

Zionist settlers carry out murderous pogrom on Palestinian town

Jean Shaoul**28 February 2023**

In the most violent settler attack on Palestinians in decades, 400 Israeli vigilantes went on the rampage in Huwara, a town close to the northern city of Nablus in the West Bank, Sunday evening. At least one Palestinian was killed and more than 100 were injured on the pogrom-style attack.

There were horrific scenes of settlers, some masked and carrying guns and other weapons, setting fire to scores of homes and shops, destroying 35 and damaging at least 40 more. They torched more than 400 cars and destroyed agricultural property, leaving the town aflame for hours afterwards. Nine Palestinian families had to be rescued from their homes, according to Israel's public broadcaster, *Channel 12 news*.

Palestinian health authorities said that a 37-year-old man had been shot and killed by Israeli fire. Two people were wounded by gunfire, a third was stabbed and a fourth was beaten with an iron bar. Ninety-five others were being treated for teargas inhalation, stabbings and beatings. Settlers also attacked other towns in the area, as well as Ramallah and Salfit.

One Israeli commentator made the comparison with Kristallnacht, the "Night of Broken Glass," the state-orchestrated pogrom carried out by the Nazis against the Jews in Germany in 1938.

The intention of the attackers is to provoke a wider conflagration and create the basis for stepped up ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from the West Bank and possibly an all-out war by Israel.

The attack came in the wake of the killing by a Palestinian of two Israeli brothers who lived in one of the nearby settlements that surround Huwara as they drove through the town earlier Sunday morning. It had been widely trailed on social media, with settlers announcing a rally through the town, posting flyers and giving out leaflets calling for revenge.

Despite this, the constant military patrols in the area and the regional headquarters of Samaria just two minutes away, neither the Border Police nor the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) deployed troops to stop the vigilantes. As in all previous settler attacks, those soldiers who were there simply stood by, protecting the vigilantes not the victims. The next day, the streets were empty, bar the settlers who chanted racist slogans and gave the thumbs up signal, taunting the residents.

Sunday's violence caps weeks of escalating violence and criminality by Israeli security forces that have shot 67 Palestinians, including 13 children, as they carried out mass operations aimed at arresting alleged terrorists, including a Palestinian gunman who killed seven Israelis in a settlement in East Jerusalem.

These killing sprees, extra-judicial executions, are provocations designed to precipitate revenge attacks on Jewish Israelis. They come just two months after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's return to power at the head of a coalition of fascist, racist and ultra-orthodox religious nationalist parties that are determined to annex the Palestinian territories that Israel has occupied illegally since the 1967 Arab Israeli war.

Settler attacks on Palestinians, their homes, property and land, in the occupied territories, a recurrent feature for decades, spreading to attacks on Israel's own Palestinian citizens in the last year, have escalated in tandem. They have been aided and abetted by the most advanced military machine in the Middle East.

Instead of protecting the Palestinians as required under international law, Israeli soldiers have fired tear gas grenades, rubber bullets and live rounds to drive Palestinians from their own lands and sometimes even joined the settlers in their attacks.

In 2022, Israeli security forces injured more than 2,000 Palestinians in settler-related incidents, four

times more than in 2021. There was a near 50 percent increase in settler violence in 2022 compared to 2021. The last weekend in January saw 144 settler attacks on Palestinians and their property in just the northern part of the West Bank, according to Ghassan Dagħlas, a Palestinian official.

Lior Amihai, executive director of Yesh Din, an Israeli legal advocacy group that defends Palestinians in legal cases, says that the Palestinians have no recourse to help when they are attacked. “They are completely alone. It’s the Wild West. That’s why it’s like a pogrom.” Peace Now and B’Tselem, Israeli NGOs, also described the settler attacks as a “pogrom” supported by the government.

Recent weeks have seen Itamar Ben-Gvir, the Jewish Power leader and National Security Minister, take increasingly punitive measures against Palestinian prisoners in Israel jails, believed to number around 5,000, who, he said, were being treated too softly. These measures include the increased use of solitary confinement, searches of cells, bans on visits, the closure of prison-run bakeries and a four-minute time limit on showers, as well as legislative proposals to limit medical treatment.

The pogrom-like rampage in Huwara followed the call by Finance Minister and Religious Zionism leader Bezalel Smotrich for the IDF to “strike the cities of terror and its instigators without mercy, with tanks and helicopters.” He said that Israel should act “in a way that conveys that the master of the house has gone crazy.” He had earlier liked a tweet by a settler leader saying that “the village of Huwara should be wiped out today,” deleting it only after the revenge raid.

Not a single cabinet minister condemned the vigilantes or the security forces’ failure to restrain them. Netanyahu responded by immediately announcing that Israel’s parliament, the Knesset, had passed legislation approving the death penalty for those convicted of terrorism offences against Israelis. He and Ben-Gvir made pious statements, saying, “This is not the way.” But Ben-Gvir gave voice to his real agenda, declaring, “The government of Israel, the state of Israel, the IDF, the security forces—they are the ones who have to crush our enemies.”

Jewish Power legislator Zvika Fogel gave his full-throated support for the burning down of Palestinian villages in revenge for attacks on Jewish Israelis. He

said Monday, “A closed, burnt Huwara—that’s what I want to see. That’s the only way to achieve deterrence. After a murder like yesterday’s, we need burning villages when the IDF doesn’t act.” He also said, “We need to stop shying away from collective punishment,” a crime under international humanitarian law. Members of Netanyahu’s Likud party supported the settlers.

While the United Nations, the United States and the major European powers have condemned the violence and called for a “de-escalation of tensions,” they have supported Israel’s brutal suppression of the Palestinians for decades. They have all given Netanyahu’s fascistic government the green light to terrorise the Palestinians with ever greater force in pursuit of its agenda of annexing the Palestinian territories and implementing apartheid rule, as embodied in the “Nation-State Law” enshrining Jewish supremacy as the legal foundation of the state.

The raid on Huwara, orchestrated by the Netanyahu government and given de facto support by the Israeli military, came just hours after officials from Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Egypt and the US met in the Jordanian port city of Aqaba. The talks “reaffirmed the need to commit to de-escalation on the ground and to prevent further violence,” in an effort ostensibly aimed at de-escalating the tensions in the West Bank and preventing a broader conflagration spilling over into neighbouring countries. The Jordan foreign ministry published a concluding statement saying Israel had agreed to pause the expansion of the settlements and the legalization of settlements outposts, illegal even under Israeli law, but Netanyahu immediately repudiated any such agreement.



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