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## Deadly Violence Erupts in Standoff Over Mosque in Jerusalem

[New York Times](#)

Isabel Kershner

Six people were killed on Friday in an outbreak of violence that erupted over [Israel](#)'s placement of metal detectors at entrances to the sacred Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem and spread to the West Bank.

Three Israelis were killed in what appeared to be a terrorist attack in a West Bank settlement hours after three [Palestinians](#) were killed in clashes with Israeli security forces.

According to the Israeli authorities, a Palestinian entered a home in the Halamish settlement on Friday night, fatally stabbed three civilians — two men and a woman — and wounded another woman, before being shot at the scene. The names of the Israeli victims were not immediately made public.

The three Palestinian protesters were fatally shot in separate clashes in and around Jerusalem. The Palestinian Health Ministry identified them as Muhammad Mahmoud Sharaf, 17, from the mostly Palestinian neighborhood of Ras al-Amud in East Jerusalem; Muhammad Abu Ghanam, from the East Jerusalem neighborhood of At-Tur, which is on the Mount of Olives; and Muhammad Lafi, 18, from Abu Dis, a Palestinian town on the outskirts of the city.

The Israeli police said rioters threw rocks and firebombs and set off fireworks in the direction of the security forces, endangering them.

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Israeli soldiers fired tear gas at Palestinians to disperse them after Friday Prayer on a street outside Jerusalem's Old City. Credit: Ammar Awad/Reuters

President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, who had cut short a trip to China to handle the spiraling crisis over the metal detectors, announced late Friday that he was freezing contacts with Israel at all levels until it canceled the new measures around the Jerusalem holy site.

It was not immediately clear if the suspension included the Palestinian Authority's security coordination with Israel, a crucial vestige of the relationship between the two sides. Peace talks have been at an impasse for years.

The victims of the attack at the settlement were members of a family who had gathered for a traditional Sabbath eve meal. A neighbor, a soldier on furlough, heard the family's cries for help and shot the assailant through a window, according to reports in the Israeli news media.

The authorities identified the attacker as Omar al-Abed, 19, from a nearby village in the Ramallah district. He posted a final message on Facebook a couple of hours before the attack.

"I am a young man who has not yet reached the age of 20, I have many dreams and ambitions!!" he wrote. "I loved life — to draw the smile on people's faces. But what life is this when our women and young men are killed unjustly and our Aqsa is facing desecration." He said he had a sharp knife, begged forgiveness from his family and signed off with emojis including hearts.

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The Israeli military distributed a graphic image from the site of the attack, showing a kitchen floor awash in blood.

Other images circulating on Palestinian news sites included a [video](#) purporting to show the body of one of the dead protesters, wrapped in a bloody sheet, being passed over the wall of an East Jerusalem hospital for a quick burial, apparently for fear the corpse would be seized by the Israeli police.

The clashes came as thousands of Palestinian Muslims prayed in front of police barricades in the streets around the Old City of Jerusalem after a tense, weeklong standoff over the metal detectors and other restrictions.



Palestinians prayed outside the Old City walls as Israeli forces stood behind barriers. Credit: Mahmoud Illean/Associated Press

The metal detectors were introduced after a [brazen attack](#) on the morning of July 14, when three armed Arab citizens of Israel emerged from Al Aqsa Mosque and fatally shot two Israeli Druze police officers who were guarding an entrance to the compound. The assailants ran back inside the courtyard and were killed after an exchange of fire with other officers, who had pursued them.

After the attack, in a rare move, Israel temporarily closed the contested and volatile holy site — which is revered by Jews as the Temple Mount and by Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary — and emptied it of all workers while the police conducted searches.



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Israeli forces scuffling with a Palestinian worshiper in Jerusalem on Friday. Credit: Jack Guez/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

The Israeli government's decision to introduce metal detectors when the site reopened rapidly became a source of friction and a symbolic rallying cry in the contest for control and sovereignty over the sacred compound. In an extraordinary turn, members of the Waqf, the Muslim trust that administers the site, called for a boycott of prayers there for as long as the metal detectors remained in place.

According to the Israeli police, only a few dozen worshipers entered the compound for prayers on Friday. Earlier in the day, bracing for a possible eruption of violence, the police announced that only men over the age of 50 would be allowed access. (Women of all ages were permitted.)

On a regular Friday, the number of Muslims entering the site can reach tens of thousands. This week, the police turned back busloads of worshipers heading to the city from other parts of the country.

"The metal detectors are a political issue," said Jamal Zahalka, an Arab member of the Israeli Parliament, outside the Old City on Friday. "They have them all over the world, in supermarkets, shopping malls, everywhere. But they are there by consensus, not imposed by somebody else."

As tension built, the Israeli cabinet met into the night on Thursday. Ministers decided to leave the metal detectors in place, despite recommendations to

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remove them by the Shin Bet, Israel's internal security service, and by other security organizations.



Palestinians threw stones at Israeli forces during the clashes. Credit Ahmad Gharabli/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

“Israel is committed to preserving the status quo at the Temple Mount and the freedom of access to the holy places,” Israeli officials said in a statement after the cabinet meeting.

Critics said that the government was evading responsibility for keeping the metal detectors in place by leaving the ultimate decision up to the police. The police issued a statement in the morning clarifying that entry to the site through metal detectors was “according to the decision of the highest political echelon,” and that the police would decide how strict the security checks would be based on assessments of the situation.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel has come under pressure from right-wing members of his coalition, who urged him not to “cave in” to Palestinian protest and who said that removing the metal detectors would send a message of weakness and lack of resolve regarding Israeli control of the area.

“The decision to leave the metal detectors at the entrance to the Temple Mount is the right decision,” Tzipi Hotovely, a deputy foreign minister from Mr. Netanyahu’s conservative Likud Party, [wrote on Twitter](#) on Friday. “The prime minister defended the national interest.”



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Israeli forces detained a Palestinian protester. Credit: Ahmad Gharabli/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Israel captured East Jerusalem, along with its holy sites, from Jordan in the 1967 war and then annexed the area in a move that was never internationally recognized. Aware of the potentially explosive religious and political sensitivities, Israel allowed the Waqf to remain in charge of day-to-day affairs inside the mosque compound under the aegis of Jordan. Jordan's special role in administering the site was reaffirmed in its 1994 peace treaty with Israel.