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WORLD

Truck Plows Into Israeli Soldiers in Jerusalem, Killing Four

Israeli authorities call incident a suspected terror attack

By Rory Jones

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TEL AVIV—A Palestinian man rammed a truck into Israeli soldiers on a busy promenade in Jerusalem on Sunday, killing four, in what Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called a terrorist attack.

The driver targeted a group of Israeli soldiers disembarking from a bus in a popular tourist area overlooking Jerusalem's Old City and was shot dead at the scene by security forces, police said.

A video published by Israeli media outlets showed the truck driving into the Israelis before attempting to ram them again. The attack killed three female soldiers and one male soldier, all in their 20s, Israeli authorities said. Some 17 other soldiers were wounded and evacuated to hospitals, they said.

"We know the identity of the perpetrator, who by all indications supports the Islamic State," Mr. Netanyahu said as he visited the scene Sunday evening, according to his office.

Israeli police identified the driver of the truck as 28-year-old Fadi Qunbar. The Palestinian Authority's official news agency, Wafa, said the driver was a Palestinian from East Jerusalem.

The attack came ahead of a conference France is convening this month with members of the international community in an effort to revive Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, and amid tension over a United Nations resolution last month that deemed Jewish settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem illegal.

Mr. Netanyahu compared the Jerusalem attack with Islamic State-claimed truck-rammings last month at a Berlin Christmas market, which left 12 people dead, and in France last July, in which 86 were killed. He provided no evidence of links between Islamic State and Sunday's attacker.

In the past, the Israeli leader has attempted to link Palestinian violence against Israeli civilians and soldiers with global acts of terrorism committed by Islamic State. But support for the terror group isn't widespread among Palestinians, according to Israeli security officials.

There was no immediate claim or statement referencing the attack on Islamic State's official media channels.

Medics and police arriving moments after Sunday's truck-ramming described a bloody scene, with bodies wedged under the vehicle.

"When we arrived there was chaos," said Chen Lendi Sharon, a medic who was among the first to arrive on the scene, according to a statement from Israel's ambulance service. "I saw a truck that rammed youngsters getting off the bus."

In an interview on Israeli television Israeli Police Chief Roni Alsheich said authorities



Israeli security forces and emergency personnel gather at the site of the vehicle-ramming attack in Jerusalem. PHOTO: MENAHEM KAHANA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

had no prior warning of the assault.

After the attack, Israeli security forces raided Mr. Qunbar's home in the Palestinian neighborhood of Jabel Mukaber in East Jerusalem, police said. Police detained nine suspects for investigation, including five family members, they added.

The attack broke a period of relative calm in the country after a wave of Palestinian violence last year.

Palestinians have carried out more than 300 attacks against Israelis in Israel and the occupied West Bank since September 2015, according to Israeli officials.

But assaults have largely tapered off in recent months in the country, and have mostly been confined to sporadic attacks against soldiers or Jewish settlers in the West Bank.

The attacks have killed more than 40 people and wounded hundreds of others, according to Israeli officials. More than 200 Palestinians have also been killed, most after attacking Israelis, Palestinian officials said.

Palestinian officials have blamed the violence on frustration with life under Israeli occupation. Israel's government has accused Palestinian authorities of using social media to incite the bloodshed.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas didn't immediately make a statement in response to Sunday's attack. A spokesman for the Palestinian Authority didn't respond to a request for comment.

A spokesman for Islamist movement Hamas, which governs in the Gaza Strip, praised the assault as "heroic."

The U.S. State Department condemned the attack and called on "all to send a clear message that terrorism must never be tolerated."

The U.S. abstained from voting last month on the U.N resolution that criticized Jewish settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, allowing it to pass.

A key element of the resolution called on Israelis and Palestinians to condemn acts of violence against each other. Secretary of State John Kerry echoed the sentiment in a speech following the resolution.

Sunday's attack occurred at the Armon Hanatziv Promenade, near the border between West and East Jerusalem. Israel captured East Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

Nickolay Mladenov, U.N. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, immediately condemned the truck-ramming.

"It is reprehensible that some choose to glorify such acts which undermine the possibility of a peaceful future for both Palestinians and Israelis," he said. "There is nothing heroic in such actions."

France plans to convene the international conference on January 15th, but hasn't invited Israelis or Palestinians to attend. Israel has rejected the conference. Mr. Abbas has welcomed it and called on countries to form an international committee to oversee peace negotiations.

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