**‘Islamic Jihad plotted to blow up Israeli wedding hall, kidnap IDF soldier’**

October 20, 2016

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Jerusalem Post

http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Islamic-Jihad-plotted-to-blow-up-venue-in-South-kidnap-IDF-soldier-470494

Security forces announced Thursday that they had thwarted an Islamic Jihad plot to carry out a terror attack at a wedding hall in the South and to kidnap and kill an IDF soldier for the purposes of bargaining with Israel.

Mahmoud Yousef Hassin abu-Taha, a resident of Khan Younis in Gaza, was arrested last month while entering Israel through the Erez Crossing, ostensibly for purposes of commerce.

Abu-Taha was enlisted by Wael Sufian abu-Taha, a senior Islamic Jihad official in Gaza. He instructed abu-Taha to form a cell in order to carry out a terror attack in the South and to kidnap a soldier to be used in a prisoner swap deal, the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) said.

The three men who Abu-Taha enlisted to help him with the attacks were also arrested.

One of the suspects, 55-year-old Shafik Hamed Ahmed abu-Taha was illegally residing in Israel and was an employee of the wedding hall that the cell planned to attack. A second suspect, 39-year-old Ahmed Tisir Abdulrahman abu-Taha from Gaza, was also illegally residing in Israel. A third suspect, a 40-year-old from Deir al-Balah in Gaza, was living in the South legally after having gained residency through marriage by way of the "family reunification" law.

The suspects had carried out reconnaissance at the wedding hall, devising a plan that would claim the lives of a maximum number of victims, the Shin Bet stated.

At the same time, Mahmoud began planning the kidnapping of the soldier, receiving thousands of shekels from Wael abu-Taha in order to rent an apartment in Israel to which he planned to lure a soldier. According to the Shin Bet, Abu Taha planned to kill the soldier, bury him and send his belongings back to Gaza to use as bargaining chips with Israel.

"This grave affair yet again exhibits the efforts of terrorist elements in Gaza to carry out murderous terror attacks in Israel," the Shin Bet stated.

The affair also shows the way in which terrorists take advantage of entry permits to Israel, given for humanitarian porpoises to improve the economy of Gaza, the Shin Bet said.

In addition, the terror plot shows the danger posed by Palestinians illegally residing in Israel, the Shin Bet warned.