Hamas claims Tel Aviv blast as attempted suicide bombing, vows to carry out more

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The Hamas terror group on Monday claimed responsibility for an explosion in Tel Aviv the day before, saying it was a suicide bombing conducted as a joint operation with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and vowing further such attacks.

The claim of responsibility came hours after the police and the Shin Bet security agency confirmed that the blast was an intended terror attack.

The man behind the planned attack was walking down Lehi Road in south Tel Aviv on Sunday evening when the bomb he was carrying in his backpack detonated, killing him instantly and moderately wounding a passerby.

In the immediate aftermath of the blast, police had also been examining the possibility that it was linked to criminal or gang activity, but on Monday morning the Shin Bet and police said in a joint statement that after an initial investigation, “it can be said that this was a terror attack, with the detonation of a powerful explosive device.”

The Shin Bet said it was still working to confirm the identity of the bomber, a man in his 50s, although Hebrew media outlets reported that he was believed to be a Palestinian from the Nablus area in the West Bank.

In its statement, Hamas said that it had carried out the attack along with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad — another Gaza-based terror group — and warned that suicide bombings would continue in response to Israeli attacks.

The attack comes as Israel and Hamas are attempting to negotiate a hostage release and truce deal through intermediaries to end the Gaza war that started when Hamas terrorists invaded southern Israel on October 7, killing some 1,200 people and taking 251 hostages.

Suicide bombings in Israel have been rare since the Second Intifada in the early 2000s, when hundreds of Israelis were killed in a series of deadly bombings.

In the wake of the intifada, Israel constructed the West Bank security barrier that has been credited with helping thwart further bombing attempts.

Security camera footage showed the man, believed to be in his 50s, walking down the street with a large blue backpack on his back.

Other footage showed the moment of the explosion in the south Tel Aviv neighborhood.

Recently, amid the war in Gaza, Israeli security authorities have identified attempts by Hamas and other terror groups in the West Bank to return to carry out such attacks.

In March of this year, a [would-be suicide bomber](https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-soldiers-kill-would-be-suicide-bomber-en-route-to-carry-out-attack-in-israel/) was killed while trying to infiltrate into Israel from the West Bank. Other attempted attacks have been foiled in recent months at earlier stages.

According to the Ynet news site, security authorities have yet to determine whether the man in Tel Aviv intended to detonate the bomb when he did, or if it malfunctioned and exploded without warning in a fairly empty area before he could reach his target.

One passerby, identified only by his first name Leonid, was wounded in the blast. He was passing by on an electric scooter on his way home from work when the bomb detonated.

“I didn’t notice anything unusual and I didn’t see anyone,” he told Ynet from Ichilov Hospital, where he was undergoing treatment for his injuries, which medical staff said included a punctured lung. “Suddenly there was a huge explosion and I flew off the scooter.”

“There was a lot of fire and I was right in the middle of it,” he said. “It felt like a movie — a giant explosion with me in the middle of the flames. I’ve been told a few times already in the hospital that I’m lucky to only have a few holes in me.”

Prior to the Shin Bet’s confirmation that the blast was indeed a terror attack, Ayalon District Police Commander Haim Bublil told Kan radio that he was “99%” sure that a bomb blast was an attempted terror attack.

“It may be that the terrorist planned to go to a nearby synagogue or maybe a shopping center. We can’t understand yet why it exploded at that point,” he said.

A Tel Aviv resident told Ynet that at the time of the explosion, more than 80 people had been inside the nearby synagogue for evening prayers.

“If he had entered the synagogue, it could have been an event with national consequences. There was a great miracle here,” he said.

In its statement to the public on Monday, the police said that Tel Aviv Police District Commander Peretz Amar had conducted a special assessment to address the city’s security needs in the aftermath of the bombing.

“The Israel Police continues with increased operational activity in crowded places with the cooperation of special units and and volunteers from the civilian defense squads,” the statement added.