacks.

The three fronts with which Israel is forced to cope differ from one another in terms of the type of threat and the method of response.

Judea and Samaria: terrorism front – There is an Israeli military and intelligence presence in these areas. The required response is the one that is actually taking place, and mainly includes intelligence and prevention. This is a familiar routine with varying intensity of ongoing security, and not even on the front.

South: limited military threat - There is no Israeli military presence in these areas but there is an intelligence presence. Hamas is a hybrid organization but its military ability to inflict damage on Israel is low relative to Israel’s ability to inflict severe damage on Hamas, even just by firing without the need for maneuvering. In addition, there are additional external pressures on Hamas (such as the Gulf States, Egypt and others). Therefore, the required response is the one that is actually taking place, which is mainly defense (including the barrier system against penetrating tunnels), quality intelligence, and preventative operations within the framework of the war between the wars.

North: Significant military threat in its scope - There are many influential players, such as Iran, Russia and the US. Hezbollah has significant military capability, but it does not pose an immediate military threat. The required response (which is covert) is defense (including the completion of the barrier system against penetrating tunnels), quality intelligence, an effective covert campaign against Hezbollah’s interests in the world and its infrastructure, the completion of Israel’s re-structuring military force and the prevention of re-structuring military force capabilities in Lebanon, such as weapons smuggling.

Due to the contradictions between them, it is possible to act on these fronts simultaneously and over time.

In order to stop the wave of terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria, Israel must continue to do what it knows how to do very well - intelligence and prevention. Israel reached impressive levels of prevention during the wave of terrorist attacks in the 1990’s: arrests, disruption of terrorist cells’ activity, route security defense, and more. The existing Israeli infrastructure of the Shin Bet and the IDF is sufficient to deal with the present type of challenge, which is neither a new type nor characteristic of terrorist attacks that require a new method of response.

Residents of the West Bank believe that achievements against Israel will only be possible after the Abu Mazen period.

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The increase in the number of terrorist attacks in the West Bank stems primarily from internal developments in the Palestinian arena, but also from the informal arrangement that is beginning to emerge between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Several key factors can be identified:

1. Hamas’s strategic decision to transfer the center of terrorist activity to the West Bank in light of the need for restraint in Gaza, at least temporarily. Hamas’s conduct generally contains contradictory orders - the preservation of sovereignty and governance in the Gaza Strip, and jihad against Israel. This contrast is contained using two central methods: First, a constant preoccupation with the accumulation of capabilities in anticipation of future jihad against Israel (the tunnels as a future offensive tool, for example). Second, a differentiation between different arenas in which the sovereign-agreement rationale prevails (as is the case in the Gaza Strip) – and arenas in which the jihadist rationale prevails (as is the case in Judea and Samaria).

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In order to reduce the scope of terrorism, it is necessary to act simultaneously on three channels: political, economic and security. Economic well-being can reduce the number of people who turn to terrorism.

The increase in terrorist attacks, therefore, stems from an informed decision by Hamas.

2. As the PA’s central leadership in the West Bank is weakening - in light of Abu Mazen’s uncertain future and health, and perhaps even the beginning of "behind the scenes" struggles over his successor – local leadership in various cities and villages are gaining strength. This also affects the patterns that appeared in the recent terrorist attacks, which were not carried out by a lone terrorist or a broad organizational infrastructure, but rather by local cells of 2-3 people, usually from the same village.

3. The PA has stagnated while Hamas acts creatively. In PA territory, there is a sense of a lack of vision; the absence of a strong leadership; the absence of a personal, economic and political horizon; the absence of a narrative that the PA and Fatah present as an alternative to Hamas' violent resistance. This is not a failure of the mechanisms, but rather a weakness of the PA since, in the absence of a vision and horizon for the individual and the community, it relies solely on preventative capabilities and operative actions taken in the West Bank so far.

