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September 4, 2001, Tuesday, BC cycle

Explosion near school in Jerusalem kills **suicide bomber** and injures 20 people

BYLINE: By JACK KATZENELL, Associated Press Writer

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A **suicide bomber** disguised as an Orthodox Jew blew himself up a few yards from a French school in central Jerusalem on Tuesday, seconds after police chased him down a street. Twenty people were injured, including the two officers.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the blast at about 7:45 a.m. near the Lycee Francais, a French-language school. Pierre Weill, a Radio France correspondent, said he had pulled up outside the school to drop off his 12-year-old daughter when he heard the explosion.

"My car was splattered with pieces of flesh and blood. My daughter was also covered with bits of flesh and blood. We saw the head of the **suicide bomber** rolling into the courtyard," Weill said. He said his daughter, Ines, was shaken and slightly hurt.

Police quickly covered the **bomber's** head with an empty garbage can to keep it out of sight of the horrified children, said spokesman Gil Kleiman.

Doctors at nearby Bikur Holim Hospital said 20 people were injured. One was in critical condition, two were moderately hurt, and 17 suffered minor injuries.

Israel held Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat responsible. Arafat said he was "feeling sad for those civilians who were injured today in the Jerusalem attack, because we are against these acts which harm civilians, whether they are Palestinians or Israelis."

Arafat spoke after a meeting with European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana who is trying to help arrange Israeli-Palestinian truce talks.

Arafat said Peres, Solana and two senior Palestinian officials met Monday evening to prepare the negotiations. It was the highest level session in weeks.

A senior Palestinian official who spoke on condition of anonymity said truce talks would begin at the Erez checkpoint between Israel and the Gaza Strip, and that various sites were being considered for subsequent meetings, including the Egyptian resort of Taba, Italy and New York.

The **suicide bomber** blew himself up on Prophets Street, just a block from a pizza restaurant where an Islamic militant detonated explosives on Aug. 9, killing himself and 15 bystanders.

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Tuesday's bombing was the fifth in Jerusalem over two days. While the overall casualty toll was relatively low - three people were hurt Monday - it marked the most concentrated bombing campaign in 11 months of Israeli-Palestinian fighting.

Solana visited the site of Tuesday's blast, but was hustled back into his car by security guards when he was mobbed by about 30 angry bystanders.

"Take your suitcases and get out of here. Why do you come?" shouted Mickey Liberti, a Jerusalem resident, when Solana arrived at the scene.

The **suicide bomber** got out of a car amid rush hour traffic. Police said the man was dressed as an Orthodox Jew, wearing a skullcap, a white shirt and black pants. On his back, he carried a large sack that apparently contained nail-studded explosives.

The assailant was approached by two officers with the paramilitary border police, who had been alerted by passers-by about a **suspicious**-looking man in the street. The officers demanded to see his ID.

Border policeman Guy Mughrabi said he and his partner spotted and chased the man, coming within three to four yards of him.

"As soon as we yelled 'stop' he turned his back toward us and placed his right hand on the bag. We aimed our rifles at him, but it was too late, and then there was an explosion," Mughrabi told Israel army radio.

Witnesses said the **bomber** smiled as he set off the blast.

The explosion blew out nearby windows and damaged several cars. The back of one car was splattered with blood and body parts. Police in white overalls closed off the area and searched for more bombs.

At the Lycee Francais, an international school, classes were held despite the bombing. Around midmorning, children played basketball in the courtyard after the **bomber's** remains were removed.

Just down the block is the Anglican School, attended by children of diplomats, journalists and other foreigners, including many Americans. Witnesses said security was beefed up at the Anglican School, but U.S. Consulate officials denied reports that Marines were sent to the compound.

Israeli government spokesman Avi Pazner linked the bombing to the U.N. racism conference in Durban, South Africa, where Arab states sought a declaration condemning Israel for its treatment of the Palestinians. Israel and the United States withdrew in protest Monday.

"What we see here is one of the obvious results of the hate and incitement pouring out of Durban, which encouraged the terrorist activities of all those organizations who are now launching a concerted attack on our capital, Jerusalem," Pazner said.

Pazner said Arafat was ultimately responsible for the bombing. Israel has said Arafat has done nothing to rein in militants, and that members of his security forces have participated in attacks on Israelis.

In the past year of Israeli-Palestinian fighting, Islamic militants have carried out multiple **suicide** bombings.

Jibril Rajoub, the Palestinian security chief in the West Bank, blamed Israel for the bombing, saying its targeted killings of suspected militants and other retaliatory strikes triggered more bloodshed. "We hope the Israeli government will learn a lesson from this," Rajoub said.

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Monday's small car and pipe bomb explosions were claimed by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a radical PLO faction which said it sought to avenge the death of its leader in a targeted Israeli missile attack last week.

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