A West Bank tinderbox
Israel can't let explode

ANALYSIS
*By ANNA AHRONHEIM*

Amid an increase in Palestinians who have been killed by IDF fire this year, Israel is growing concerned but does not think the West Bank will spiral out of control.

More than 40 Palestinians have died since the beginning of the year, including children and others in questionable circumstances. Another four Palestinians were killed early Monday morning during a raid in Jenin.

The numbers are twice those of the same period in 2020, and the Palestinian street is not quiet.

Amid the rise in Palestinian fatalities, IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Aviv Kohavi said while the West Bank is “a violent environment,” the military would not tolerate reckless disregard for human life.

“We will support you when you follow your professional doctrines, but we will deeply criticize those who do not,” he told soldiers. “We will support you when you follow orders, but we will not accept devia-
tions. We will support you when you use judgment, even if you make mistakes, but we will not tolerate negligence.”

Those comments were heard loud and clear on the Palestinian street, said Col. (ret.) Dr. Michael Milstein, head of the forum for Palestinian Studies at the Moshe Dayan Center and senior analyst at IDC Herzliya’s Institute for Policy and Strategy.

While Kohavi’s message was met with anger among Palestin-
ians, Milstein told The Jerusalem Post what is happening in the West Bank is a mix of circum-
cstances and tensions between Palestinians and Israel, whether settlers or soldiers, and between Palestinians and the Palestinian Authority.

But, there are two major rea-
sons why, despite the high num-
ber of Palestinian fatalities, the forces carry out near-nightly raids in the West Bank to arrest wanted Palestinians, as well as to uncover workshops producing weapons and to confiscate funds that could be used for terror-
ism, Jenin is the only city where troops come under heavy fire.

Jenin is one of the more vio-
lent cities in the West Bank, a security source told the Post. Its refugee camp is the only place where whenever Israeli forces enter, they get engaged in fierce firefight.

Since Operation Guardian of the Walls and the cancellation of the PA elections, Hamas and Fatah have been fighting for dominance.

With armed struggle gaining support following the May conflict, militants are feeling more confident about engaging Israeli forces, the security source said.

The founding of the illegal set-
tlement outpost of Evyatar and the delay by the IDF and police in evacuating it has also led to a high level of violence by Palest-
inians living in the neighboring village of Beita.

The almost nightly violent pro-
tests of hundreds of Palestinians has led to at least six deaths. It’s a level of violence the IDF hasn’t seen in years.

Even though the violence in Beita has angered Palestinians, those living in Hebron or Bethlehem “are really focusing on their own issues,” Milstein said. “They know what’s happening and support the people in Beita, but they won’t do anything.”

The issue of Beita “is more local,” he said. Had it been in Jerusalem, “then it’s another thing.”

The PA has also been wea-
kened in the West Bank, especial-
lly in Jenin, where they have little control. The lack of authority has led to an increase in weapons, which in turn has emboldened groups such as Tanzim and Pal-
estinian Islamic Jihad to engage with Israeli security forces, simi-
lar to the group that engaged troops overnight on Monday.

“Israel doesn’t have any other way to control what’s happen-
ing in the Jenin refugee camp other than arresting or killing those trying to promote terrorist attacks,” Milstein said. “It’s an ongoing effort.”

But the issue in the refugee camps, especially in Jenin, is not like the Gaza terrorist cells, he said, adding: “Unlike Gaza, it’s more relations between gangs. Many of these young terrorists are neighbors. In Gaza, it’s total-
ly different; they are armies.”

The ongoing coordination between Israel and the PA secu-

This is a headline not only for the IDF, but for the PA security forces who are trying to impose their authority,” he said. “But it’s a failure all the time. The power of the gangs and clans is some-
times much stronger than that of the regime.”

On Monday afternoon, thou-
sands of Palestinians took part in the fourth of four people killed by Israeli security forces in Jenin, chanting slogans glorify-

The pictures of the funeral are creating a lot of anger on the Palestinian street,” Milstein said. “But 99.9% of Palestinian youth will express their anger with the keyboard. Only a very small part; will translate this anger to lone terrorist attacks.”

Still, Israel should be ready for any attacks in the coming days following the deaths of the four men, he said, adding: “This is the situation that [was] domi-

On Monday afternoon, one such attack was thwarted by troops after a Palestinian dressed as a soldier was arrested near the settlement of Ma’aleh Levo-

And while tempers remain high, Milstein does not foresee a new uprising or an increase in violence.

“There’s no Third Intifada and no Palestinian Spring,” he said. “There’s so much tension, but at the end of the day, they go home and not to the street.”