

Clashes erupt on West Bank after child is murdered by Zionist settlers

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At least one Palestinian teenager was fatally shot Friday as thousands demonstrated throughout the West Bank in outrage over a terrorist attack by Zionist settlers that burned to death an 18-month-old Palestinian toddler, Ali Saad Daobasa. The attack left his parents and four-year-old brother in a critical condition. According to the *Jewish Journal*, the four-year-old suffered burns over more than 60 percent of his body.

Arsonists affiliated with Israel's extreme nationalist milieu torched the family's home in the Kafr Duma village of the West Bank early Friday morning. They first spray-painted the Hebrew words "Revenge" and "Long live the king messiah" on the house's walls, alongside a Star of David, then smashed its windows and threw in Molotov cocktails.

The family was sleeping when the attack came at around 2 AM. While the parents pulled out the badly burned four-year-old, burned and suffering smoke inhalation themselves, they were unable to rescue their youngest son as the flames engulfed the house.

A relative of the family who rushed to the scene of the fire told the Israeli daily *Haaretz* that he witnessed the parents of the murdered toddler in flames on the ground, and standing next to them two men, their faces masked by balaclavas.

At least one Israeli police officer was killed in the immediate wake of the murder, as enraged crowds hurled stones and improvised firebombs in eastern Jerusalem and in the nearby village of Isawiya, and unidentified gunmen fired on an Israeli patrol vehicle in the West Bank near Kochav Hashachar.

The Israeli political and military establishment has responded with a show of contrived sympathy for the family and with the announcement that it will further escalate its military and police activities under the pretext of "hunting down the terrorists" responsible for the murder.

"Terror is terror, and we must fight it in every place," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said during a public visit to the hospital where the survivors of the attack were being treated.

"I am in shock from this criminal and terrible act. We are talking about terrorism in every respect," Netanyahu said Friday.

"The IDF strongly condemns this deplorable attack and has heightened its efforts in the field," Israeli Defense Force spokesman Col. Peter Lerner said Friday.

Issued from a regime that has engaged in relentless violence against the Palestinian and Arab masses, such moral-humanitarian appeals are testament to the limitless hypocrisy and cynicism of Netanyahu and Israel's entire military-political establishment.

In reality, political responsibility for Friday's murder rests unequivocally with the entire Israeli ruling elite and the Zionist state.

The Israeli ruling class has systematically cultivated far-right death squads for decades. Friday's murder bore all the hallmarks of the unrelenting crimes carried out by these fascist elements, whose main social function is to do the dirty work of the Israeli state in driving Palestinians from their homes and clearing the way for further Israeli expansion.

Daobasa's killing followed a familiar pattern, reprising tactics used in a spate of "price tag" killings and arson attacks against Palestinian communities.

There are undoubtedly real concerns within the Israeli state apparatus about the consequences of empowering such pathological elements, but the army, police and legal system have over and over again proven their complicity in these acts and reluctance to hold anyone accountable except in the handful of the most horrific attacks that provoke international revulsion and censure.

Clashes on Tuesday between settlers and Israeli police over limited demolitions of illegal housing units at a

Zionist settlement near the West Bank capital of Ramallah, highlighted the potential for the Israeli far right to turn against its masters, biting the hand that has fed it and contributing to the destabilization of the regime.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sought to placate the settlers, a key base of support for his government, by authorizing the building of 300 new housing units in the same settlement.

There are already signs that the attack in Kafr Duma, whatever its precise origins, will be used to justify intensified military and police operations against the Palestinian population.

Emerging from discussions with Israeli military commanders Friday, Netanyahu announced that Israeli security forces would intensify operations in the West Bank, using “all means at their disposal” to find the killers and prevent further terrorism. There is no doubt, however, that any escalation of Israeli operations in the occupied territories will be directed first and overwhelmingly against Palestinian resistance.

The Palestinian Liberation Organization, which has become a pliant tool of Washington and Tel Aviv, policing the population while its leaders have become multimillionaires, was nonetheless compelled to indict the Israeli state for enabling the fascistic settlers.

“This is a direct consequence of decades of impunity given by the Israeli government to settler terrorism,” the PLO noted in a statement Friday.

Somewhat sharper was the analysis of the Israeli rights group B’Tselem, which said that further atrocities like Friday’s murder of a defenseless Palestinian infant were “only a matter of time.”

“Official condemnations of this attack are empty rhetoric as long as politicians continue their policy of avoiding enforcement of the law on Israelis who harm Palestinians, and do not deal with the public climate and the incitement which serve as backdrop to these acts,” the group said in a statement. It indicted an “undeclared policy of the Israeli authorities in response to these attacks as lenient and conciliatory,” adding that perpetrators are rarely tried and even police investigations are often never initiated.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has recorded 120 terrorist attacks by Israeli settlers in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank since the year began, many of them carried out under the armed protection of Israeli security forces.

The escalation of Tel Aviv’s “counterterror” operations has done nothing to slow the tempo of these atrocities.

Friday’s attack comes only one day after an Orthodox fanatic stabbed six marchers at a gay pride demonstration, grievously wounding a 17-year-old female. On the same day, the Israeli legislature passed a law authorizing the force-feeding—internationally recognized as torture—of Palestinian political prisoners who go on hunger strikes.

The latest atrocity on the West Bank has recalled for many the burning to death last summer of Mohammed Abu Khdeir, a 16-year old Palestinian who was abducted by right-wing Israeli nationalists in Jerusalem, forced to drink gasoline and then burned to death amid the slaughter of more than 1,400 civilians in Gaza.

The boy’s father, Hussein Abu Khdeir, told the Israeli news web site *Ynet*, “We feel that our son was murdered all over again.”

“The Israeli government doesn’t want peace,” he added. “Half of the government are settlers; they don’t want peace.”

The criminality of the Tel Aviv government and its settler death squads flows inexorably from the deep-going crisis of Zionism, which employs endless war, repression against the Palestinians and the whipping up of right-wing nationalism as a means of deflecting immense internal tensions.

Underneath the attempts to portray Israel as some kind of nationalistic monolith, it remains one of the most socially polarized countries on the planet, with a poverty rate higher than that of Mexico and the highest per capita concentration of billionaires in the world.

The mobilization of extreme right-wing forces like those that carried out Friday’s atrocity, combined with an escalating assault on democratic rights, will be directed not only against the Palestinians, but also at suppressing all opposition to the policies of the Israeli state and defending the profit interests of Israel’s oligarchs against the working class.



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