Ex-Fatah prince, East Jerusalem lawyer indicted for attempted terror attacks

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Former Fatah’s al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade Commander Zakariya Zubeidi and east Jerusalem lawyer Tareq Barghut have been indicted in the IDF West Bank Courts for attempted terror attacks in which they allegedly fired on Jews in the vicinity of Ramallah in the West Bank.

The indictment of each man is explosive.

Zubeidi at one point has been considered among the most powerful strongmen in the Palestinian Authority and was given amnesty for his role as one of the leader's of terror during the Second Intifada.

Barghut is a well-known lawyer for Palestinians, is certified as an Israeli lawyer and his arrest and the arrest of his wife in February led the entire legal community defending Palestinians in the IDF West Bank Courts to strike, bringing the entire system to a halt.

While not unprecedented, it is highly unusual for Israel to arrest top Fatah officials or a lawyer for Palestinians, who are generally considered off limits.

The announcement came from the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agnecy) on Monday which said, “Intelligence gathered by the Shin Bet pointed to the involvement of Zakariya Zubeidi and Tareq Barghut in a series of attacks in the Beit El area.”

The two were arrested on February 27 during an operation by the agency and IDF forces at the end of the night of another attack which had been thwarted by the security forces due to earlier assessments on the ground.

Barguth has been employed as an attorney in the PA’s Ministry of Prisoner’s Affairs and there have been indications that part of what led to his arrest was internal Palestinian tensions, possibly leading to a fellow Palestinian informing on his alleged double-life as a lawyer and a terrorist.

Colleagues of Barghut in the past have dismissed the allegations against him as fake news being used by the occupation to persecute Palestinians, but the Shin Bet was adamant that it has smoking gun evidence.

While Zubeidi, who was once considered a "symbol of the Intifada,” renounced militancy over a decade ago, and was awarded clemency by Israel after he agreed to give up arms.

“Zakaria Zubeidi flagrantly and violently violated the commitment and was involved in several terrorist attacks after he agreed to cease all terrorist activities,” the Shin Bet said in a statement.

According to the statement, Zubeidi will be put on trial for all the terrorist activity in which he was involved - both from his past and for activities for which he was recently arrested for. It was unclear if anyone was injured by their attacks as no victims were named.

The Shin Bet investigation alleges that the two carried out two shooting attacks-on  November 7 and on January 5 toward buses traveling on the road adjacent to Beit El. As part of their preparations for the attacks, the Shin Bet said that they carried out reconnaissance of the area designated for the attack, monitored the targets for the attack, and collected information.

The agency also alleges that the two carried out another shooting attack on December 27 where they opened fire on a bus that went up to Psagot, but were unable to hit it because of the weather conditions.  They also planned to carry out another attack on February 19 in the same area.

According to the Shin Bet, Barghut admitted that he carried out another shooting attack on November 19, 2016 at a police car in the Zeitim crossing near Jerusalem, which caused damage but no injuries.

During the investigation, the M16 weapons and the magazines with which the attacks were carried out were confiscated by security forces.

"This is a serious incident involving a senior official in the Palestinian Prisoners' Ministry and an Israeli lawyer working in the Palestinian Prisoners' Office who carried out severe terrorist attacks using a Palestinian Authority vehicle used by Zakariya as part of his job in the prisoner's office,” a senior Shin Bet official said.

“The intelligence and operational activities of the security forces, immediately after the attacks and in the weeks that followed...led to the exposure of the cell and the prevention of serious terrorist attacks in the future. "

In a 2009 interview with Palestinian Maan News, Zubeidi said that Palestinian resistance could coexists alongside negotiating with Israel, saying that “this resistance is not defined yet. It could be armed resistance and it could be peaceful resistance.”

In 2012, Zubeidi was arrested by the Palestinian Authority, being accused of “collaboration” with Israel and killing Israeli filmmaker Juliano Mer-Khamis. Zubeidi denied the charges and said that he was tortured and kept under inhumane conditions in the PA's prison in Jericho.

In early 2013, Zubeidi turned himself into Palestinian security forces after Israel revoked his amnesty and spent the next four years in prison. He was released in 2017 and returned to Jenin with his amnesty reinstated.