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Israel hits back after deadly bombing

August 10, 2001 Posted: 7:03 AM EDT (1103 GMT)



(REUTERS)

A Palestinian police building is destroyed as Israel retaliates for Thursday's mass killing by a suicide bomber.

JERUSALEM (CNN) -- Citing the "very basic rules of self defense," Israel retaliated early Friday after 15 people were killed and dozens injured by a suicide bomber who attacked at a busy Jerusalem pizzeria.

The actions against the Palestinian Authority were authorized on a 9-3 vote by the Israeli security cabinet.

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Israeli Justice Minister Meir Shearit announced the retaliation. "Israel is acting according to the very basic rules of self defense," he said. "We are

not willing to see ourselves with tied hands against the threat of terror."

An Israeli F-16 jet fired at least two missiles into a Palestinian police station early Friday, destroying the facility, and Israeli police said it took over an area of East Jerusalem that serves as the unofficial headquarters for the Palestinian Liberation Organization. They closed at least seven buildings and occupied Orient House, regarded as the unofficial foreign ministry of the Palestine Authority. They arrested at least seven guards.

CNN's Jerrold Kessel said the moves appeared to be specific actions against "symbols of Palestinian aspirations of sovereignty in Jerusalem."

The includes the house of the governor of Abu Dis, the base of Force 17, which is the elite guard of Palestine Authority President Yasser Arafat, and general intelligence and preventive intelligence forces as well as the headquarters for the military and the Palestinian police.

VIDEO

CNN's Mike Hanna on Israel's strikes on Palestinian positions (August 9)



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The Israeli statement said the forces were operating there illegally. The region is under the security control of the Israelis, and the Palestinians have agreed not to operate out of this area, the Israelis said.

Thursday's suicide bombing killed the bomber and at least 14 others, including five members of a single family. Of the dead, six were children, officials said.

Watch the aftermath of the suicide bomb attack in Jerusalem, reported by CNN's Jerrold Kessel (August 9)



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The explosion left about 100 people injured, many of them severely, Israeli authorities said.

The dead included Shoshana Greenbaum, 31, a pregnant schoolteacher who lived in New Jersey and was in Israel to get a master's degree in Jewish education.

"Israel must act to preserve the lives of its citizens and we hope that President Bush will support Israel's efforts to defend itself and its own people," said her father, Alan Hayman, from his home in Los Angeles.

Arafat issued a statement condemning the violence and asking the Israelis to join in a "comprehensive cease-fire."

"We call upon the Israeli government to join us in issuing a joint declaration for a comprehensive cease-fire to take place immediately and to begin implementation of the Mitchell recommendations under international supervision, expeditiously and immediately," said the statement.

Earlier Thursday, Ra'anana Gissin, an adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, said Israel will have to respond to the bombing.

"We can't allow to pay ... with the blood of our people and the blood of our citizens for some illusion of stability or restraint in the Middle East," Gissin said on CNN.

Other Israeli and Palestinian officials each blamed the other for the attack and for the continuation of violence that has wracked the area for the past 11 months.

"We see Arafat and the Palestinian Authority responsible for this terrible attack in Jerusalem today," Israeli Cabinet minister Danny Naveh told CNN. "Arafat is the one that gave the green light to Islamic Jihad to commit such bombings. He has released from jail terrorists with blood on their hands."

Several hours after the blast, news agencies in Beirut received faxes from the Jerusalem Brigade of Islamic Jihad claiming responsibility for the attack.

The claim for the restaurant blast identified the bomber as a 23-year-old Palestinian, Hussein Omar Abu Naeseh, and said the blast was "dedicated" to those killed in an Israeli raid on a Hamas office in Nablus July 31.

Soon after, the militant Palestinian group Hamas said it was

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Palestinian Cabinet member Hanan Ashrawi reacts to what she calls "Israel's policy for deliberate assassination"
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Israel's Internal Security Minister Uzi Landau responds to the suicide attack in Jerusalem.
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responsible for the blast and released a picture of the man they say was the suicide bomber, Izzedine Shuhin al-Masri, 23, from the Palestinian town of Jenin on the West Bank.

The Hamas statement said al-Masri carried out the attack to avenge the Israeli killing of Hamas militants, specifically two killed last week in Nablus.

After the claim from Hamas, Jihad retracted its claim of responsibility.

In a separate incident Thursday evening, four Israelis were hit by gunfire as they traveled in a car near the West Bank town of Jenin. One of the occupants, a woman, died en route to a hospital, according to Israeli border police.

Naveh also said Israel would respond to the bombing, as it has in the past when attacks have struck at Israeli civilians.

"Our only target is to prevent further terrible attacks," he said. "We will do whatever we can in order to stop terrorists from coming into our towns."

The Palestinians, however, blamed Israel for the continuation of violence in the region, saying its policies provoke the Palestinians and that Palestinian officials cannot control the violence.

"It seems to me as usual they are looking at the wrong address," said Palestinian legislator Hanan Ashrawi. "They should look closer at home. I don't think the Sharon policy of attempting to besiege a whole people ... is a policy of utmost responsibility."

Mitchell plan cease-fire didn't hold

A cease-fire drawn up by the Mitchell committee, headed by former U.S. Sen. George Mitchell, went into effect June 13. But violence in the region has continued virtually unabated in spite of the cease-fire.

Echoing a statement released earlier by U.S. President George W. Bush, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said in Washington that the United States was doing "everything we can" to help bring peace to the region, but that peace could only be brought about by the Palestinians and Israelis.



A woman injured in the blast is carried away from the scene to an ambulance.

"We have a way out of this crisis. It's called the Mitchell plan," Powell told reporters. "I'm pleased that Chairman Arafat condemned the violence, but now he has to find those responsible and bring them to justice This is a very dangerous situation, and it's not going to be solved except by the parties in the region."

"The problem is in the region and the two sides have to get the violence down," he said.

'The window exploded'

Thursday's blast rocked the Sbarro restaurant -- at the intersection of King Georges Street and the Jaffa Road, a major artery going into central Jerusalem -- during the busy lunch hour.

Police said their initial investigation indicated the bomber was carrying "a medium-sized bomb in a bag" slung over his shoulder when he entered the restaurant. They said the bomb was loaded with nails and steel pellets to increase the potency of the blast.

Anat Amarya was at the restaurant with four of her children, two of whom had to be hospitalized. She said her family had just gotten their order when the explosion occurred.

"I felt this very strong boom above my head," she said. "I felt a burning sensation, like a lamp burned on me, and my daughter flew on me, the window exploded on her. All the chairs and tables were on top of her. I screamed to my older son to help. He got up, took my daughter and went outside to a nearby clothing store.

She added, "I am sorry to my husband. He told me today right before I left, 'Don't go out today to the city, there is a bomb warning.' And I went anyway. Now I am paying for it."

Television pictures after the blast showed a scene of devastation, panic and chaos. A woman covered with blood held a cloth to her face as she stood in front of the restaurant. Other injured people lay bleeding on the street; others were led away screaming as the severely injured were being loaded into the back of ambulances and carried away on stretchers.

The inside of the restaurant was littered with broken plaster, fixtures and furniture.

Thursday's bombing was the worst suicide attack since a June 1 suicide bomber killed 21 people at a Tel Aviv disco.

-- CNN Jerusalem Bureau Chief Mike Hanna and Correspondent Jerrold Kessel contributed to this report.

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