3 cops killed in southern West Bank shooting attack; gunman later killed

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/3-killed-in-southern-west-bank-shooting-attack-idf-pursuing-gunmen/>

Three Israeli police officers were killed in a shooting attack near the Palestinian city of Tarqumiyah in the southern West Bank on Sunday morning, the military, police, and medics said.

The slain officers were named as Ch. Insp. Arik Ben Eliyahu, Command Sgt. Maj. Hadas Branch, and First Sgt. Roni Shakuri.

A Palestinian gunman opened fire at a police car on Route 35 near the Idhna-Tarqumiyah junction, just east of a checkpoint between the West Bank and Israel, before fleeing the scene. He was later killed in an exchange of fire with troops in Hebron.

The Magen David Adom ambulance service said it treated three victims in critical condition.

Ben Eliyahu and Branch were declared dead at the scene, while Shakuri died en route to a hospital.

The gunman was believed to have opened fire from a passing vehicle at the police car, before fleeing the scene on foot. It was not immediately clear if there were other attackers with him.

The Israel Defense Forces launched a pursuit of the gunman, later locating and killing him in Hebron.

Troops of the Duvdevan Commando Unit surrounded a building in Hebron where the gunman was holed up, following intelligence on his whereabouts provided by the Shin Bet security agency and Military Intelligence Directorate, an IDF source said.

The commandos carried out a tactic known as “pressure cooker” that involves escalating the volume of fire directed at a building to force a suspect to come out.

The soldiers fired shoulder-launched missiles at the building, and the gunman was eventually killed. The military source said the troops found an M16 assault rifle on his body.

He was named by the IDF and Shin Bet security agency as Muhannad al-Aswad, 31, from Idhna.

Al-Aswad was affiliated with the Palestinian Authority’s Fatah movement, and in the past served in the PA’s presidential guard, the military said.

Israel Police Commissioner Danny Levy told reporters at the scene of the attack that the victims were officers from the police’s West Bank district.

Police later named the three.

Ben Eliyahu, 37, from Kiryat Gat, was survived by his wife and three children.

Branch, 53, from Sde Moshe, was survived by her husband, three children, and a granddaughter.

Shakuri, 61, from Sderot, was survived by his wife, a daughter, and a granddaughter.

Shakuri’s daughter [Mor Shakuri](https://www.timesofisrael.com/first-sgt-mor-shakuri-29-police-officer-was-planning-a-june-wedding/), who was also a police officer, was killed battling Hamas terrorists trying to take over the Sderot police station on October 7.

The attack came after terrorists on Saturday detonated two [car bombs](https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-says-it-killed-2-terrorists-as-car-bombs-detonate-in-west-bank-attacks-3-hurt/) in the southern West Bank’s Gush Etzion settlement bloc, some 15 kilometers (nine miles) northeast of Tarqumiyah. Two soldiers were lightly and one moderately hurt in the explosions.

The attackers, who were killed in the attack, were both from Hebron.

Meanwhile, in the northern West Bank, a soldier was [killed](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/soldier-killed-3-injured-in-shootout-with-hamas-gunmen-in-west-banks-jenin/) and three were wounded, including one in serious condition, in a shootout with Hamas gunmen in Jenin on Saturday, amid large-scale IDF operations in the area.

The IDF said Sunday that so far amid its ongoing operation in the northern West Bank, some 30 gunmen have been killed.

Violence has soared in the West Bank during the war in Gaza sparked on October 7, when thousands of Hamas-led terrorists stormed southern Israel to kill nearly 1,200 people and take 251 hostages.

Since October 7, troops have arrested some 5,000 wanted Palestinians across the West Bank, including more than 2,000 affiliated with Hamas.

According to the Palestinian Authority health ministry, more than 670 West Bank Palestinians have been killed in that time. 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, 29 people, including Israeli security personnel, have been killed in terror attacks in Israel and the West Bank — including in Sunday’s attack. Another six members of the security forces were killed in clashes with terror operatives in the West Bank.