California Congressman Ro Khanna detained by Zionist settlers and Israeli soldiers in the West Bank

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California Democratic Congressman Ro Khanna has reported that he and his delegation were detained in the occupied West Bank by armed Zionist settlers and then by soldiers of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) on Wednesday.

Khanna was visiting the ruins of Khirbet Zanuta, a Palestinian Bedouin village in the southern West Bank whose residents were driven out by repeated settler assaults following the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks, when his group's van was surrounded and blocked.

He has explained that he went to the West Bank explicitly "to seek an unfiltered view" of life under occupation, including meeting Palestinian families, because he believes politicians who refuse to speak up for Palestinian human rights are "morally compromised."

According to Khanna's own account, settlers armed with American?made M4 rifles blocked the road, encircled the vehicle and refused to let the delegation pass, effectively detaining a sitting member of the U.S. House of Representatives and several American citizens for more than an hour.

"We were just looking at [the destroyed village], and these hoodlums come in with machine guns—M?4, an American?made machine gun—and they detain us. They block off the road. And then they call the IDF, and the IDF is on their side, not on the side of the Americans," he later told Reuters.

Khanna and his staff contacted the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem from the van while they were held, and only after intervention by what he described as police officers, following embassy involvement and calls to senior Israeli officials, was the group allowed to leave.

An aide traveling with him, Cameron Kasky, said they were held for more than an hour and described the settlers as "young men" who were "laughing" as they blocked and kicked the tires of their van, mocked them and menaced the delegation.

On NBC's *Meet the Press* Sunday morning, Khanna directly contradicted the official IDF narrative and accused the Israeli military of lying about what had happened. The IDF statement claims that troops merely responded to reports that settlers "were unlawfully blocking the vehicles of foreign nationals and members of the media," dispatched forces that "quickly dispersed the Israeli civilians, and reopened the blocked road," and insists that "the IDF soldiers operating in the area did not take part in blocking the road."

Khanna has flatly rejected this version. In his public comments over the weekend, which he reiterated on national television, he said that when the IDF arrived "they sided with the settlers and continued our detention," stressing that soldiers moved a car to reinforce the blockade rather than free the American delegation.

"Our security person goes and talks to the IDF soldiers, and they said, 'We don't care that there's an American in the car. We don't care about a congressman. We don't care what the American Embassy is saying,'" he recounted, describing the soldiers' contemptuous refusal to end the standoff.

Khanna has called this behavior "a huge mistake" by the IDF along with maintaining that its statement is false. In interviews he has said he is "probably the first American politician who's been detained by the IDF and Israeli settlers" and vowed, "you will be hearing more soon," as he presses for the prosecution of both the settlers and the four IDF soldiers involved.

Khanna told the *New York Times* he saw "the arrogance in the eyes of those settlers, 21? and 22?year?olds with guns, laughing that they had detained us, the arrogance of those young IDF soldiers that my tax dollars are funding, having no respect for the fact that they were detaining Americans, no respect that there was an American congressperson in that bus."

Ro Khanna represents California's 17th District, centered in Silicon Valley, and has served in Congress since 2017, where he has been a critic of Israel's mass killing in Gaza and West Bank repression. Khanna did not use the word "genocide" to describe the situation in Gaza until September 2025, nearly two years after the Israeli war crimes began. International and US news media are describing Khanna as a potential Democratic Party presidential contender in the 2028 elections.

Despite an armed, foreign?backed settler gang and soldiers detaining a sitting US congressman and other Americans in occupied territory, there has been no public statement from the White House. Reports note that while Khanna has been in

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contact with the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem, he “has not spoken with the White House or the State Department” and is still planning “to get a comment about what the Israeli government plans to do with these four IDF soldiers.”

The Trump administration’s silence is part of its shielding the Israeli state and its settler auxiliaries from any serious consequences for crimes committed against Palestinians—and now, against US officials.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly sought to present settler violence as the work of isolated “vigilantes,” who will supposedly be punished under the law, even as his government arms, finances and politically champions the very forces terrorizing Palestinians in the West Bank. While commenting on recent incidents, Netanyahu promised that “the law will be applied to them,” a formulation echoed in other official Israeli rhetoric after settler attacks.

There have been no reported arrests of the armed settlers who detained Khanna’s delegation, and IDF sources have not only denied his account but derided it, claiming that no senior officers were sent and that the matter was quickly resolved. The fact that settlers acted with impunity against foreign nationals underlines that Netanyahu’s talk about restraining “vigilantes” is a cynical cover for ongoing state?directed violence in the West Bank.

Khanna himself drew the connection between his experience and the daily terror inflicted on Palestinians, stating, “If they will do this to an American congressman, imagine what is happening to Palestinian families who are just trying to live.”

The Zionist settler movement in the West Bank is dominated by far?right religious nationalist currents that openly call for the expulsion of Palestinians, celebrate pogrom?style attacks on villages and view any Palestinian presence as an obstacle to Jewish supremacy over “Judea and Samaria.”

The settlers’ “thuggish” behavior towards Khanna—laughing young men with US?made assault rifles, surrounding a vehicle, blocking a road, calling in the army and boasting of their power—mirrors the routine harassment, beatings, shootings, arson attacks and destruction of homes, schools and agricultural land inflicted on Palestinian communities.

Khirbet Zanuta, the village Khanna visited, was itself abandoned after relentless settler raids in which homes and a school were destroyed, an example of the systematic campaign to empty areas of Palestinian residents and expand the network of illegal settlements and outposts.

These Zionist thugs are integrated into Israel’s political system through coalition partners drawn from religious extremist and Jewish Power parties, whose leaders have praised settler rampages and pushed for the annexation of large parts of the West Bank.

Their ideology combines religious messianism, ethnic chauvinism and explicit admiration for historically fascist movements, and they have created armed gangs that operate with the backing or active participation of the police, the IDF and the Civil Administration.

As of mid?March 2026, at least 29 Palestinians had been killed in the West Bank by Israeli forces and settlers since the start of the year, according to data compiled by the Palestine information center “Mutaa.” Israeli rights group B’Tselem has reported that, since October 7, 2023, Israeli forces and settlers have killed at least 1,085 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, including an unprecedented number of children and teenagers.

The mass killings have continued into mid?2026 alongside mass arrests of Palestinians, land confiscation and the use of live fire at protests and raids. Israeli attacks on June 29, 2026 alone killed a 15?year?old boy in the West Bank and several children in Gaza, prompting B’Tselem to condemn an “unprecedented killing of Palestinian children and teenagers.”

The response of the Israeli government and judicial system to crimes committed by settlers against Palestinians has been one of impunity and institutional endorsement. Human rights groups have documented tens of thousands of settler and military “violations” in the West Bank this year alone—16,880 incidents leading to hundreds of injuries, on top of the killings—with virtually no serious prosecutions of perpetrators.

In the case of Khanna himself, Israeli authorities have announced only that “the identity of the armed individual connected with the incident is under review,” while the IDF insists its soldiers did not participate in blocking the road.

As in countless attacks on Palestinians, the authorities talk of “investigations” while allowing settler outposts to grow, continuing to arm and deploy soldiers alongside settlers and preserving the legal architecture that denies Palestinians their fundamental rights.

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