4. Pressure on Abu Mazen to prevent the transfer of money to the Gaza Strip. Demonstrators in Gaza and the Hamas leadership portray him as a "bad" figure. Therefore, the more they want to increase pressure on him, the more they incite the arena in Judea and Samaria.
In order to reduce the scope of terrorism, it is necessary to act simultaneously on the three channels in which Israel and the PA have a connection: 1. political channel 2. economic channel 3. security channel.

Today, we are in a state of political isolation from the Palestinians (which has more cost than benefit; in other words, the very existence of discourse is of great importance even if it does not include agreements). Even the economic channel is inactive. However, the entire relationship between Israel and the Palestinians cannot rely solely on the security channel. It is, therefore, necessary to strengthen economic cooperation - through economic ventures, common commercial areas and more.

Economic welfare is not intended to completely eradicate terrorism and terrorist attacks, but it is intended to reduce the number of people in the circle of terrorism. As a rule, a person who has more to lose is less likely to turn to the path of terrorism.

Mordechai uses the metaphor of the "boiling frog" to describe Israel's interpretation of the reality on the ground in the West Bank. The basic assumption is that when a frog is placed into boiling water, it will try to jump out and escape. But if the frog is placed in cool water that is gradually heated, it will not notice the danger as it will become accustomed to the slow rise in temperature, it will not try to escape, and it will eventually be cooked and die.

Among the decision-makers there is discussion of a "third intifada," which will come about in the manner we have experienced in the past (as in the example of the "boiling water" frog). However, in reality, a significant change is already taking place as reflected in terrorism waves ("gradually heating the water"), and cumulatively a negative trend is emerging. The last wave of attacks, beginning with the attack in the Barkan industrial zone until the recent attacks on Route 60, constitutes another wave and is part of a process of profound change. The bottom line is that the security stability we have become accustomed to in recent years is being challenged and is in decline.

Abu Mazen is weakening and, strategically speaking, does not provide the "goods" in the eyes of the Palestinians, while Hamas is gaining a dominant position in the arena. This factor encourages radical elements in the field.

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3 This road stretches from Be'er Sheva to Nazareth, and most of it passes through the West Bank. The road's main weakness, from a security point of view, is the mixed Jewish-Arab traffic. As a result, many terrorist attacks against Jews are carried out on this road.
Abu Mazen’s status among the Palestinian public has been eroded and they await the day after. He lost public legitimacy and was often viewed as a collaborator with Israel. He continues to wage an all-out war against Hamas and carries out various actions related to his internal legitimacy in the public (payment to the families of martyrs, prisoners’ families, etc.), but the atmosphere on the ground is that extremists on both sides are dictating the tone.

The reality in Gaza affects the events in the West Bank since Hamas is strengthening its position in the latter. If, in the past, an attempt was made to strengthen the PA and weaken Hamas, today the reality is the opposite. A situation has been created in which Hamas is not affected by Abu Mazen’s sanctions, as it receives backing from the international community as well as money that Qatar and Israel transfer to it. The arena is affected by this reality.

Israel must contend with various challenges on several fronts. All of these challenges have a limited profile and low intensity:

**In the north** - on the Lebanese front and on the Syrian front, there is a clear strategic framework within which the IDF and security forces operate.

**In the Palestinian arena (Judea and Samaria, and Gaza)**, there is no strategic framework, which projects on the reality on the ground.

The IDF is capable of operating simultaneously in all arenas, since each of them requires different tools.

**In Lebanon** – Israel is dealing with the tunnels. **In Syria** – Israel is dealing with the Iranian attempt to establish itself. **In Gaza** - Israel is coping with sporadic fire at the home front and riots at the fence. **In the West Bank**– Israel is dealing with routine security measures and the ongoing fight against terrorism, with an emphasis on counterterrorism activities.

