PA security officer opens fire on IDF troops, is shot dead, army says

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The Israel Defense Forces said on Wednesday morning that a member of the Palestinian Authority’s security services opened fire at troops in the northern West Bank and was shot dead by Israeli forces.

Though not unprecedented, it is highly unusual for members of Palestinian security forces, which often coordinate closely with the IDF and other Israeli defense agencies, to carry out attacks against Israeli troops and civilians.

“IDF soldiers who were at a military post near the southern exit of the city of Nablus responded with fire after a terrorist armed with a pistol arrived from the direction of the city and shot at them from his vehicle,” the IDF said in a statement.

The military initially said that the assailant was “neutralized” and later confirmed that this meant he was killed.

The Palestinian Authority official WAFA news agency named him as 29-year-old Bilal Adnan Rawajbeh. Rawajbeh, a resident of Nablus-area village Araq al-Tayeh, was a legal adviser with the rank of captain in the Palestinian Preventative Security Forces, one of the PA’s most powerful intelligence organizations.

It appeared as though the pistol used belonged to the Palestinian security service as well.

According to WAFA, Rawajbeh was fired upon by Israeli troops “at point blank range… while he was passing through the checkpoint.” The PA official news source called his death “an execution.”

A spokesperson for the PA security services did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The IDF staunchly denied this account, saying Rawajbeh had opened fire at the Golani Brigade soldiers from inside his vehicle at a junction south of Nablus.

“The car with the assailant came from the city, turned left at the roundabout, and opened fire toward the [soldier’s] position. The commander of the troops responded quickly and fired his weapon. Immediately afterward, two soldiers at the bus stop ran over and joined the incident, opening fire at the assailant. The assailant was struck by a number of bullets,” said Lt. Col. Shahar Barkai, the commander of the soldiers’ unit, the Golani Brigade’s Barak Battalion.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said in a statement that the IDF kept its medics from accessing the scene and providing first aid to Rawajbeh after he was shot. The IDF typically ensures that a suspect does not have an explosive vest or otherwise presents a threat before allowing civilian medics to treat them.

Video footage posted to social media appeared to show an IDF soldier approaching the suspect’s vehicle at the Hawara checkpoint and firing toward it. The footage seemed not to show the initial attack.

The incident came days after Israeli troops opened fire on a Palestinian car after a homemade bomb was thrown from the vehicle at a junction manned by soldiers in the central West Bank, the army said.

“The soldiers blocked the road to stop the terrorist cell. The car accelerated in their direction and the fighters responded by firing at the terrorists,” a statement from the IDF said, adding that the car was hit by bullets.

Palestinian media reported that three people in the car were wounded during the incident, which took place overnight Thursday near the West Bank city of Jenin.