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Israeli figures warn state has 'lost control' as West Bank settlers attack

Senior government officials have expressed alarm at the uncontrolled nature of the assaults by Jewish settlers against Palestinian residents.

By Heidi Levine, Louisa Loveluck and Lior Soroka

JABA, West Bank — Israeli political and military leaders are scrambling to contain a recent wave of settler attacks across the West Bank, warning against further violence targeting Palestinian communities as vigilantes have rampaged through villages, beating local residents, torching a mosque, and assaulting and injuring Israeli security forces who helped demolish an illegal outpost this week near the flash point city of Hebron.

The attacks, carried out by roving gangs of masked men and boys, have underscored the extent to which the Israeli government has allowed Jewish settlers to operate with impunity in the occupied territory. They have also exposed a deep rift between the most radical Israeli settlers, who believe they have a divine right to the land, and parts of the security establishment, which sees the violence as destabilizing and undermining the state.

In recent days, senior Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Isaac Herzog and Defense Minister Israel Katz, have condemned what they described as violent incidents perpetrated by a small group of extremists. Herzog called the violence “shocking and serious” and said it “crosses a red line.” And Katz, who last year ended administrative detention for Jewish settlers suspected of attacks, pledged more money and resources Monday for a Defense Ministry initiative he said seeks to reduce the attacks through dialogue.

But current and former members of Israel’s political and security elite have also urgently raised the alarm — and instead blamed the

government for enacting policies they said either encouraged settler violence or allowed it to flourish.

“Israel is reaping what it sowed: the entire racist policy of pushing and harming the Palestinians, while giving Jewish terrorism complete freedom of action,” said Israel Ziv, a retired general who served as head of the operations directorate of the Israel Defense Forces.

“Through explicit policies on one hand and silence on the other — refusing to condemn, refusing to act — the state has lost control,” he said.

Netanyahu’s government has lent significant support to the expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, taking dramatic steps to ensure that it retains control over most of the territory, which Israel seized from Jordan during the 1967 war.

While approving housing and other infrastructure projects for Israeli settlements at a record rate, the government has also increased demolition of Palestinian property while deprioritizing investigations into attacks on Palestinians, according to rights groups monitoring the trends. Settlers have also expelled Palestinians from villages, according to the United Nations, in an effort to thwart the creation of a Palestinian state. In an interview Tuesday with Israel’s Channel 14, Bezalel Smotrich, the country’s far-right finance minister, acknowledged the violence but said the attacks were being used to “defame” Israel and the settler movement.

“There is no place for violence, for taking the law into one’s own hands, certainly not for throwing stones at soldiers,” he said. “This is not how you build the Land of Israel.” He added, “We are killing the idea of a Palestinian state — day by day, hour by hour — with more than a hundred farms that already span over 700,000 dunams,” or 173,000 acres.

As the government has tightened its grip on the West Bank, the number of attacks by Israeli settlers or soldiers on Palestinian farming communities in 2025 has surpassed any year on record since the U.N. began counting in 2006. The annual olive harvest, which is now drawing to a close, saw gangs of Jewish extremists burning cars, looting farming equipment, and vandalizing more than 5,700 trees and saplings cultivated by Palestinians across 87 towns and villages.

In the southern West Bank on Monday, a rare move from the army to dismantle an illegal outpost of a larger settlement sparked clashes with security forces, local media reported. Within hours, gangs of young men had descended on two nearby Palestinian villages, burning property and beating residents.

Then, it was the turn of the Palestinian village of Jaba, southwest of Bethlehem, residents said. Musa Mashaaleh recalled hearing the attackers approaching his house. He watched on security cameras as masked men torched his car and pelted the building with stones, he said. In total, Mohammad Abu Subhieh, a member of the local council, said the settlers burned four cars and two buildings. “One of them told my niece that they would come back and burn our house,” Abu Subhieh said.

But political observers again pointed to the government’s role in fanning the flames. Netanyahu, Israel’s longest-serving prime minister, returned to office in December 2022 on the basis of a coalition agreement that promised to “promote and develop settlement in all parts of the Land of Israel,” including Judea and Samaria, the biblical name for the West Bank. Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir, Israel’s minister for national security, have both been key figures in a push to annex the territory.

“They’re raising the hornets — and then suddenly they’re frightened of their own creation,” said Ziv, the retired general.

Yair Golan, leader of Israel's Democrats party and former deputy military chief of staff, urged the country's leadership to describe the attacks as "Jewish terrorism."

"How else can you describe this? If the same acts had been committed by Palestinians, we would call this Palestinian terrorism," he said in an interview with Kan News, Israel's public broadcaster. "A country that is unable to safeguard itself from terrorists and is unable to uphold the rule of law, sentences itself to extinction."

Atlanta Journal Constitution

Israel's president: Shocking settler violence must end

November 12, 2025

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's president and high-ranking military officials on Wednesday condemned attacks a day earlier by Jewish settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank, calling for an end to a growing wave of settler violence in the occupied territory.

President Isaac Herzog described the attacks as “shocking and serious,” adding a rare and powerful voice to what has been muted criticism by top Israeli officials of the settler violence. Herzog's position, while largely ceremonial, is meant to serve as a moral compass and unifying force for the country.

Herzog said the violence committed by a “handful” of perpetrators “crosses a red line,” adding in a social media post that “all state authorities must act decisively to eradicate the phenomenon.”

