Two Israeli sisters killed, mother critically hurt in West Bank shooting attack

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/two-israeli-women-killed-another-critically-hurt-in-west-bank-shooting-attack/>

Two Israeli sisters were killed and their mother was critically hurt in a terror shooting attack in the West Bank on Friday, officials said, escalating an already tense situation on multiple fronts.

The victims, residents of the Efrat settlement, were not immediately named. The two fatalities were aged 15 and 21, and their mother is 48. The UK Foreign Office confirmed that the three were British nationals.

The father of the family was traveling in a separate car, just ahead, turned back in the wake of the attack, and was present as medics arrived to treat his family, the mayor of Efrat said.

The Magen David Adom (MDA) ambulance service said its medics initially responded to a vehicle collision on the Route 57 highway in the northern Jordan Valley, near the Hamra Junction, close to the settlement of the same name.

When medics and troops reached the scene, the car was found to be riddled with bullet holes.

According to MDA, two women were declared dead at the scene, and a woman who was critically hurt in the attack was taken to Hadassah Ein Kerem hospital in Jerusalem by helicopter, where doctors said her life was in danger due to bullets to her upper body.

The Israel Defense Forces said the shooting was a terror attack and had launched a manhunt for the gunmen and other suspects who fled the scene.

“IDF forces are blocking roads in the area and have begun a pursuit of the terrorists,” the military said.

The mayor of the Efrat settlement, Oded Revivi, said the two dead women were sisters, and their mother was the third victim, all residents of Efrat.

He said the father had been driving a separate car ahead, with other members of the family, and turned around following the attack, witnessing the medical treatment of his wife and daughters.

The Efrat Local Council is accompanying the family members in coordination with welfare officials, the statement said.

According to an initial investigation of the shooting, the gunmen first opened fire at the Israeli-owned car before it crashed into the highway’s shoulder.

The terrorists then opened fire at the car again, killing two of the occupants and critically wounding the third.

Troops scanning the area found 22 7.62mm shell casings, typically used by a Kalashnikov rifle.

Surveillance camera footage showed the terrorists driving up to the victims’ car, with one man opening fire from the passenger seat.

The car with the gunmen then made a U-turn on the highway and fled the scene.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office said he would hold a security assessment on the situation. Defense Minister Yoav Gallant’s office similarly said he would hold an assessment with senior defense and military officials.

Military chief Herzi Halevi instructed the IDF to call up an unspecified number of reservist soldiers amid heightened tensions across the region.

Halevi said in a statement that the call-up would be focused on air defense units and the “air attack arrays,” meaning fighter jet pilots and attack drone operators, as well as other aircrew.

Halevi also instructed the IDF to strengthen defenses in the Central Command following the West Bank attack.

Meanwhile, coalition MKs were demanding a harsh response to the attack, and the spokesperson for a far-right lawmaker resigned in protest of the government’s “weak” policies.

Jordan Valley Regional Council head David Elhayani told Channel 12 news that the attack was “a very serious incident” with “far-reaching implications.”

Likud MK Keti Shitrit said the current situation was “intolerable and cannot continue,” adding: “We have a duty to restore security and take tough and effective measures in order to restore deterrence. Praying for better days.”

Fellow Likud lawmaker Dan Illouz said: “At this time we all must stand together for the State of Israel. My heart is with the families. We will not surrender to terror. A tough response is needed against the terror.”

Likud MK Avichay Buaron said the government should “serious consider” immediately annexing the Jordan Valley.

Elisha Yered, the spokesperson for Otzma Yehudit MK Limor Son Har-Melech, said he was quitting due to what he said was the government’s “weak security policy, which is costing us in blood.”

Meanwhile, the Hamas terror group praised the deadly shooting, calling it “a natural response to the occupation’s ongoing crimes against Al-Aqsa Mosque and its barbaric aggression against Lebanon and the steadfast Gaza.”

Hamas warned Israel against “continuing its crimes against Al-Aqsa Mosque,” claiming the holy site must remain “purely Islamic, with no place for occupation or [Israeli] sovereignty.”

The attack came as tensions rose across the region after tit-for-tat rocket fire from the Gaza Strip and Israeli strikes, a major rocket barrage from Lebanon, clashes at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem’s Temple Mount, as well as a suspected Iranian drone launched from Syria earlier in the week.

There have also been several attacks in the West Bank, with three soldiers hurt in a [car-ramming](https://www.timesofisrael.com/three-injured-in-suspected-ramming-attack-in-west-bank/) attack on Saturday, and two more soldiers hurt in separate [shooting attacks](https://www.timesofisrael.com/soldier-lightly-injured-by-gunfire-during-operation-in-west-bank-village/) on Wednesday and [Thursday](https://www.timesofisrael.com/young-man-hurt-in-suspected-shooting-attack-near-jerusalem/).

Also during the past week, two soldiers were injured, one seriously, in a terror stabbing near the Tzrifin military base in central Israel.

The Islamic holy month of Ramadan, which this year once again coincides with the Jewish festival of Passover, is known to be a period of high tensions between Israeli forces and Palestinians. Tens of thousands of worshipers visit the Al-Aqsa Mosque — Islam’s third holiest site, located in the compound that is the most sacred to Jews — throughout the month, regularly leading to a spike in tensions and violence with Israel.

The IDF imposed a closure on the West Bank from 5 p.m. Wednesday until Saturday evening, with crossing points closed to Palestinians on the first day of the Passover holiday. Gaza border crossings were also closed. The same was set to happen next week on the last day of Passover beginning on April 11 and lasting until April 12.

Some crossings opened Friday to let worshipers attend mass prayers at Al Aqsa.

Such closures are standard practice during festivals and holidays. The military says they are a preventative measure against attacks in periods of increased tensions.

Tensions between Israel and the Palestinians have been high for the past year, with the IDF conducting near-nightly raids in the West Bank amid a series of deadly Palestinian terror attacks.

Palestinian terror attacks in Israel and the West Bank in recent months have left 17 Israelis dead and several more seriously hurt, including Friday’s attack.

At least 89 Palestinians have been killed since the beginning of the year, most of them while carrying out attacks or during clashes with security forces, though some were uninvolved civilians and others were killed under circumstances that are being investigated.