Palestinian Rock Attacks On the Rise Since UN Settlement Vote

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The West Bank has seen a sharp rise in the number of violent attacks, primarily rock-throwing incidents, since an anti-settlement resolution was passed on December 23, 2016 by the United Nations Security Council, Israeli defense officials said.

The rise was recorded in the last week of December 2016 and the first week of January 2017, an increase security forces say is mostly due to exam season in Palestinian high schools. They note, though, that it is a larger increase than in the same period in previous years.

In September 346 rock-throwing attacks were recorded, in October 375, in November 420, and in December 344. Most of the December attacks occurred in the final week of the month. In the first week of January there were 169 recorded attacks, a pace that, if maintained, would lead to almost 700 attacks by the end of the month.

The rock attacks were also linked to a series of anniversaries taking place around now, including that of Fatah’s founding and first terrorist attack on January 1, 1965, and of the assassination of Yahya Ayyash, Hamas’s chief bomb maker, on January 5, 1996.

Nevertheless, the political context cannot be dismissed. On December 23, 2016, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2334 demanding an end to settlements in the West Bank. A few days later, on December 28, US Secretary of State John Kerry gave a speech warning of the dangers of settlement expansion. Finally, Palestinians have been agitated by ongoing discussion about the possibility the US embassy will be moved to Jerusalem after President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

The past few months have also seen an uptick in shooting attacks by Palestinians in the West Bank. In September there was one, October and November had four each, and in December there were six. Most of those attacks were local initiatives, unaffiliated with any serious terror organization.

Most strikingly, there have been a relatively large number of attempts to carry out organized terror attacks, mainly by Hamas. In 2016 Israeli security forces prevented some 100 serious terror attacks, not including the attacks prevented by the Palestinian Authority. Those thwarted attacks were designed to ignite a full-blown intifada, so far without success.

The officials also noted continued unrest among the Palestinian public against both Israel and the Palestinian Authority, saying that the atmosphere remains as tense as ever.