

Hamas rejects Islamic State's claim of killing of Israeli officer

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Jerusalem: The Islamic State group today claimed responsibility for the fatal stabbing of an Israeli policewoman on duty near Jerusalem's Old City, a claim rejected by the Hamas. The three armed Palestinians who were shot dead after killing the officer belonged to local Islamist and leftist movements, Hamas, which rules the Gaza strip, said.

Three Palestinians armed with an automatic weapon and knives killed the officer on duty in near simultaneous attacks at two locations Friday evening, before they were shot and killed.

"The claim by the Islamic State group is an attempt to muddy the waters," Hamas spokesperson Sami Abou Zouhri said.

The attack was carried out by "two Palestinians from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and a third from Hamas", he said.

Earlier, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack. In an online statement, the group said three IS fighters had targeted "a gathering of Jews" in an operation yesterday during which the three attackers were killed by Israeli police.

It was reported to be the first attack in Israel that the the Islamic State had claimed.Â

It was the latest bloodshed in a wave of Palestinian attacks on civilians and soldiers that erupted in 2015. At times the attacks were daily occurrences, but they have relatively subsided in recent months. However there have been a string of recent attacks near the Old City.

Police spokeswoman Luba Samri said Hadas Malka, 23, was responding to an attack nearby when a Palestinian assaulted her with a knife. Samri said Malka wrestled with the man for several seconds as he stabbed her multiple times before other officers saw what was happening and opened fire, killing him. She later died of her wounds in hospital.

Meanwhile nearby, Palestinians fired at officers with an automatic weapon and attacked them with knives before officers returned fire, killing them.

Since September 2015, Palestinian assailants have killed 43 Israelis, two visiting Americans and a British student, mainly in stabbing, shooting and vehicular attacks. In that time, some 250 Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire. Israel identified most of them as attackers.

Israel blames the violence on incitement by Palestinian political and religious leaders compounded on social media sites that glorify violence and encourage attacks.

Palestinians say it stems from anger over decades of Israeli rule in territory they claim for their state.

- (With agencies)