In the event that a settlement process does not occur in the foreseeable future, Israel will find it difficult to maintain the same level of security stability in Judea and Samaria. The burden, therefore, falls to the IDF and the security forces to strengthen the operational effort while simultaneously strengthening security coordination with the Palestinians. In this context, it is worth noting the tension between a tactical operational effort and security coordination with the Palestinian security apparatuses, since the coordination itself challenges the freedom of operational action. This tension needs to be managed with operational administrative skill by the Central Command and the West Bank Division.
In the prolonged confrontation between Israel and Hamas, when Hamas wants to break the siege and achieve legitimacy vis-à-vis Israel and in the Arab and international arenas, it strives to wage a less violent confrontation because it understands that violence harms it strategically. It found a middle path in the form of marches to the fence and the kite terrorism that lasted from December until last summer. Israel managed to contain the events and respond moderately without eliminating terrorist leaders. Hamas realized that its strategy was not effective and, therefore, decided to open a front for terrorist attacks in the West Bank. These are not “bottom-up” events that come from the public, since there is no identification with a national resistance. The public wants stability and a good economy. The recent events in the West Bank are the result of actions carried out by Hamas fighters in a controlled and systematic manner in order to restore the Palestinian issue to the agenda and make it difficult for Israel to continue its policy of containment. However, the Palestinian street is not currently built for a prolonged confrontation, since Abu Mazen’s leadership is perceived as temporary and the people understand that they must wait for the next leader. Should there be a popular uprising, Israel will face a prolonged wave of terrorism.

Israel’s most urgent mission is to create calm in the internal arena vis-à-vis the Palestinians in order to deal with the central threat posed by the northern front. Therefore, the containment policy taken by the government is intended to divert security and political attention to what is happening in Syria, which became more acute in light of the expected US withdrawal from Syria.

Abu Mazen’s main considerations at this time are biographical - how he will be portrayed in the pages of history. He wants to emulate Yasser Arafat, who was perceived as a national hero and received a Nobel Prize. He aspires to make achievements, but his hatred for Hamas overshadows how he wants to be portrayed. This limits his room to act. On the one hand, he makes nationalistic declarations, but on the other hand he is very committed to security cooperation with Israel. He will not be the one to cause harm to the PA and endanger its narrative, and it is important to him to transfer a stable government to his successor.

Since Hamas is the one carrying out the attacks, Israel must create a positive balance against it in Gaza. They share many common interests, especially since Hamas

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understands that the right-wing government in Israel is a guarantee of its continued existence. There are vague rules of play between Hamas and the Israeli government, and a proper reading of the map by Hamas can win points in its favor, mainly a partial break of the blockade, an insurance policy for its leaders against elimination and an expansion of the fishing area.

Arab mediators, especially Egypt and Qatar, want to distance Hamas from Iranian hands. Thus, they do a great deal to bring the Israeli interest together with the interests of Hamas, which would reduce Iran's influence.

This will succeed because the public in Gaza and in the West Bank wants economic stability and is putting pressure on Hamas.

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The recent terrorist attacks taking place in the West Bank are a periodic issue. Cumulative experience from the past decade has shown that there are small waves (ripples) of terrorism in the West Bank, which come and go. Sometimes there is a direct connection to events taking place around them (other arenas, political activity, etc.), but in most cases it is the result of joint operational activity by PA and Israeli security forces. Sometimes this activity is more successful and sometimes less so. "Successful" attacks create enthusiasm among terrorist operatives and increase motivation, but the motivation wanes after a while. It is clear that these are not particularly complex terrorist attacks that require preparation, but rather shooting/stabbing attacks.

The riots in the Gaza Strip affect Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad operatives. However, this is not their motivation since they are also very motivated to carry out terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria, under the nose of the PA, and sabotage the efforts of the security apparatuses to maintain quiet. Once there is an operational opportunity in the field, they find it.

Abu Mazen has no influence on the ground. He is detached from what is happening in terms of security and he functions as a statesman - promoting his own foreign relations and those of the PA. He cannot help to restore quiet. The security activity in the West Bank is connected to the heads of the security forces, and they act alone to prevent terrorism.
Each arena that Israel is dealing with has a different character:

Northern arena - an arena of emergency preparedness. This is not an active arena of shooting/attacks. In this arena, preparations are made for a war that could break out in a month, a few more years, or not at all. This means making appropriate preparations, causing damage to the infrastructure of the other side (for example, exposing terrorist tunnels), and more. This is indeed important, but the timing has no meaning.

