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Medics carry one of the victims away

A powerful bomb on the border between Israel and the West Bank has left at least three people dead and several critically injured.

The Islamic militant group, Hamas, said one of its suicide bombers had detonated the bomb which went off close to a group of Israeli teenagers waiting for a bus near the central Israeli town of Kfar Saba.

The explosion at 0745 local time (0545GMT) follows two bombings in Jerusalem on Tuesday in which 30 people were injured and one of the bombers killed.

Reports of the latest incident came as the American ambassador to the United Nations vetoed moves in the Security Council to establish an international observer force to help protect Palestinians.

Nail bomb

Reports say the bomber walked up to the youths as they waited for the school bus by a petrol station near the "green line" which separates Israel from the West Bank.

Three youngsters, aged between 12 and 15, are reported to be in critical condition, wounded by nails in the bomb.

The armoured bus was due to take them to a religious school in a

“ We will not allow Yasser Arafat to provoke us into acting against our own interests

Israeli Public Security Minister Uzi Landau

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settlement in the West Bank.

Police said other bombs had been defused earlier on Wednesday near a market in the coastal town of Netanya and in the central city of Petah Tikva.

Hamas said the bombing represented the "continuation of the Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation".

"There are still seven martyrs ready to strike and we have more," it warned.

Sharon under pressure

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has called a special security cabinet meeting for Wednesday afternoon in response to the latest attack.

Mr Sharon is under mounting pressure to put stop the Palestinian attacks, having been elected in February on a promise to provide security and take a hard line stance against the Palestinians.

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But the BBC's Jeremy Cooke in Jerusalem says Mr Sharon may be reluctant to order immediate military action, as it could lead to further tensions and bring more condemnation from Arab leaders attending a summit in Jordan.

Israeli police say they are tightening security "in a massive way" in cities across the country.

Regional police commander Yehuda Bachar told Israeli radio they had already raised security along the border.

Public Security Minister Uzi Landau hinted no military action would be taken until after the summit, which ends on Wednesday.

"Israel will go on the offensive in the coming days against the terror which will probably last weeks or months," he told Israeli radio.

"Everyday or every other day the Palestinian Authority will pay a political price. We will not allow [Palestinian leader] Yasser Arafat to provoke us into acting against our own interests.

Reports from the West Bank town of Jenin say a 60-year-old



Emergency services rushed to the scene

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Palestinian woman died of asphyxiation on Wednesday after Israeli soldiers fired tear gas at her house.

More than 400 people have been killed since the uprising began, nearly 350 of them Palestinian, including dozens of children. More than 60 Israelis and 13 Israeli Arabs have died.

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