His remarks, and those of two high-ranking military officials, came after dozens of masked Israeli settlers attacked the Palestinian villages of Beit Lid and Deir Sharaf in the West Bank on Tuesday, setting fire to vehicles and other property before clashing with Israeli soldiers.

Israeli settlers torch a mosque and scrawl hateful messages despite official condemnation, November 13, 2025

DEIR ISTIYA, West Bank (AP) — Israeli settlers torched and defaced a mosque in a Palestinian village in the central West Bank overnight, scribbling hateful messages in a show of defiance, a day after some Israeli leaders condemned a recent attack by settlers against Palestinians.

One wall and at least three copies of the Quran and some of the carpeting at the mosque in the Palestinian town of Deir Istiya had been torched when an Associated Press reporter visited Thursday.

This is How We Stand Up Against Settler Violence

20 November 2025 | By Daniel Sokatch, CEO New Israel Fund

Earlier this week, Zak Witus, NIF's director of young leadership, was detained in Ben Gurion airport on his way back from Israel. He had been leading a group of Jewish young people, participants in the NIF's Global Activism Fellowship, on a tour full of learning and action in Israel and the West Bank. As Zak waited at the gate, security pulled him aside. They had gone through his suitcase and found some t-shirts produced by NIF grantee organizations. One was in Arabic and Hebrew. It said "Khalas"—or "enough". He also had a poster that said "Only Peace Will Bring Security."

Zak conducted himself admirably, and, less than an hour later, was on his plane home. But his experience was unnerving, especially since just a week earlier, two American Jewish women—one aged 57, and another aged 18—were not only detained and deported after participating in a Rabbis for Human Rights olive harvest with Palestinians, but banned from entering Israel for ten years. This is egregious.

Let's be clear: the Israeli government has crossed a new line, and it is recasting Israel's relationship to Diasporic Jews. The women in this case are non-violent, loving critics of Israel, not radical anti-Israel activists.

The message the Israeli government is sending to Jews around the world is a stark rebuke to the entire Zionist enterprise as it was once understood: Diasporic Jews are not welcome in Israel if they dare protest what the self-described Jewish State does in the name of the Jewish people.

One of the women, 18-year old Leila Stillman-Unterbach, whose mother is a rabbi, was on a gap year with a program called Achvat

Amim, or “Solidarity of Nations” which NIF also partners with. She [wrote this in the Forward](#) (I recommend you read the whole piece):

I was not wearing a kaffiyeh; I was wearing rings etched with the words of the Shema prayer. It did not seem to matter what I had said in my many interviews that day nor did it matter that I kept Shabbat, could speak nearly fluent Hebrew, and knew where to find the best falafel in Jerusalem. All that seemed to matter is that by showing up as a Jew to aid Palestinians, I was the wrong kind of Jew.

Leila was simply doing what we all ought to be doing—being the “wrong kind of Jew”, the kind who refuses to indulge in supremacy, who refuses to stand idly by as Palestinians face violence by settlers and the Israeli military, and who, instead, stands alongside Palestinians as they nonviolently face the forces of expulsion and annexation. We should all strive to be that “wrong kind of Jew”.

That’s exactly what protective presence activists like Oded Yedaya are as well. Protective presence is a practice that involves accompanying Palestinians shepherds and farmers, who are constantly at risk of harassment from settlers and the army, to their fields. And over the weekend, Oded—a 76-year-old photographer and the father of Ella Yedaya, an NIF staffer in Israel—joined a group of other Israeli activists who gathered together to harvest olives alongside Palestinians. When settlers began throwing rocks and beating people with sticks, Oded was chased down a steep hill and struck with at least two stones. The second one knocked him out cold, leaving a 2-inch gash in his forehead.

MERCAZ Olami, November 14, 2025

Some good news before Shabbat: MERCAZ Olami has signed a balanced, responsible agreement that will shape the leadership, policies and priorities of the national institutions - WZO, KKL, the Jewish Agency, and Keren HaYesod - for the next five years. Through this agreement, we've delivered on our core promises to you laid out during our campaigns in over a dozen countries worldwide.

- A 50% increase in funding allocation to streams including Conservative and Reform institutions and their programs that will benefit our communities in Israel and worldwide.

- Increased funding for MERCAZ's Zionist and Israel education programming.

- Expanded Conservative/Masorti representation on various boards and committees that will make funding allocation and policy decisions over the next five years – a result of our 15% increase in representation in the Congress.

- In the last term, both top positions at the national institutions (KKL Chair and WZO Chair) were held by the right-wing/Haredi bloc. In this term, the pluralistic/liberal bloc will hold half. Yair Netanyahu will NOT hold any position that requires political approval.

- Extremist allies of Itamar Ben Gvir are not included in the agreement.

- Expanded authority for the WZO Vice Chair (MERCAZ's senior position in the institutions), enabling our team to further advance our work and values in the institutions.

- Passed resolutions by wide margins putting the Jewish people on record in favor of an equal draft law in Israel, the formation of an apolitical and impartial State Commission of Inquiry into October 7th, and equal treatment and infrastructure at the Egalitarian Kotel.

The very first thing we must say after listing these significant accomplishments is thank you. These achievements were only possible because of your hard work and your votes. Now, our work continues on for the full five year term.

