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Monday, 1 January, 2001, 15:33 GMT

New killings fuel Mid-East hatred

Palestinian militants want Arafat to reject the US proposals

At least four Palestinians - including two policemen - are reported to have died in further violence in the West Bank, as Palestinians and Jewish settlers demanding revenge staged demonstrations on Monday.

The Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, said he expected a response within the next 24 hours to his request for clarification of President Clinton's proposals for a peace agreement with Israel.

He was speaking in Gaza after returning from talks in Egypt with President Hosni Mubarak.

Mr Arafat also said the Palestinians would continue resisting what he called Israeli aggression, as thousands of his supporters in the Fatah movement demonstrated in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

> " I say that our people are very strong and will continue their struggles and confrontations "
>
> Yasser Arafat

Fatah, the dominant group in the Palestine Liberation Organisation, is marking the 36th anniversary of its founding.

Security demands

Meanwhile, settlers blocked the entrances to several Palestinian towns in the West Bank. They demanded extra security following the killing on Sunday of a Jewish extremist.

Two Palestinian policemen were killed overnight in a gun battle with Israeli soldiers in the West Bank town of Tulkarem.

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▶The BBC's Paul Adams in Jerusalem "Each death paves the way for the next"
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▶Nabil Shaath, Palestinian cabinet minister "Mr Arafat was more hopeful than he was two or three days ago"
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The Israeli army, which is investigating the incident, said it came under fire in a dozen locations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip on Sunday night.

Another Palestinian man was killed in what the Palestinians say was a revenge attack by the settlers, and a 12-year-old boy died of injuries he received at the weekend.

Peace moves

Meanwhile, peace moves continued, with the European Union's head of foreign policy, Javier Solana, visiting the region for talks with Mr Arafat and the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak. He aims to persuade them to accept the US peace proposals.

The US plans have never officially been made public, but the Palestinian concerns are believed to focus on sovereignty over East Jerusalem and the right of Palestinians to return to their former homes in what is now Israel.

A senior Palestinian official, Nabil Shaath, told the BBC that President Mubarak had been in contact with both Mr Clinton and Mr Barak.

He said there could even be a meeting between Mr Arafat and Mr Clinton, who leaves office in less than three weeks.

Monday's violence follows the killings on Sunday of two leading Jewish and Palestinian figures.

Extremist Jewish leader Binyamin Zeev Kahane and his wife were killed, and five of their children injured, in an ambush as the family drove to their home in a Jewish settlement.

Shortly afterwards, Thabet Thabet, a senior official of Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction was shot dead in the West Bank.

Clinton push for deal

Since the latest round of violence erupted in September, more than 350 people - most of them Palestinians - have been killed in clashes and attacks.

The latest killings cast a shadow over President Clinton's

Palestinians say Arafat's aide Thabet Thabet was assassinated

Thousands of followers attended the extremist Jewish leader's funeral

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last-ditch attempt to broker a peace treaty before he leaves office, and the BBC's Jerusalem correspondent Jon Leyne says time is running out for a deal.

Mr Barak said on Monday that if a peace deal could not be reached with the Palestinians, Israel could pursue a policy of unilateral separation.

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