

Israeli settlers, soldiers attack Palestinians in East Jerusalem and Nablus

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Armed Israeli settlers staged attacks on Palestinians Wednesday in East Jerusalem and on Thursday in the West Bank city of Nablus. The actions signal a new offensive by settlers and other ultra-rightists encouraged by the election victory March 17 of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing coalition.

Little information has yet been made public about the Nablus incident. The Palestinian news agency WAFA reported that dozens of settlers stormed the monument of Sheikh Yousef Dweikat, a local Muslim religious figure, which the settlers claim is where the biblical patriarch Joseph is buried. The settlers came in buses escorted by Israeli troops, who fired tear gas at local Palestinians when they offered resistance to the settler rampage.

Far more has been published in both the Israeli and Palestinian media about the seizure of a residential building in the Wadi Hilweh neighborhood of Silwan in East Jerusalem, just south of the Old City, but the US and international media have been virtually silent on the events there.

Settlers affiliated with the right-wing Elad-City of David Foundation entered a small four-unit apartment building and seized three apartments belonging to an extended Palestinian family. The takeover came while several of the adult residents were at the local police station responding to a summons to report for questioning. WAFA reported that they were not actually questioned, but during the time they were in the station the settlers invaded the apartment building, removed furniture and belongings from three of the four units and changed the locks. The whole operation was evidently coordinated between the settlers' organization and the police.

The Palestinian residents of the apartment building, known as the al-Malhi building for the extended family

that lived in all four apartments, assembled inside and outside the fourth apartment unit, which remained under their control, and a running battle ensued with police and settlers.

Police opened fire with teargas grenades and rubber-coated metal bullets. They also seized several Palestinian youth and took them away, one as young as 11, but later released them. Eventually the Israeli attackers took over the entire building.

The al-Malhi family have been fighting the theft of their homes for nearly two decades, as settler groups have steadily invaded the Silwan neighborhood. The area lies just outside the southern wall of the Old City and only a few yards from the Al Aqsa mosque, one of the principal religious sites in Islam.

The "sale" of the apartment building was apparently engineered as a scam by the Israeli group, using a forged document deeding the property to Yad Yafah, a nonprofit organization associated with the settlers. Israeli courts have repeatedly held up this document as genuine.

A member of the family has reportedly been induced by the Zionists to act as their agent, and he came to the building Wednesday backed by police, security guards and armed settlers, to give a fig leaf of legitimacy to the mass eviction.

At the same time, other Israeli settlers seized control of two open pieces of land elsewhere in Wadi Hilweh: 500 square meters used by Palestinian children as a playground and 1,200 square meters belonging to the al-Abbasi family. The settlers placed mobile homes on both properties as the first stage in establishing another Jewish outpost in the overwhelmingly Palestinian neighborhood.

Separately, Israeli police tried unsuccessfully to enforce an eviction order, issued Monday against the

Sab Laban family, residents of the Old City, who have been renting a property as “protected tenants” under a law that gives them certain rights. The Ateret Cohanim Settlement Organization, a well-funded Zionist group promoting Judaization of the entire Old City, claims the family home is vacant.

Eight members of the family have locked themselves inside the house, defying the court order. They have lived the house since 1953, when they first rented it from the Jordanian authorities, who then ruled East Jerusalem.

Israeli police arrested seven Palestinian teenagers Wednesday night in Jerusalem, as tensions mounted in the city’s Arab neighborhoods.

Elsewhere in the West Bank, Israeli troops raided the city of Jenin and its adjacent refugee camp in the northern West Bank, and homes in Ya’bad and al-Zababda towns and in Sinjil, northeast of Ramallah. A total of three men were arrested in the raid.

Other repressive measures were taken in the northern Jordan Valley villages of Makhoul and al-Hadidiya, where Israeli military bulldozers demolished dozens of homes and livestock barns, and in Palestinian olive farms outside Nablus, where military bulldozers uprooted 300 olive trees and razed 5,000 meters of stone walls, clearing an area adjacent to an Israeli settlement. No warning was given to the residents or the farmers before their homes and property were destroyed.

The settlers and other Zionist fanatics are undoubtedly encouraged by the reelection victory of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is allied with the settler and ultra-right parties in forming a new government. But these attacks represent less an escalation than a continuation of the Zionist settler rampage against Palestinians in East Jerusalem and throughout the West Bank.

Another right-wing fanatic attacked Israeli author Yehonatan Gefen at his home in Beit Yitzhak, near Netanya on the central Mediterranean coast. The assailant knocked on the writer’s front door, and when he answered, punched him in the face and threw eggs, screaming that he was a “leftist traitor.” Gefen, a poet and songwriter, appeared at a Tel Aviv theater after Netanyahu’s victory and declared, “The nation has once again chosen someone whose rule is based on frightening the people. It chose a racist who on Election

Day said that Arabs were descending on the voting booths. What would you say if in Germany there were people who say that Jews are streaming toward the voting booths?”

Joining the settlers and semi-fascist fanatics in celebration of the Netanyahu victory were several leaders of US-backed Syrian “rebel” groups, who sent congratulatory messages through an Israeli Druse official who has acted as their conduit to the Israeli government. The messages were reported by the right-wing *Jerusalem Post*, a fervent supporter of the prime minister, which evidently regarded them as a feather in Netanyahu’s cap.

One Syrian “rebel”, identified as Musa Al-Nabhan, wrote, “We hope that your government will continue to provide the necessary support to the Syrian people, which are fond of you and looking to build the best of relations on all levels.” A letter from the Revolutionary Assembly for the Future of Syria, addressed to Netanyahu, said, “We received with great hope and joy the news of your victory...and hope that you will continue ... to support the Syrian revolution.”

The *Post* reported that similar messages were received from several high-ranking officers in the Free Syrian Army, a group which has more supporters in Washington DC—and apparently in Jerusalem—than in Syria.



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