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Stop Settler Violence

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<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/05/24/stop-settler-violence.html> ^[1]

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Everything you need to know about Israel's occupation is summed up in a recently released video [showing settlers opening fire on unarmed Palestinians](#) ^[2] in the full view of Israeli troops who appear to make no effort to stop them. Two of the Palestinians were badly injured.

The UN estimated that settler attacks increased by 50% in 2011. The Israeli human rights group Yesh Din has estimated that nine out of ten investigations into these violent incidents fail to result in any prosecutions.

Security in the occupied territories all too often means simply security for settlers. Security for them to create "illegal" settlement outposts. Security to build on privately owned Palestinian land, which can be retroactively "legalized" ^[3] by the Israeli government in defiance of Supreme Court orders. Security to move freely around the West Bank. Security for them to travel on what are, in effect, Jewish-only highways. Security for them to fill their swimming pools and water their lawns while adjacent Palestinian villages go without enough to drink. And, as the video demonstrates, security for them to shoot at Palestinians with impunity in the full view of Israeli security forces who may do nothing to restrain them.

Under the occupation, "security" frequently boils down to freedom for settlers to defy not only international law, but also Israeli law, with impunity. The Israeli military, the Civil Administration, the court system and other basic social structures privilege Israeli settlers—not only over the Palestinians living under occupation, but over other Jewish Israelis.

The settlers receive greatly disproportionate social spending, with their areas more typically

designated “national priority” regions slated for special investment. The Israeli government pays them, literally, to colonize the occupied territories, and subsidizes their entire project at the expense of the rest of Israeli society.

Not all settlers, of course, are violent extremists like the fanatics from Yitzhar who attacked 'Asira al-Qibliya last weekend, as shown in the video. Many simply moved to some of the larger settlement communities not out of any ideological commitment, but because the government was offering them affordable housing and other benefits. But a subset of the settlers are increasingly revealing themselves to be violent fanatics, and have not only carried out “price tag” vigilante violence against Palestinian—often in reprisal for Israeli government actions they don't like—they've also on occasion turned against the Israeli military [4] as well.

The atmosphere of impunity has fed upon itself, leading to numerous brazen incidents such as this one that happened to be filmed last weekend. It goes without saying that the Israeli government, as the occupying power, has a responsibility to protect the Palestinians from these attacks. But it also is worth noting what this growing sense of lawless violence and anarchy on the part of extremist settlers is doing to Israeli society. The Israeli columnist Zvi Bar'el summed up the grim situation by noting that it is not so much that Israel is preparing to annex settlement areas, but the settlers who are increasingly annexing Israel [5].

Settlements are clearly illegal, most notably under article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which is a human rights instrument. People living under foreign military occupation have a basic human right not to have their land taken away from them and given to other people. Settlements are also, of course, the most significant threat to the only potential conflict-ending arrangement: a two-state solution.

But with the upsurge in settler violence, the assault on Palestinian human rights has taken on a whole new dimension. Israeli society not only has to choose if it will persist with the occupation and thereby lose either its “Jewish” or its “democratic” character, or, indeed, both. It also has to choose whether it will allow itself to be defined by the violent behavior of settler fanatics and their supporters in the Knesset.

It's irrelevant that violent settlers are a small minority of both Jewish Israelis and the settlers themselves. When the Israeli military, courts, Civil Administration and other social and governmental institutions default to winking and nodding at these outrages, the whole society becomes complicit.

Very few American Southerners were members of vigilante groups like the Ku Klux Klan during the era of segregation. But because their government institutions, courts, police forces and so forth did so little to restrain or punish racist violence against African Americans and civil rights workers, the societies themselves were widely and correctly viewed as guilty. If the Israeli government and society does not move quickly and decisively to restrain the growing menace of settler violence, it, too, will be widely and correctly viewed as ultimately responsible.

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