

Political

update: Terrorist attack in Jerusalem leaves three dead – 3 July

Key points:

- Palestinian drives bulldozer into crowded commuter bus in Jerusalem killing three and injuring many more.
- Attacker was an Arab resident of east Jerusalem who stole the bulldozer from a local construction site.
- Three groups claim responsibility for attack although Israeli security sources say the attacker probably acted alone.

Latest developments

- A Palestinian resident of east Jerusalem plowed a bulldozer into a crowded bus and a string of cars on Jaffa Street in Jerusalem killing three women and injuring dozens more.
- He used the bulldozer to ram into two public buses carrying passengers. One of the buses was completely overturned. He then crushed a number of cars with their drivers still in them and targeted several pedestrians, chasing after them and running them over.
- Police shot and killed the driver of the bulldozer by climbing on to the moving vehicle and disabling him during the attack. A state of emergency was immediately declared in the city and a large police force was deployed in the east Jerusalem village, Sur Bahir, where the attacker lived.
- A preliminary investigation showed that the bulldozer was stolen from a nearby construction site and was then driven against the direction of traffic on Jaffa Street, crashing into the bus, which turned on its side, hitting other vehicles and pedestrians along the way.
- Three organisations have so far taken responsibility for the attack, including the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, the Martyrs of Imad Mughniyeh Galilee Freedom Battalion and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Israeli Security sources have said that the claims were likely to be false and that the man was probably acting alone.
- Foreign Secretary David Miliband sharply denounced the incident as a “horrific act” and extended his condolences to the victims and their families. Miliband said that the UK remains committed to achieving a genuine peace capable of ensuring Israel’s security as well as that of the Palestinians. He said:

“Our first thought is for the victims and the relatives of the victims...Our second thought is obviously for the process of building a Middle East peace that’s enduring.” (3/7/08)

Background

- The incident is the second terror attack in Jerusalem this year. It follows an attack in which a gunman, also from east Jerusalem, killed eight students in a religious school in March. The previously unheard of Martyrs of Imad Mughniyeh Galilee Freedom Battalion also claimed responsibility for the deadly shooting in March.

- About two-thirds of Jerusalem's 700,000 residents are Jewish. The rest are Palestinians who predominantly live in the eastern part of the city which came under Israeli control in 1967.
- Approximately 253,000 Palestinians hold Jerusalem ID cards which, unlike Palestinians in the West Bank, entitles them to the same benefits as Israeli citizens allowing them full freedom to work and travel throughout Israel. Many Jerusalem Arabs work in the construction industry.
- The unique situation of east Jerusalem Arabs has in recent months shown to pose a serious security threat to Israel as there are only very limited security measures that Israel can put in place within the city. This was emphasised by Prime Minister Olmert who said on Thursday (3 July) that, "...there is no way to fence-off the Arabs of East Jerusalem".
- Prime Minister Olmert and Defence Minister Ehud Barak have said that the attacker's east Jerusalem house should be demolished as a "deterrence" to prevent any future such attacks. Local authorities have also banned the attacker's family from erecting a mourning tent for him as is traditional for Palestinians.
- In a move unrelated to yesterday's attack, two bills granting the Interior Minister permission to revoke the citizenship rights from families of terrorists passed a preliminary reading in the Knesset yesterday (2 July).