**Israel Indicts Mastermind Behind West Bank Kidnapping**

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By Gili Cohen

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Hussam Qawasmeh, who allegedly headed the terror cell that [kidnapped and murdered three Jewish teenagers](http://www.haaretz.com/misc/tags/West%20Bank%20kidnapping-1.599015) in Gush Etzion in June, was charged in Ofer military court with organizing and funding the attack.

Marwan Qawasmeh and Amer Abu Aisheh, the two men who on June 12 allegedly kidnapped and murdered Eyal Yifrah, 19, Gilad Shaar, 16, Naftali Fraenkel, also 16, are still at large. According to the indictment, even after the kidnapping, when thousands of security personnel were searching for the two, they were able to contact Husam, who arranged for them to hide for a time in a Hebron-area mosque.

According to the charge sheet, Hussam organized the attack through his brother, Mahmoud, who was freed in the prisoner release that freed Gilad Shalit and expelled to Gaza.

During his interrogation, the Shin Bet Security Service says, Hussam said he had hinted to his brother that he needed funds for a military operation, and eventually he received 220,000 shekels. A female courier made three deliveries of 50,000 shekels each to Hussam’s mother’s home, the Shin Bet said, while the other 70,000 shekels were transferred to Hussam via an offsetting transaction. This money was used to buy two M-16 rifles and two pistols from another man named Adnan Zaro. Abu Aisheh bought the Hyundai I-35 that was used in the kidnapping from a middleman who obtained it from car thieves in Kafr Idna. On the day of the kidnapping, Marwan Qawasmeh bought another vehicle that was used as the cell’s getaway car.

Hussam told Shin Bet investigators that at 1 A.M. on Friday, June 13, a few hours after the kidnapping, Marwan came to Hussam and said, “We wanted to kidnap one but we got three. We messed up. We killed them.” Afterward the two drove to a nearby mosque to pick up Abu Aisheh, but because of the large military presence in the area they changed their minds and drove instead to a piece of land Hussam had purchased in January, which is where they buried the three teens’ bodies.

According to the Shin Bet, Hussam had not purchased the land with the intent of burying anyone there and the land was legally registered in his name. As a result, the moment the bodies were found, Hussam realized he was a marked man and tried to flee. First he hid in Jericho and then in the Shoafat refugee camp in East Jerusalem, where he was arrested in July by special forces. He had shaved his beard in a presumed attempt to conceal his identity.

The Shin Bet investigation revealed that despite the Israel Defense Forces’ intensive manhunt in the Hebron area, after the attack Marwan Qawasmeh and Abu Aisheh received assistance from two other Hebron residents, Arafat and Ahmed Qawasmeh, in their attempts to flee. At first, as [previously reported in Haaretz](http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.612132), the two tried to hide in an unused cesspool, which was covered in earth and furnished with a small breathing pipe; later they hid in caves and in homes in the Hebron area. During this period the two apparently never left the Hebron district. Even after that, the two were able to make contact with Hussam, who arranged for them to sleep in a local mosque. All this allegedly took place under the noses of thousands of soldiers who were combing the entire Hebron area.

During Hussam Qawasmah’s interrogation it emerged that several other Palestinian inhabitants of Hebron helped the two wanted men hide: Arafat Qaqasmah, 50, also a former prisoner, who is considered to be senior in Hamas in the Hebron area, and Ahmad Qawsmah, who admitted in his interrogation that before the attack Marawn Qwasmah asked for his help in “hiding people wanted by the Palestinian Authority.” Upon the conclusion of their interrogation, their cases were handed over to the military prosecution in Judea and Samaria, where an indictment against them has been formulated.

“The hunt is under way, and it’s just a matter of time,” a Shin Bet agent told Haaretz. Asked how the two managed to hide for so long despite the intense efforts of the IDF and the Shin Bet, he said that only four people had been involved in the attack before the kidnapping, and subsequently another four people let in on the secret.

With regard to whether this attack was overseen in Gaza or by senior Hamas officials, the agent said the Shin Bet doesn’t think the kidnapping was a directive from above, though the money probably came from there, “and even that was not necessarily for a kidnapping but for military activity.” The Shin Bet agent thought the attack was the failed attempt by a local Hamas cell in Hebron that to kidnap someone to use as a bargaining chip.

Like the two men wanted in the abduction and murder of the three teens, Hussam Qawasmah, 40, was also formerly a prisoner in an Israeli prison between 1995 and 2002 in the context of his activism in Hamas and his membership in a cell that carried out attacks including the throwing of explosive devices. According to the Shin Bet, he admitted involvement in the terror attack and named other Palestinians who took part in hiding the two wanted men.

His brother Hassan Qawasmah is serving a life sentence for his part in a terror attack near the International Convention Center (Binyanei HaUma) in Jerusalem in 2011, which killed a British tourist and wounded 39 people.

Another brother, Mahmoud, who was the liaison man in the Gaza Strip through whom the money was sent for carrying out the West Bank attack, abetted the double suicide attack in Be’er Sheva in 2004 in which 16 Israelis were killed. Mahmoud was released from Israeli prison in 2011 in the Shalit deal and was expelled to the Gaza Strip.