

## **Watch video: Israeli forces in disguise raid hospital; kill one Palestinian, capture another**

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**Jerusalem:** Security camera footage of a deadly Israeli arrest raid in a West Bank hospital on Thursday gave a rare glimpse into the murky undercover units that Israel contends are a key tool in preventing violence and Palestinians revile as a ruthless symbol of Israeli occupation.

In the footage, Israeli officers disguised as Palestinian civilians in Arab garb, including some wearing fake moustaches and beards or dressed as women, burst into the hospital and dragged away a wanted Palestinian in a wheelchair.

One man was shot to death during the sweep, identified by hospital workers as the Palestinian suspect's cousin.

The pre-dawn raid in the volatile West Bank city of Hebron, outraged Palestinians and drew accusations that Israel had improperly used force in a building that should be immune, or at least insulated, from military operations.

"This is an outright crime," said Jihad Shawar, director of the Al-Ahli Hospital. "No one should violate hospitals, but Israel did."

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Israel has long used undercover units to arrest wanted suspects. But rarely are their activities captured on camera so vividly.

The hospital released security camera footage showing about a dozen men entering a hospital ward shortly before 4 a.m. A person in a wheelchair suddenly stood up as the security men pulled out their weapons and walked down the hall.

One officer was disguised as a Palestinian woman in a black niqab, a garment that completely covers the face and body. Another, wearing a headscarf, was dressed as a pregnant woman, walking slowly and holding her back. Others wore thick moustaches, Palestinian kaffiyehs or a long beard, typical of devout Muslims.

At one point, the bearded man shouted and pushed a bewildered hospital worker. Roughly two minutes later, the officers were seen pushing a man in a wheelchair, presumably the suspect, back down the hallway.

As they left, one officer turned to the hospital worker and motioned, apparently to let him know that someone was shot. As the officers exited, a pair of hospital workers rushed toward the area of the shooting.

The Israeli military identified the target of the raid as Azzam Shalaldeh, a Palestinian accused of stabbing and severely wounding an Israeli man in the West Bank late last month. It said Shalaldeh, who is about 20, was in the hospital being treated for a gunshot wound he suffered after being shot by his stabbing victim.

The statement said that during the raid, the forces shot to death another man who attacked them. Hospital workers identified him as Shalaldeh's cousin, Abdallah, and said he was shot as he emerged from a bathroom. The army said the cousins are "known Hamas operatives."

Osama Najjar, the spokesman for the Palestinian Health Ministry, called the incident an "assassination." The international human rights group Amnesty International said wounds to Abdallah's head and upper body suggested the shooting was an "extrajudicial execution."

Israel has used undercover units behind enemy lines since the time of its founding in 1948. But operations used against Palestinians took their current shape roughly 25 years ago, at the time of the first Palestinian uprising.

Both the Israeli army and the paramilitary border police maintain such units. During a wave of violence over the past two months, the units have been especially active, and Thursday's incident was not the first time they have been caught on camera.

In one videotaped case, undercover officers dragged a shooting suspect out of a West Bank hospital. Another time, they entered an east Jerusalem hospital to confiscate documents.

Last month, a group of men posing as Palestinian protesters and mingling with rock-throwers in the West Bank were filmed suddenly drawing their weapons and arresting a protester.

Palestinian protesters say the presence of undercover agents is a constant concern, and they often assign people to act as lookouts. The Palestinians accuse the units of using excessive and even deadly force, pointing to numerous cases of wanted militants killed in arrest raids over the years.

Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said one undercover unit, known as "Yamas," is used primarily in densely populated areas. "There is a tremendous amount of risk," he said, adding that they are crucial in both thwarting attacks and gathering intelligence.

Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon praised Thursday's raid. He said small undercover units can today do the work that once required entire military divisions. "We are not just on the defensive. We are also on the offensive," he said.

The author of an upcoming book on the undercover agents said they undergo months of training, often come from Arabic-speaking minorities in Israel and immerse themselves in the "local terrain," intimately learning the habits and movements of their targets. Many serve for years and rise to senior positions in security agencies.

"Their mission is basically to undermine the enemy, terrorize the enemy, not make the enemy feel safe where he is and to apprehend the enemy," said Samuel M. Katz, whose book, "The Ghost Warriors: Inside Israel's Undercover War Against Suicide Terrorism," chronicles the actions of Yamas during the second Palestinian uprising a decade ago.

The exploits of the units have spawned a primetime television drama in Israel called "Fouda," which tells the story of fictional undercover agents.

The disguises in the latest video were reminiscent of an incident in 2010 when agents believed to be from the Mossad spy service were videotaped in a luxury Dubai hotel wearing tennis outfits and blond wigs during a mission to kill a Hamas weapons smuggler.

The location of Thursday's operation sparked debate over whether a hospital is a legitimate target for a military raid.

Emanuel Gross, an expert on military law at the University of Haifa, said "there is no prohibition" under international law from entering a hospital to arrest a suspect.

Hadas Ziv, a spokeswoman for Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, agreed that hospitals are not immune, but she said

military activity must be proportionate to the threat in question.

She called Thursday's raid "completely disproportionate," saying that visitors and hospital staff were all put at unnecessary danger.

Israel's Shin Bet security agency, which participated in Thursday's raid, said Israel will not allow wanted suspects to seek cover in "places of refuge."

In a recent case that has generated international uproar, U.S.

forces called in a devastating airstrike on a hospital in northern Afghanistan that killed at least 30 noncombatants. The Associated Press has learned that the attack came at the request of Afghan partners, adding to indications that the U.S. did not properly vet information from its Afghan allies before the attack.

- AP