One killed, 11 wounded in terrorist shooting attack near Jerusalem checkpoint

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An Israeli man was killed and 11 others were wounded in a terror shooting attack carried out by three Palestinian gunmen near a checkpoint between Jerusalem and the West Bank settlement city of Ma’ale Adumim on Thursday morning, police and medics said.

According to police, the trio opened fire with automatic weapons at Israelis waiting in traffic while heading toward Jerusalem on the Route 1 highway, a few hundred meters before the az-Za’ayyem checkpoint, close to the West Bank town of the same name.

A man in his 20s was killed in the shooting, medical officials said. He was later identified as Matan Elmaliah, 26, of Ma’aleh Adumim.

The Magen David Adom ambulance service said it treated a total of 12 people, including the young man who was declared dead at the scene.

A pregnant woman aged 23 was listed in serious condition, and four others were in moderate condition, including a woman in her 30s, a man aged 23, a man aged 51, and a woman aged 52, MDA said.

Another five people were treated for minor injuries and acute anxiety, it added. All the victims were taken to hospitals in Jerusalem.

The pregnant woman was undergoing “significant surgery,” according to Dr. Alon Schwartz, head of the trauma department at Shaare Zedek Medical Center.

Schwartz said the woman was in stable condition with no risk to her life at present. Asked about the health of the fetus, he said it was “too early” to know if there would be any long-term impact on its development or the pregnancy but that no issues were found during an initial examination.

Two of the gunmen were shot dead by security forces and armed civilians at the scene. The third gunman initially fled, before being “neutralized” a short while later following police searches in the area, law enforcement officials said. His condition was not immediately known.

Images shared by police showed that the trio, residents of the Bethlehem area, were armed with assault rifles, makeshift submachine guns, and a grenade.

The Shin Bet security agency identified the terrorists as Muhammad Zawahra, 26, and his brother Kathem Zawahra, 31, both residents of the village of Ta’amra, and Ahmed Al-Wahsh, 31, a resident of Za’atara.

Kathem Zawahra had been previously jailed for entering Israel illegally, the Shin Bet said.

Eyewitnesses said that the terrorists ran along the lines of cars waiting in the traffic jam, firing into the vehicles.

A video, taken by a passenger on a bus waiting in the congestion, showed panicked people abandoning their cars and running along the road to escape the gunfire.

Magen David Adom emergency service medic Natav Tayib said the scene was spread out over a distance of 1.5 kilometers.

Tayib said emergency teams found five cars with injured people inside, one of which had a man, in his 20s, who had gunshot wounds to his upper body and was unconscious with no vital signs. He was later declared dead.

Amir Ararat, a medic who was on his way to work at the Hadassah Mount Scopus Medical Center, said he managed to save one of those injured because he happened to have a tourniquet in his car.

As the attack unfolded, he saw a woman who had been shot by the terrorists and was trying to escape further injury.

Ararat ran to help her. “She had a bullet in her forearm; it hit an artery,” he said.

Fortunately, Ararat had a tourniquet with him of the kind issued to Israel’s combat soldiers, and he applied it to the woman’s arm “in the midst of the shooting.”

“I heard shooting, but I focused on treating the injured person,” he said and noted the woman had managed to move about 150 meters away from the scene of the attack.

Eyewitness Yisrael Adler told the Ynet news site he saw a terrorist approach a car driven by the pregnant woman and then open fire at her. The woman, who was injured, tried to duck under the dashboard, he said.

“The terrorist moved on,” Adler said. “Afterwards, she went to someone else’s car and said, ‘Help me, help me.'”

Adler said that due to the gridlock caused by the shooting, it took ambulances time to reach the woman. “It is a miracle she was saved,” he said.

“It could be that if there was no traffic jam there, [the attack] would not have happened,” Adler said.

**Checkpoint death trap**

Local politicians echoed the criticism, saying the long lines at West Bank checkpoints were a death trap.

Ma’ale Adumim Mayor Benny Kashriel told the Kan public broadcaster that “we have dozens of times alerted the security forces to the concern of terror attacks on that congested road.”

Kashriel said the municipality asked that additional lanes be added to the checkpoint to speed up movement through the chokepoint, as well as separating Israeli and Palestinian vehicles.

Oded Ravivi, mayor of the West Bank settlement of Efrat, said in a statement the “method of the attack this morning and the exploitation of the traffic jams in the checkpoint area is the nightmare of everyone who is facing the tunnel checkpoint.” He was referring to a similar checkpoint at the entrance to tunnels connecting the Gush Etzion bloc with Jerusalem that is also frequently congested and was the scene of a [fatal shooting attack](https://www.timesofisrael.com/6-injured-1-critically-in-attack-by-3-gunmen-at-west-bank-checkpoint-near-jerusalem/) in November.

He urged security chiefs “to change their approach immediately and create a safe space for residents who wish to reach Jerusalem” and also “be a little more attentive to our comments and clarifications as public leaders.”

The terror attack came amid Israel’s war against the Hamas terror group in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas issued a statement praising the attack and called the deadly shooting “a natural response” to the war in Gaza, Arabic-language media outlets reported.

“The heroic operation is a natural response to the Occupation’s massacres and crimes in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank,” the terror group said.

Tensions in Israel and the West Bank have been high since October 7, when some 3,000 terrorists burst through the Gaza border into Israel in a Hamas-led attack, killing at least 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and seizing 253 hostages.

Israel responded with an aerial campaign and subsequent ground operation with the goal of destroying Hamas and ending its 16-year rule over Gaza and securing the release of the hostages.

The Israel Defense Forces has continued to operate throughout the West Bank and police have been on high alert in Israel, in light of concerns about a possible escalation of violence.