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Return to Violence



Ziad Awad celebrating his release in 2011

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Israeli killed on Passover eve was murdered by Palestinian freed in Shalit deal

Cleared for publication: Police Chief Superintendent Baruch Mizrahi was killed by Ziad Awad, a Palestinian freed from an Israeli jail as part of the prisoner deal that freed Gilad Shalit.

Yoav Zitun

The killer of Baruch Mizrahi, the senior Israeli police officer killed in a Passover eve terror attack near Hebron, was a Palestinian released in the prisoner exchange deal which saw Gilad Shalit freed in 2011 in return for 1,027 Palestinian prisoners, it was cleared for publication Monday.

An indictment was filed Monday against Ziad Awad, a resident of the village of Idna near Hebron, for murder and attempted murder.

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Awad was freed in the first tranche of the Shalit prisoner exchange deal, after he was sentenced to life in prison for murdering Palestinians who had collaborated with Israel.



Awad's arrest last month

Chief Superintendent Mizrahi, a senior officer in the Israel Police, was killed when a gunman armed with what is believed to have been a Kalashnikov opened fire on Israeli cars near Hebron, as they travelled to a Passover Seder in the Kiryat Arba settlement. His wife and nine-year-old son were wounded in the attack. Mizrahi left behind five children.

Awad, 42, was arrested last month by the Shin Bet and the police in a special joint operation with the IDF. He was arrested together with his son Izz a-Din, 18, who helped him plan the attack as well as flee the murder scene and hide afterwards. Both father and son are members of Hamas.



Video of arrest

During their interrogation, it emerged that Ziad Awad rode a motorcycle to the scene of the attack, having obtained the Kalashnikov rifle beforehand. According to the Shin Bet, he visited at the place some 10 days earlier to better plan his attack.

Before launching the attack, Awad confided in his son that he had religious motivation, saying that, "according to Islam, whoever kills a Jew goes to heaven."

According to a senior IDF source, "the murder was conducted in professional manner, and (Awad) then fled the scene on a motorcycle, returning to his home in the village."

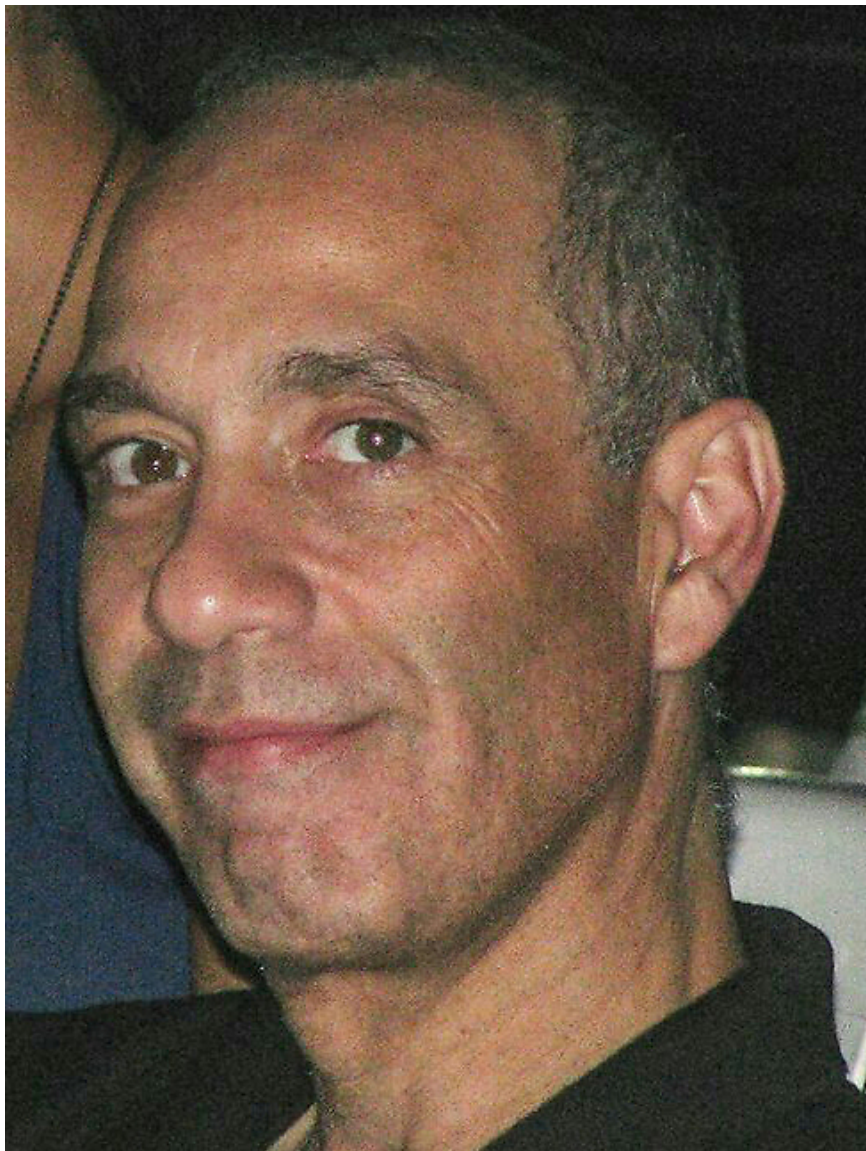
Freed before completing half of sentence

During the investigation into Mizrahi's murder, security forces located the Kalashnikov rifle allegedly used by Awad.

Despite initial assessments, the investigation pointed to the attack being carried out by a lone terrorist. The assumption was based on the large number of shells found at the scene. What led investigators to Awad was DNA evidence collected from the shell casings. The IDF and Shin Bet are still searching for other suspects involved in the shooting.

Ultimately, physical evidence allowed investigators to create a profile for the murder, which helped them close in on Awad.

Awad was initially arrested in 1999 and began serving what was supposed to be a 27-year prison term for murdering Palestinian collaborators, but he was released in 2011 as part of the deal to free Shalit, who had been held captive in Gaza for five years.



Baruch Mizrahi (Photo: Reproduction)

A few days after his murder, Mizrahi's wife, Hadas, recalled coming under fire and ordering her children to stay down.

"We passed the Tarqumia checkpoint and a traffic circle, and then Baruch saw a terrorist," she said. "He told me, 'they're shooting, they're shooting, they're shooting. There's a terrorist.' Baruch put his foot down on the gas pedal."

"I felt a pain in my back. I told the kids, 'take off your seatbelts and lie down on the floor'. I took the steering wheel, shifted into low gear and used the handbrake to reduce the speed," she said. I used a rag to wipe up the blood; I saw that Baruch was dead. When the soldiers arrived, I told them to dress my wounds and put the children in a protected vehicle, so that they didn't see their father lying dead."

Mizrahi was the head of the tech division of the Israel Police. He had served for 25 years in the IDF, holding senior posts in elite intelligence units. A police statement said that his contributions to Israel's security had been "substantial".

Large numbers of IDF troops have been deployed to the West Bank over the past 10 days, following the abduction of three Israeli teens in the Hebron area on June 12. Awad's arrest is not connected to the search for the three boys, the Shin Bet said

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