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INTERNATIONAL NEWS



Reuters

Palestinian youths throw rocks and bottles at Israeli border police during clashes in the West Bank city of Hebron on Saturday.

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## Death toll at 19 in Mideast chaos

**Palestinian, Israeli troop clashes are worst in 4 years**

MSNBC STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

JERUSALEM, Oct. 1 — The death toll rose to 19 with more than 700 injured as violence flared between Palestinians and Israeli soldiers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip on Sunday for a fourth consecutive day of bloody clashes. A strike by Arabs shut down shops and schools, and leaders on both sides traded recriminations in the worst surge of violence in four years.

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Nightly News

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September 30, 2000  
NBC's Tom Aspell reports on the latest round of violence.

TWO PALESTINIANS were shot and wounded by Israeli bullets in the town of Rafah in the Gaza Strip, witnesses said. Medical sources told Reuters another Palestinian died overnight in Gaza from wounds sustained from live rounds.

A total of 18 Palestinians have been killed and about 700 injured in three days of rioting, Palestinian officials told the Associated Press. Israel says 11 members of its security forces have been wounded in the fighting, and an Israeli soldier was shot dead in the West Bank town of Qalqiliya on Friday, bringing the death toll in four days of fighting to 19. Rioters have used guns, sticks, rocks and bottles in the violence that erupted on Thursday in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

### FIGHTING SPREADS

The latest clashes spread to Israeli Arab towns, including Nazareth. In the town of Jesus' boyhood, hundreds of youngsters, many with their faces masked, threw stones at Israeli police who fired a steady barrage of tear gas and rubber-coated steel bullets.

The town's main road, which was blocked with burning tires, is near the Basilica of the Annunciation built on the spot where tradition says the Angel Gabriel foretold Jesus' birth.

Near the divided town of Hebron in the West Bank, about 150 Palestinians on a road overpass threw stones down on passing Israeli cars and soldiers. And in the Arab neighborhood of Jabal Mukaber in east Jerusalem, about a dozen young Palestinians hurled rocks at riot police.

"This is a war between religions and I'm participating because I'm Muslim," said Khaled Abu Araish, 25.

**‘This is a war between religions and I’m participating because I’m Muslim.’**

**— KHALED ABU ARAISH, 25**

The Israeli soldiers responded by firing rubber-coated metal bullets, witnesses said.

Clashes also broke out near the Jewish settlement of Netzarim and other places in the Palestinian-ruled Gaza Strip, the scene on Saturday of the worst clashes in months between the sides.

### **A SETBACK FOR PEACE**

The violence threatened to kill hopes for an already faltering peace process aimed at ending decades of violence.

A Saturday-night phone conversation between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat failed to ease tensions, and confrontations resumed Sunday morning in several locations.

In their conversation, Barak urged Arafat to help quell the violence.

"The prime minister warned Arafat that he (Barak) will not let violence a tool in the negotiations," Barak's office said in a statement.

Barak said Israel has been showing "maximum restraint," but would do what was necessary to protect its citizens and restore order. The violence erupted as Israelis marked the Jewish New Year.

#### **Clashes in the Mideast**

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The Palestinian leader, in turn, called on Barak to withdraw Israeli troops from the entrances of Palestinian towns and cities. Arafat adviser Nabil Abu Rdainah said Arafat also demanded the Israeli troops stop firing on Palestinian civilians.

A senior Palestinian official said Barak had apologized for the fact that so many had been killed.

Arafat also said that if Israel did not stop the bloodshed in 24 hours he would take several "measures," including going to the U.N. Security Council.

In a statement issued Saturday night, the Palestinian leadership called on the United Nations to form an international committee to investigate the events of the past days and condemn those responsible.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, in Iceland on Saturday during a trip to Europe, said she had spoken to both parties to try to ease tensions.

"We are very concerned about the violence. It is clearly counterproductive in the peace process," Albright said.

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Saeb Erekat, a senior Palestinian official, accused the Israelis of using excessive force, saying this “is matched with a huge number of casualties.”