West Bank arena – requires ongoing security. An attempt to maintain an even level of terror that will not escalate. It requires forces in place, activity by the IDF and the Shin Bet. Israel is not interested in terrorism and neither is the PA, which fears a Hamas takeover of the West Bank. Therefore, there is cooperation between Israel and the security apparatuses. Salam Fayyad, who served as the Palestinian Prime Minister (under Abu Mazen) ten years ago, built the infrastructure for those security apparatuses. The beginnings of security and military cooperation took place after Operation Defensive Shield and full cooperation began in the summer of 2008 on the field level. This cooperation is vital to Israel and allows it to contain terrorism. The scope of crime in the West Bank during the last decade has been lower than in Israel during the same period. If this cooperation would have existed in the Gaza Strip, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad would not have been successful in promoting terrorist activity to the same extent. Residents of the West Bank live in overall security.

Gaza arena – the most inflamed and urgent arena of all. Terrorist organizations are constantly threatening residents of the Gaza envelope, and during times of escalation residents of other communities as well, such as Ashkelon, Ashdod, Be'er Sheva and more. There is no partner in this arena and it requires constant attention.

The ongoing security activity will bring an end to the wave of terrorist attacks and, in Cohen’s opinion, does not require any special action. Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad are constantly trying to carry out attacks, but they usually do not succeed. In the media, we hear about the attacks that have been carried out and that will fade. Guidelines are always being refined for both the civilian public and the soldiers.
We are not yet facing a large and new wave of terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria, but rather only a temporary and "local" rise in terror attacks stemming from the developed operational readiness of one Hamas cell and several others. At the same time, one cannot rule out the possibility that the push for the timing of the terrorist attack at the Barkan industrial zone by Ashraf Na'alwa, who became a kind of local hero, also enabled him to escape and hide out.

Meanwhile, it must be admitted openly and "bravely" that the "success" of these attacks also "contributed" to failures in the operational discipline and functioning of the "Netzah Yehuda" battalion. It is also possible that this functioning "corresponds" to letters from IDF Ombudsman Maj. Gen. Yitzhak (Ret.) Brick criticizing the "operational discipline" of certain IDF units.

There is no new wave of radicalization in Judea and Samaria, since there is already enough extremism among many young people as a result of Islamic incitement that could push them to carry out terrorist attacks. However, it is quite possible that Hamas' successes in the Gaza Strip in the form of riots at the fences and clashes with IDF forces, coupled with attempts by Hamas in Gaza to ignite a new intifada outside of the Gaza Strip, inspired its rival, Abu Mazen, in Judea and Samaria.

Abu Mazen, for his part, is trying to maneuver in the field between public sympathy for the perpetrators of the attacks and his desire to prevent a deterioration to a new intifada that will weaken his already shaky rule.

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The northern front constitutes the main strategic threat at the moment. Therefore, Israel must strive to calm and contain the two other problematic arenas, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

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*Major General Yitzhak Brick, decorated for courage during the Yom Kippur War, issued an "attack through letters and interviews" to the Israeli media when he retired, claiming that the IDF, especially ground forces, are not sufficiently prepared for the next war, and that there is a problem of military discipline in certain military units in the IDF.*
Several measures can be taken to increase the chances of reducing the number of attacks (beyond the measures already taken by the Shin Bet and the IDF):

1. An extensive information and implementation campaign to refine the behavior of the Jewish civilian public in terms of hitchhiking and on the roads of Judea and Samaria.

2. An additional effort by the public leaders of West Bank residents to prevent price-tag attacks, which only divert the IDF from their main mission.

3. Since there is an election atmosphere on the horizon and a coalition competition “drawing positions to the right”, it is important that there be a concentrated effort by the political echelon among public figures and politicians to refrain from making defiant statements against the Palestinians, specifically on the sensitive subject of holy places, especially the Temple Mount, which are catalysts for individual attacks.