3 Israelis killed, 8 wounded in West Bank terror shooting; IDF hunting for gunmen

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Two elderly women and an off-duty cop were killed and at least eight other Israelis were wounded when Palestinian terrorists opened fire on vehicles in the northern West Bank on Monday morning, the military and medics said.

The shooting attack, which targeted a bus and two cars, occurred inside the Palestinian village of al-Funduq, which straddles a major artery used by thousands of Israelis and Palestinian drivers daily. The army said it launched a manhunt for the gunmen.

The fatalities were identified as Master Sgt. Elad Yaakov Winkelstein, a police officer, and sisters-in-law Rachel Cohen and Aliza Raiz.

Three Palestinian terrorists from the Jenin area in the northern West Bank opened fire on two Israeli cars and a bus traveling along the highway as they passed through the village, according to the military.

According to an initial Israel Defense Forces probe, the terrorists, armed with assault rifles, first opened fire at a civilian car from a close range, killing Cohen and Raiz. Their deaths were declared at the scene by Magen David Adom medics.

Then, the gunmen fired at a bus further away, injuring eight people, including the driver, 63, who MDA said was rushed to a hospital in serious condition. Two women on the bus were in moderate condition, and at least five others were lightly hurt.

As the terrorists were shooting at the bus, the military said an armed civilian opened fire with a handgun at the gunmen, causing them to get back in their car and flee. The shots hit the car but apparently did not injure any of the terrorists, the military probe found.

While the terrorists were fleeing, they opened fire on another car around 150 meters (490 feet) away, killing Winkelstein, the police officer, according to the IDF’s investigation.

The military said two of the gunmen were known to the defense establishment and were already wanted for involvement in terror activity, while the third was still unidentified.

Winkelstein, 35, a father of two from the northern town of Ein HaNatziv, was an investigator at the Ariel police station. He was off-duty at the time of the attack.

One of Winkelstein’s sons was in the car when he came under fire, but was unharmed physically, according to Hebrew-language media reports.

Cohen, 73, and Raiz, 70, sisters-in-law and educators from the settlement of Kdumim, were driving together when they came under attack.

The IDF said that it had dispatched a large number of troops, as well as an Israeli Air Force helicopter, to search for the terrorists.

The attack occurred along Route 55, an east-west highway traversing the West Bank and linking areas northwest of Tel Aviv to the outskirts of Nablus, passing near or through a number of Israeli settlements and Palestinian towns.

Surveillance video published by Israel’s Kan public broadcaster showed a man emerge from the passenger side of a white sedan stopped on the road and aim a weapon at a passing bus. The man appears to continue shooting for several seconds before getting back in the car, which then peels away from the scene.

The army said it set up roadblocks near the attack site, and placed cordons around the city of Nablus and several other nearby villages.

Defense Minister Israel Katz ordered the military to “use strong force against any place where the killers’ tracks lead.”

“Anyone who follows the path of Hamas in Gaza and sponsors the murder and harm of Jews will pay a heavy price,” he added.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed Israel would collar the shooters “along with everyone who helped them. No one will be spared.”

There was no claim of responsibility for the attack, but it was swiftly lauded by the Hamas terror group, which called it a “heroic response to the ongoing crimes” committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip.

Following the attack, police minister Itamar Ben Gvir called on Israel to end security cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, which has been waging a major crackdown on terrorists in Jenin in recent weeks.

“Remember that the PA supports terror, stop all cooperation with it, place as many checkpoints as possible and close roads [because] the settlers’ right to life outweighs PA residents’ freedom of movement,” he said.

On Sunday, the Border Police said its troops shot and killed wanted terror suspect Hassan Rabaiya in a village near Jenin when he attempted to escape during an arrest raid.

The Palestinian security services identified Rabaiya as a first lieutenant in its Preventive Security force, saying he was killed while “performing his national duty.”

Israeli authorities released helmet-cam footage that showed police blowing up what they called an explosives lab in his home.

Separately, the Palestinian Health Ministry in the West Bank said a 17-year-old boy was killed by Israeli gunfire in the Askar refugee camp in Nablus. The military said individuals hurled explosives at soldiers operating in the area, who then opened fire and hit one of them.

There have been numerous attacks on Israelis using Route 55 over the years, including in al-Funduq. Most attacks have involved stone-throwing, though there have been shootings as well, including an April attack on a bus and another vehicle that injured two.

Plans to pave a bypass road around al-Funduq for Israelis were recently approved; construction is set to begin next month.

Violence in the West Bank has mounted since October 7, 2023, when Hamas assaulted southern Israel, sparking war in Gaza and unrest across the region. Since then, 46 people, including Israeli security personnel, have been killed in Palestinian terror attacks in Israel and the West Bank, including some carried out by Israeli citizens.

Another six members of the security forces were killed in clashes with terror operatives in the West Bank. Much of the violence has been concentrated near Nablus, Jenin and other Palestinian cities in the northern West Bank where PA control has steadily weakened over the years.

According to the PA health ministry, more than 835 West Bank Palestinians have been killed since October 7, 2023. The IDF says the vast majority of them were gunmen killed in exchanges of fire, rioters who clashed with troops or terrorists carrying out attacks.

During the same period, troops have arrested some 6,000 wanted Palestinians across the West Bank, including more than 2,350 affiliated with Hamas.