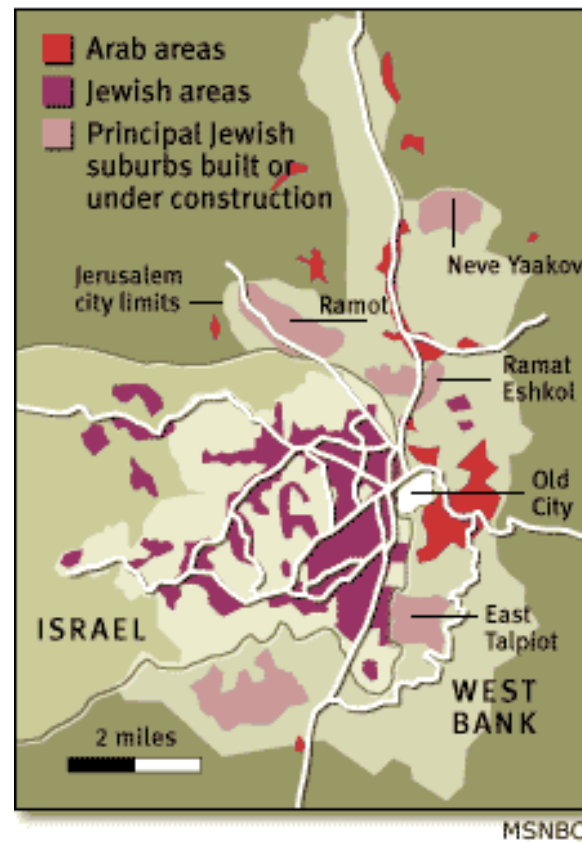
“We are not firing at Israelis, we are not killing Israelis. The soldiers are the ones killing the Palestinians,” he said.

But Israel’s army chief, Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz, said the Palestinian Authority did nothing to stop the violence, and that Palestinian police officers in some cases even participated in the clashes.

## GENERAL STRIKE

Throughout the West Bank, shops and schools were closed as Palestinians observed a general strike for a second day. The strike spread to Arab Israeli communities inside Israel on Sunday in a show of solidarity.

Israeli Arab lawmaker Ahmed Tibi said that Israeli Arab towns had called the general strike in protest of “the massacres of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.”



In several tense areas, funerals for the Palestinians were planned Sunday, and large crowds were expected. A 12-year-old boy, Rami al-Durra, was killed on Saturday and buried later in the evening. His funeral drew thousands.

Palestinians blame the violence on Israeli politician Ariel Sharon’s visit on Thursday to what Jews call the Temple Mount, and Muslims revere as the Noble Sanctuary. The area

is sacred ground to both Jews and Muslims, and Israeli and Palestinian negotiators are deadlocked over which side will control the sites under a peace deal. All U.S. compromise proposals have been rejected so far by the negotiators.



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Sharon is reviled by many Arabs for his role in the massacre by Lebanese Christians of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon in 1982 after Israel's invasion of Lebanon. An Israeli inquiry attributed indirect responsibility for the massacre to Sharon, who was forced to resign as defense minister.

On Saturday, Sharon dismissed charges that he was to blame for the present riots.

Most of the fighting has pitted stone-throwing Palestinians against heavily armed Israeli security forces. But Palestinians also opened fire in some protests and the Israelis acknowledged using live ammunition in isolated cases.

Palestinian official Erekat told Reuters he was not sure peace negotiations would resume next week as planned. Negotiators ended separate discussions with U.S. officials near Washington on Thursday without signs of progress.

Palestinian Planning Minister Nabil Shaath left for Europe on Sunday to ask for international protection for Palestinians in light of the deaths of the past days, Shaath told Reuters.

Arab League members were due to meet on Sunday in Cairo upon Arafat's request to discuss the clashes.

*NBC News correspondent Tom Aspell in Tel Aviv and The Associated Press and Reuters contributed to this report.*

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