**Three Teenage Yeshiva Students Missing, Feared Kidnapped In West Bank**

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http://www.timesofisrael.com/three-yeshiva-students-missing-believed-kidnapped-in-west-bank/#ixzz34onnlZEu

Three yeshiva students in their teens are believed to have been kidnapped in the West Bank, Israeli officials announced Friday afternoon.

The IDF spokesperson’s office said they lost contact with the three Thursday overnight. Israeli security forces were conducting a widespread operation to locate them, the IDF said.

“Since the morning, we have been engaged in operational activity designed to find [them] and bring them [back],” said Brig. Gen. Motti Almoz, the commander of the IDF Spokesperson’s Unit. “Over the past several hours, there has been a very large intelligence effort to try and determine what happened with those youths since they disappeared.”

Facts that might interfere with the ongoing investigation, he said, were being withheld at this time.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the families of the missing teenagers,urged them to remain strong and told them the State of Israel would do everything possible for their sons. He promised to keep them updated.

The Prime Minister’s Office said it held the Palestinian Authority of President Mahmoud Abbas responsible for their well-being.

Netanyahu was meeting with security officials at the Defense Ministry headquarters in Tel Aviv Friday afternoon to assess the situation.

A torched car was found in an undisclosed location in the West Bank, the IDF said, adding that checks were underway to determine the connection, if any.

Earlier Friday, a senior Islamic Jihad official [called on Palestinians to kidnap Israeli citizens,](http://www.timesofisrael.com/islamic-jihad-kidnappings-the-only-way-to-release-prisoners) arguing that Israel had proven in the past that it was willing to negotiate the release of Palestinian security prisoners in exchange for the lives of its civilians.

The three students were reported missing Thursday night after witnesses said they had been seen hitching rides home at around 10 p.m. from their yeshiva in Gush Etzion. They have not been heard from since late Thursday night.

Palestinian Islamists have repeatedly called to kidnap Israelis, including to use them as bargaining chips to extract the release of Palestinian security prisoners.

Earlier Friday, Palestinian media reported a firefight between Israeli military forces and Palestinian gunmen in the South Hebron Hills region. According to a report in the Palestinian Ma’an news agency, large IDF forces raided the village of Yatta in the Hebron region and searched houses there. The military had set up road blocks in the area.

There have been several terror-related incidents over the past few months.

In April, Baruch Mizrahi, a 47-year-old father of five was [gunned down while driving to Passover seder](http://www.timesofisrael.com/west-bank-shooting-victim-named-as-baruch-mizrahi/) outside the West Bank city of Hebron.

In November 2013, 19-year-old soldier Eden Atias was stabbed by a Palestinian teenager during a bus ride in the northern town of Afula. Atias was asleep on the bus when he was stabbed multiple times by his attacker, who had crossed the Green Line from the West Bank without a permit prior to the attack and was arrested immediately after it.

In December a bomb exploded on a bus in Bat Yam but nobody was injured, after an alert passenger spotted the device and the bus driver ordered the vehicle evacuated before it went off. Four Islamic Jihad operatives from Bethlehem were later arrested in connection with the bombing.

Also in December, an Israeli man working on the border fence with Gaza Strip was killed by sniper fire. The man, 22-year-old Saleh Abu Latif from the predominantly Bedouin city of Rahat, was working between Nahal Oz and Kfar Aza as a civilian employed by the Israeli Defense Ministry on repairs to a section of the Israel-Gaza border fence damaged in last week’s storm. The fence had collapsed in three locations due to the storm. In September, IDF soldier Sgt. Tomer Hazan from Bat Yam was murdered by a Palestinian acquaintance who lured him to a village near Qalqilya in the West Bank. The two had worked together at an Israeli restaurant.