

Arson attack on witness to murders in Palestinian village of Duma

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A fire broke out in the early hours of Sunday morning in the home of Ibrahim Dawabsheh. He is the only witness to last July's horrific arson attack by far-right religious zealots that killed three members of the Dawabsheh family and critically injured a fourth in the Palestinian village of Duma in the West Bank.

The fire chief from nearby Nablus told AFP that a window had been broken from the outside and flammable materials were found inside, indicating that firebombs had been hurled inside as had already occurred last July. A Palestinian Authority (PA) official said that two firebombs were thrown into the house.

The blaze damaged Dawabsheh's home and injured Dawabsheh and his wife, who fled the house after they heard glass breaking and then an explosion. They had to be treated in hospital for smoke inhalation.

The arson attack was clearly aimed at intimidating the witnesses in the forthcoming trial. All the signs are that the Israeli authorities will ignore this attempt to pervert the course of justice, and once again give a nod of approval to the extremist forces upon which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, with its majority of one, is so dependent.

The Israeli police issued a cynical statement saying that the incident did not seem to indicate a deliberate arson attack by Jewish settlers. But they released no further details, as their investigations are subject to a gagging order.

The attack took place two months after the chief suspect, 21-year-old Amiran Ben-Uliel, was belatedly charged with murdering three members of the Dawabsheh family and seriously wounding a fourth, as well as an attempted murder in an unsuccessful arson attack on another house. A minor was charged with being an accessory to the murder, while two others were charged with committing acts of violence against

Palestinians.

The firebombing sparked international condemnation and highlighted the rising tide of ultra-right-wing violence by Jewish zealots that successive governments have for decades done so much to promote. While Netanyahu denounced the attack, his government continued its undeclared policy of leniency and conciliation towards the same fascist forces that were responsible for the murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995.

Settler gangs have repeatedly been allowed to murder and attack Palestinians and destroy their property and livelihoods, with no attempt by the authorities to bring them before the courts except in the handful of the most horrific attacks that provoke international revulsion and censure. Their main political function is to do the dirty work of the state by driving Palestinians from their homes and clearing the way for further Israeli expansion.

Even after the July firebombing, the authorities did little to apprehend the suspects although their identities were widely known and they were linked to a far-right group known as "The Revolt", led by Meir Ettinger, which aims to overthrow the state of Israel by means of armed violence.

Last December, Defence Minister Moshe Ya'alon told Israel's *Army Radio* that there is "not enough evidence" to detain or prosecute the people who had finally been arrested in connection with the arson attack. This was despite the fact, as he was forced to acknowledge, that it was "clearly a Jewish attack that I am ashamed of" and that the defence establishment knew the perpetrators.

Following an international outcry, those arrested were eventually charged last January. In February, *Ha'aretz* revealed that the police had declared Ben Uliel, the

chief suspect, a high-priority target a year before the murder.

A senior law enforcement official told *Ha'aretz* that someone is only declared a police target when “a significant amount of intelligence regarding the commission of *prima facie* crimes has accumulated against him” and after approval from the head of the national investigations department. That should lead to collecting further evidence so that the suspect can be brought before the courts as soon as possible. The official said that very few people are declared police targets and only when “their capture is deemed essential to society.”

According to *Ha'aretz*, the Shin Bet security agency never investigated his activities and his criminal record was relatively light despite his involvement in building settlements outposts, viewed as illegal by the state, preventing their dismantlement, and provocations against Palestinians in the Nablus area. To all intents and purposes, the police allowed Ben Uliel to carry on as normal without lifting a finger to bring him to justice.

Another police report identified around 60 top suspects involved in right-wing extremist crimes, their profiles and their modus operandi. All of them are linked to groups advocating the overthrow of the current state of Israel and its replacement by a theocracy, to be achieved by terrorist attacks on the Palestinians that would cause chaos and instability leading to the collapse of the state. Nearly all of them, despite their involvement in violent crimes, are still at liberty.

Abd al-Salam Dawabsha, the council leader of the village of Duma where the firebombing took place, accused the PA of negligence in the months leading up to the attack, saying that the PA had not provided the money or the equipment they had requested to organise local night watchmen to guard the village.

According to the *Ma'an* news agency, nearly 90 Palestinian villages in the West Bank carry out nightly patrols. Unarmed—since Israeli military law that governs the West bank prohibits Palestinians from owning guns—and entirely separate from the PA, the groups provide a system of self-protection against almost daily settler attacks that the Israeli authorities are fully complicit in—to the extent that the Israeli army stands by while the settlers commit their atrocities.

The PA has no jurisdiction under the 1993 Oslo Accords over Israeli citizens and thus no power to prevent the attacks. When villagers face attacks from the settlers or clashes with the settlers occur, the police are not allowed to call for reinforcements from another village without Israeli approval, which is rarely if ever given.

That such self-help patrols are required demonstrates that the Oslo Accords were never intended to provide security to the Palestinians but only to Israel, with the PA subcontracted to impose the oppressive measures demanded by Tel Aviv.

On Sunday morning after the firebombing, angry clashes broke out in Duma between hundreds of school children and Israeli security forces who used tear gas to disperse the protests, leaving at least 15 girls needing treatment.



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