

Three Palestinians dead after clashes between Israeli police and protesters

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Three Palestinians were killed in incidents that followed violent clashes between protestors and thousands of heavily-armed Israeli police near the al-Aqsa mosque compound in occupied East Jerusalem on Friday. Palestinians gathered for Friday's prayers but refused to enter the compound in protest against the installation last weekend of metal detectors and additional security cameras at the entrances.

The imposition of the extra security measures followed the killing of two Israeli police who were guarding the compound entrance on July 14. Three Palestinians allegedly emerged from the mosque, fatally shot the two police and were killed in the subsequent exchange of gunfire. Israeli authorities took the rare step of closing all access to the compound, only reopening it on Sunday after installing the metal detectors.

The provocative additional security measures threaten the precarious compromise that followed the seizure of East Jerusalem during the six-day war in 1967. The hill-top compound of the al-Aqsa mosque is regarded as sacred not only by Muslims, but also by Jews, who know it as the Temple Mount, the site of two ancient Jewish temples. Under the arrangement between Israel and Jordan, the site continued to be managed by the Islamic Waqf trust and Jews were allowed to enter, but not pray, inside the compound.

Jerusalem-based Muslim clerics and Islamic groups issued a call for Muslims to boycott the site until the metal detectors were removed. Worshippers, it stated, should "pray in front of the gates of the al-Aqsa mosque and in the streets of Jerusalem and its alleys" in protest. Demonstrations and clashes with police began on Monday. Various organisations and clerics across the Middle East, including the Palestinian party Hamas, condemned Israel's actions and called for making

yesterday a "day of rage" after Friday prayers.

The Israeli government added further fuel to the fire. Ignoring international appeals, the security cabinet met late into Thursday night and issued a statement declaring that it was up to the Israeli police to decide when the metal detectors would be removed. The Israeli army and Shin Bet, the internal intelligence agency, reportedly supported their removal but were opposed by the Israeli police and Internal Security Minister Gilad Erdan.

At least 3,000 police were mobilised yesterday around the al-Aqsa compound. Clashes erupted as officers attempted to prevent Palestinians from entering the Old City, in which the compound is located. The police also announced that no males under the age of 50 would be allowed to enter the compound itself.

While Friday prayers in the streets surrounding the compound passed quietly, clashes with police broke out soon after. The latter responded to stone throwing and taunts with water cannon, rubber bullets, tear gas, stun grenades and live ammunition. Protests also erupted elsewhere in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, which were also violently suppressed by police.

Three Palestinians were shot dead in separate incidents, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry, and more than 100 people were injured. The Palestinian news agency, Maan, reported that 17-year-old Mohammed Mahmoud Sharaf was shot by an Israeli settler in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Ras-al-Amud. Muhammad Abu Ghanam died in a clash with police on the Mount of Olives, and 18-year-old Muhammad Lafi was killed in the West Bank town of Abu Dis.

On Friday night, a Palestinian allegedly broke into a home in the Israeli settlement of Neve Tsuf, north of Jerusalem, and attacked the occupants with a knife.

Two men, aged 60 and 40, and a 40-year-old woman, died of their wounds. Another woman was seriously injured.

Palestinian protesters were angered by the additional security measures, regarding them as a thinly-veiled step, by the Israeli regime, to assert greater control over the al-Aqsa mosque compound. Zionist extremists, including Israeli parliamentarian Yehuda Glick, have been agitating for Jews to be able to pray inside the compound, as well as visit it.

Jowad Dibis, 50, from the Shufat Palestinian refugee camp in East Jerusalem, told the *Washington Post*: “This is all part of the Israeli plan. Little by little, they want to take al-Aqsa away from us and put up their own temple.”

Asked about the metal detectors at Muslim holy sites such as Mecca and Medina, Dibis said: “Mecca is completely different. That is Saudis for Saudis—Saudi Arabia protecting Muslims. This is an occupation, a big difference. You think they want to protect us? Everything is about controlling us.”

In a bid to contain the mounting anger, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas postured as an opponent of the new measures on Friday night, declaring that his government would “freeze contact on all levels” until they were removed. His statement did not explicitly refer to the close collaboration between Palestinian police and intelligence units, and their Israeli counterparts, in suppressing anti-Zionist opposition on the West Bank.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government have clearly been encouraged to take a more provocative and aggressive stance over East Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa mosque by the Trump administration’s strong pro-Israeli stance. Trump made his first overseas trip to Israel and Saudi Arabia, in a bid to forge a reactionary regional alliance against Iran involving both countries, as well as other Sunni oil monarchies and dictatorships. During his visit, he became the first US president to visit the Old City of Jerusalem, which is regarded internationally as illegally occupied territory.

The divisions within the Israeli security cabinet on Thursday night, over whether to remove the metal detectors, make clear that the decision to leave them in place was taken on political, not security grounds. Sections of the security apparatus, notably the army and

intelligence agencies, fear that inflaming Muslim sentiment across the Middle East could disrupt plans for an anti-Iranian alliance.

The explosive character of the issue was underscored by the comments of Israeli lawyer Daniel Seidemann to the *Financial Times*. While dismissing Palestinian claims that the Israeli government was intent on a radical revision of the status of the al-Aqsa compound, he warned: “This creates a situation where there could be a regional war that would break out over an event that was only a rumour, but didn’t really happen.”



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