

## Political

*update:* Olmert, Barak and IDF condemn attacks by settlers - 10 October

### Key points:

- Settlers attack Palestinians while a majority of Israelis favour settlement evacuation
  - Olmert calls for an end to 'Greater Israel' and condemns violent settlers
  - Barak calls for tougher punishments for attacks on Palestinians and the IDF
  - Olmert promotes significant compensation legislation to encourage settlers to evacuate
- 

### Latest developments

- October has seen this summer's violence continue in the West Bank, with another high profile attack by extremist settlers on Palestinians, police and Israeli Defence Forces. Violence by a small minority of settlers can be contrasted with a developing consensus amongst the Israeli public that settlements should not be retained at the expense of peace with her neighbours.
- In the most recent clash, prominent extremist activist, Daniela Weiss, was detained after attacking police during the forced evacuation and closure of the Shevut Ami outpost, near the settlement of Kedumim on 2 October. During the clashes, the activists set a nearby Palestinian olive grove on fire.
- Research carried out by the Institute for National Security Studies of Tel Aviv University between 2001 and 2007 found that the number of Israelis willing to evacuate all but the major settlement blocs in the West Bank, in return for a permanent status accord with the Palestinians, increased significantly from 50 percent to a clear majority of 59 percent. The 2007 survey also found only 29 per cent of respondents in favour of the notion of a 'Greater Israel'.
- Arguing for an almost complete withdrawal from the settlements, outgoing Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert recently stated that "the notion of a Greater Israel no longer exists" and that initiatives such as the 'Settler Evacuation-Compensation Bill' are central to ending the conflict with the Palestinians (14 September). Vice Prime Minister Haim Ramon (Kadima) proposed the bill to encourage the voluntary evacuation of settlements in the West Bank. The bill would offer property owners in the 72 settlements outside of the security barrier around £180,000 each for their homes. Those homes would then be sealed or destroyed to ensure they could not be reused by other settlers.
- Major-General Gadi Shamni of the Israeli Defence Force, who is responsible for security in the West Bank, said that the rising level of violence from a minority of settlers is impairing the ability of the IDF to carry out its missions (3 October).
- Shamni has stated that the number of extremist settlers who attack Palestinians, Israeli soldiers, police and left-wing activists has grown from a 'few dozen' troublemakers to several hundred:

“Most people behave normally... We are talking about a nucleus of a few hundred activists, out of nearly 300,000 Jews who live beyond the Green Line. But their actions cause tremendous damage, both to the Israel Defense Forces’ image and to the State of Israel” (03/10/08)

- In response to the increased violence Labor Party Chairman and Defence Minister Ehud Barak called for tougher judicial punishments and is to reconvene the “West Bank Forum”, comprised of Shin Bet head Yuval Diskin, IDF Central Command chief Maj.-Gen. Gadi Shamni and senior Israel Police officers, to coordinate state action (16 September). Speaking to the Cabinet on 28 September, Barak argued that the numbers of convictions for recorded incidents of settler violence needed to increase and urged legal authorities to issue more custodial sentences.
- The Judea and Samaria District Police force said that of the 550 investigations into riots of Israelis against Palestinians, security forces and left-wing activists in 2007, only 87 had ended in convictions (9 July 2008).

## Background

- The incident at the Shevut Ami outpost follows a number of similar incidents this year in which Palestinians, police, IDF soldiers and a prominent Jewish peace activist were attacked by right-wing extremists. The Haaretz newspaper reported in August that Israeli security officials are concerned with the increase in violence by settlers in the West Bank (15 August). A recent UN OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) report documented 222 attacks in the first half of this year, compared to a total of 291 for the whole of 2007 (June 2008).
- On 25 September, the home of Ze’ev Sternhell, a leftist professor who has repeatedly criticised settlements as a “historical disaster”, was pipe bombed. Police suspect right-wing extremists of carrying out the attack in which Sternhell was lightly hurt, as they found fliers offering more than NIS 1 million (£160,000) to anyone who kills members of the left-wing organisation Peace Now near the bomb blast.
- Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert blamed the attack on a newly formed Jewish underground (28 September). He told his Cabinet on 28 September that:

“An evil wind of extremism, hatred, violence, malice, of unlawfulness, of lack of restraint, of disregard for the state has swept through certain sectors of the Israeli society and is threatening Israeli democracy... Security forces have been instructed to act with the greatest speed to find those responsible, who appear to be part of a new Jewish underground, and bring them to court.” (28/09/08)

- In the illegal outpost of Yad Yair, a group of settlers burned Palestinian fields and punctured the tires of IDF vehicles in response to their forced evacuation on 18 September. In a statement released by IDF Central Command, the IDF said that they evacuated the illegal outpost. Witnesses from the village of Madameh said that about 200 trees were set on fire by the protesting settlers.
- The incident at Yad Yair followed an attack on Palestinians in the village of Asira al-Kabaliya by settlers from Yitzar and the illegal outpost of Shalhevet Yam (13 September). Over a period of three hours a group of settlers attacked Asira al-Kabaliya, killing a Palestinian youth, injuring eight others and destroying their property. The attack was halted by Israeli Defence Force soldiers who used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the rioters. The attack was provoked by a Palestinian intruder in Shalhevet who burned down a mobile home and while preparing to break into another home was disturbed by a Jewish boy, who he stabbed. The boy was treated for light wounds at a nearby hospital.