

Israeli settlers carry out wave of attacks in West Bank, as UN cuts Gaza food aid

Andre Damon
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Israeli settlers carried out a wave of attacks across the occupied West Bank over the weekend, protected by soldiers who fired tear gas at their victims and encouraged by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The settlers brutally assaulted a *Washington Post* photographer on Friday and attacked a delegation of European diplomats on Saturday.

Netanyahu's coalition partners, including Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, are campaigning for the October 27 election on a program of annexing the West Bank and Gaza. Netanyahu himself is running on a vow to escalate the war against Iran, amid active plans by the Trump administration to resume its attacks on the country.

On Friday about 80 settlers, many in masks, came down a hillside onto Palestinian families harvesting olives near Abu Falah, northeast of Ramallah, the *Times of Israel* reported that day, citing witnesses. They hurled stones with slings and beat a 40-year-old Palestinian man and Heidi Levine, an American photographer freelancing for the *Washington Post*, who was wearing a helmet and a vest marked "PRESS."

The settlers knocked Levine to the ground, kicked her and beat her with sticks for about 10 minutes, then stole her cameras and phone. She suffered a broken rib, broken vertebrae and a finger cut to the bone. "I didn't think I was going to make it," she told Israel's Channel 12 Saturday.

The same report said that two or more army jeeps came through the grove in the middle of the assault, that the settlers kept on after the troops appeared and that the soldiers fired tear gas at the Palestinians. An Al Jazeera investigation published Monday found that soldiers later shot Abdel Jaber Obeid, a member of the local council.

Netanyahu's office claimed Friday that footage "appears to show Levine knocked down and immediately helped to her feet by the same unidentified individual."

"That is such a lie and the biggest insult," Levine replied on Channel 12 Saturday. "Mr. prime minister, maybe take another look at those videos, okay? ... because you'll see nobody was trying to help me except for my colleagues."

On Saturday masked settlers armed with sticks and iron bars attacked European diplomats outside Taybeh, a Christian village near Ramallah. Belgian Foreign Minister Maxime Prevot said Saturday that the settlers went after Belgium's consul general in Jerusalem, as well as diplomats from France and Poland. CBS News reported Sunday that Bernard Baudoux, a French mayor, said he was kicked, struck with iron bars and thrown to the ground.

Netanyahu dismissed the attacks on Sunday at a security briefing for reporters, the first he had given the press in person since October 7, 2023. "I think this is a huge exaggeration," he said.

Only on Monday, after three days of international protest, did Israeli police announce the arrest of 10 people, six of them alleged to have taken part in the attacks on Levine and the diplomats.

The Israeli human rights group Yesh Din counted at least 170 settler attacks since the olive harvest began around September 27, Reuters reported Friday. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said Monday that it has recorded more than 2,060 settler attacks in about 300 Palestinian communities this year.

Smotrich said on a Ynet podcast September 27: "I think we need to go to war in Judea and Samaria, to dismantle the Palestinian Authority that supports

terror.” Judea and Samaria is the Israeli government’s name for the West Bank. On October 6 he told a conference in Jerusalem: “I demand that the State of Israel permanently apply its sovereignty over the territories it currently holds, both in Gaza and in Lebanon.”

Ben-Gvir, chairman of the Otzma Yehudit party, unveiled a plan on September 3 for the “emigration” of 1.86 million Palestinians from Gaza within seven years, most of the territory’s population. “Instead of illusions of peace now, we need acts of emigration now,” he said.

At his Sunday briefing, Netanyahu declared that “a Palestinian state will not be established here, because it would serve as Iran’s launchpad for destroying us.” On Iran he said: “The regime must fall, and I will bring it down.” CBS News reported Monday that in a video of a call with US President Donald Trump, Netanyahu said: “Donald, we have a job to finish.”

Trump endorsed Netanyahu on Sunday in a letter posted on Truth Social. “If Israel has the wrong Leader, which would be anyone other than Bibi, America will have to do this work ourselves, and I am not inclined to do so,” he wrote. Of Iran he wrote that “unless they change their ways, rapidly, we will soon finish the job.”

In Gaza, where a “ceasefire” took effect on October 10, 2025, Israel halted all commercial shipments on Wednesday, October 14. The Israeli military body that controls the crossings claimed that day that merchants had stopped sending trucks because of Hamas taxes and threats against them. Nahed Sheheiber, head of Gaza’s private truckers union, said Thursday: “The merchants are not the ones who stopped the shipments.”

One resident told Al Jazeera, in a report published Sunday, that a sack of flour that sold for 25 to 35 shekels before the halt now costs about 80, and Ismail al-Barawi, a resident of Jabalia in northern Gaza, said a carton of eggs had gone from 35 shekels to 60 or 70.

The United Nations World Food Program said Monday that it will cut the number of people it feeds each month in Gaza from 1.6 million to 1.1 million, about half the population, and halve each family’s ration to a single parcel. It is cutting hot meals from 250,000 a day to 150,000 and has reduced cash payments to 75,000 families from 1,250 to 750 shekels a month. In September it halved its aid in the West Bank, from 400,000 people to 200,000.

The agency said its funding for the Palestinian territories this year came to less than half the usual amount and that it needs about \$450 million for the next half year. Euronews reported Monday that its resources fell “partly because US President Donald Trump drastically cut contributions to UN agencies,” and Al Jazeera reported September 1 that aid groups were running short of money because the United States had led “a sharp cut in support, with other Western nations also reducing donations.”

The agency said Monday that 1.4 million people in Gaza, two-thirds of the population, are at crisis levels of hunger or worse. “It’s a year into the agreement of this ceasefire. Well, life is still brutal here,” Carl Skau, its acting executive director, told Reuters Monday. “These cuts are happening just as we are facing the fourth winter.” Shaun Hughes, its country director, told AFP Monday: “People are not safe. Airstrikes continue on a daily basis.”

Gaza’s Health Ministry said Saturday that Israeli forces have killed 1,511 Palestinians since the “ceasefire” and 74,469 since October 2023.



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