

Eleven killed in clashes between Hamas and Gaza clan

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Palestinian security officials reported that at least 11 people were killed on Tuesday when Hamas-run security forces clashed with a powerful local family in Gaza City

The fighting, in which another 40 people were wounded, erupted when Hamas police moved to arrest three members of the Doghmush clan accused of gunning down a police officer on Monday.

The 11 people killed included at least one police officer and nine members of the Doghmush family, Islam Shahwan, a spokesman for the Hamas-run interior ministry, told reporters.

The three men the police had been searching for -- Jamil, Saeb, and Ibrahim Doghmush -- were all killed in the fighting, he said, adding that they were wanted in a "criminal case." Another 15 people were arrested.

Witnesses said they heard heavy gunfire and the blasts of rocket-propelled grenades in the city's Sabra neighbourhood, a clan stronghold, after Hamas-run forces had sealed off the area the night before.

Several members of the Doghmush clan, one of the most powerful families in the impoverished coastal strip, are suspected of belonging to the Army of Islam, a small shadowy armed group inspired by Al-Qaeda.

The Army of Islam was behind the kidnapping of BBC reporter Alan Johnston in 2007 and along with Hamas and another small group claimed responsibility for the capture of an Israeli soldier in a deadly cross-border raid in 2006.

Since Hamas seized power in Gaza in June 2007 after routing forces loyal to Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas it has had tense relations with the group that have occasionally spilled over into street clashes.

Witnesses said Army of Islam fighters took part in the clashes, but Shahwan insisted the operation did not target the group, which is led by Mumtaz Doghmush.

Tuesday's fighting was the deadliest in Gaza since the start of August, when several people were killed and dozens wounded in a similar battle between Hamas police and another clan, the Hellis, which is close to Abbas's Fatah party.

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