

Netanyahu government set on provoking all-out Israeli war with Palestinians

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29 August 2023

In the face of Israel's escalating political crisis, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is pushing for an all-out confrontation with the Palestinians.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF), police and settler groups are mounting near daily attacks on towns and villages in the West Bank. These are consciously designed to incite retaliatory attacks and thereby create a climate of fear and apprehension within Israel as means of deflecting explosive social tensions and political opposition to Netanyahu's government outwards against a "common enemy".

At the same time, Netanyahu is ramping up his rhetoric against Iran and its allies in Syria and Lebanon. Blaming "Iran and its cancerous proxies" for instigating attacks in the West Bank, occupied illegally since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war in defiance of international law and UN resolutions, he hopes to derail the protest movement opposed to his far-right government's efforts to grant itself dictatorial powers, and to unite Israelis amid the threat of a wider war.

Last week he declared, " Hamas and other Iranian proxies understand very well that we will fight with all means against their attempts to promote terrorism against us—in the West Bank, in Gaza, and anywhere else."

On Sunday, he repeated the message, saying, "I would also like to appeal to the citizens of Israel: We are facing waves of terrorism, both internal and external. These are not simple times; these are challenging times. We need to unite our forces against terrorism, against the crime in the Arab sector, and against the external and internal threats that are being organized, to a large extent, by Iran via its proxies. If we stand together, we will prevail. This is my call to all members of the government, MKs [legislators], and all Israeli citizens."

Netanyahu's declarations came after Saleh al-Arouri, a spokesperson for Hamas, the bourgeois clerical group that controls Gaza and has a following in the West Bank, said

in a televised interview on Lebanon's *Al Mayadeen*, that any resumption by Israel of targeted killings of Hamas leaders or attempts to take control of the al-Aqsa mosque compound in East Jerusalem—called for by Netanyahu's fascistic coalition partners—could spark a "regional war." He warned, "The all-out war will be a defeat for Israel."

Hassan Nasrallah, leader of the Shia Islamist party Hezbollah, warned that any attempt by Israel to target a senior Hamas member living in Lebanon would be met with a "severe reaction."

The attacks on Israelis by Palestinians determined to resist Israel's brutal suppression have followed mass search and arrest operations by the IDF in towns and cities across the West Bank, supposedly under the full control of the Palestinian Authority of President Mahmoud Abbas. Soldiers have closed towns and villages and placed their inhabitants under a curfew.

These almost daily operations in search of individuals alleged to have killed Israelis—26 Israelis, including six children, have been killed so far this year—have killed at least 206 Palestinians, 170 in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and 36 in Gaza, including 35 children, and injured hundreds more with live bullets and tear gas since the start of 2023.

IDF executions have now been "normalized" as state-sanctioned policy. The army's murderous brutality not only goes unpunished but is belittled by Israel's extremist politicians who declare that the IDF is not doing enough to deter the "terrorists." Netanyahu and his security chiefs are running a campaign of vilification against IDF chief of staff Lieutenant General Herzi Halevi, with the prime minister's son Yair sharing a post, later deleted, calling Halevi the worst army chief in history.

Last week, National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir, the fascistic leader of Jewish Power, speaking on television, lamented Halevi's "lack of the necessary powers to protect Israeli citizens" and called for a return

to consistent targeted assassinations and the denial of entry permits for Palestinian workers.

Ben Gvir wants a law which gives police the power to jail Israeli citizens without trial or charge, as is the practice in the West Bank, alongside a “national guard” under his control. He has overseen a crackdown on Palestinian prisoners—at least 1,500 Palestinians are held in Israeli jails—including the storming of a prison in the Negev and the forcible removal of 75 prisoners from their cells and their relocation, prompting hundreds of political prisoners to threaten a hunger strike.

The actions of Israel’s police are no less barbarous than those of the army. Last week, Orwah Sheikh Ali, a 22-year-old Palestinian from the Shuafat refugee camp in East Jerusalem, reported in the Magistrate’s Court in Jerusalem that his face had been branded with the Star of David, Israel’s national symbol, after his arrest for drug dealing, a charge he denied, and detention in a police station where he was brutalized and tortured, including having a plastic bag placed over his head.

Ben Gvir also claimed that Defence Minister Yoav Gallant’s “problematic” policies in the West Bank had left settlers “sitting ducks”. He declared in a brazen display of the government’s apartheid policy, “My right, my wife’s right, my kids’ right to move around freely on the roads of Judea and Samaria [the West Bank] is more important than that of the Arabs.”

Under the physical protection of the army and with political encouragement from Israel’s ultra-nationalist politicians, settler vigilante groups have carried out a daily campaign of harassment, intimidation and violence in the West Bank, aimed at driving Palestinians off their land and into neighbouring countries—a repeat of the ethnic cleansing carried out by Israeli forces between 1947-49 when more than 700,000 Palestinians were forced to flee their homes.

According to UN statistics, settler attacks have been on the rise since 2016, with 228 attacks last year leading to casualties. This year, settlers have killed at least eight Palestinians, up from five in the whole of last year, injured hundreds more and inflicted damage and destruction of Palestinian homes, property and agricultural land.

Earlier this month, Ben Gvir praised two settlers accused of killing Qusai Jamal Maatan, a 19-year-old Palestinian, in the West Bank village of Burqa as “heroes” and said that anyone defending themselves against “stone throwing” should “receive a commendation.” So embarrassing were Ben Gvir’s

comments that Israel’s paymasters in Washington felt obliged to condemn his “racist rhetoric,” describe Maatan’s killing a “terror attack” and make a pathetic plea for “full accountability and justice.”

Bezalel Smotrich, finance minister and leader of the fascistic Religious Zionism Party, leapt to Ben Gvir’s defence, accusing the US of hypocrisy and saying, “The United States is in no position to go after Israel on human rights issues given how its army acted in Iraq and Afghanistan. The US shouldn’t be preaching to Israel about morality.”

Netanyahu’s plans for war against the Palestinians that risk a far wider regional conflagration cut across the Biden administration’s efforts to bring Saudi Arabia on board his anti-Iran alliance (the Abraham Accords) and to disrupt Riyadh’s growing relations with China. On Monday, Smotrich warned that despite being willing to reach a breakthrough in normalization talks with Saudi Arabia, the government would not agree to any pro-Palestinian “gestures” in exchange for a future agreement.

Further upsetting Washington’s plans to promote normalization between Israel and other Arab countries is the turmoil in Libya where there have been widespread protests reflecting deep-seated hostility to the suppression of the Palestinians.

Protests erupted after Israel’s Foreign Minister Eli Cohen announced that he had met his Libyan counterpart Najla el-Mangoush in Rome last week in a meeting he described as “historic” and “the first step of ties between Israel and Libya.” Libya’s Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeiba—backed by the US against the rival government based in Benghazi that is supported by Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Russia—was forced to deny he had authorized the meeting and sack el-Mangoush, who has fled to Turkey.



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