

**West Bank****Israeli settlers attack European diplomats in the West Bank**

Belgian foreign minister says his government will 'press for EU sanctions against those responsible for this violence'



The surge in settler violence is the worst in two decades, according to official UN data © Atef Safadi/EPA/Shutterstock

**Neri Zilber** in Tel Aviv

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Israeli settlers assaulted European diplomats in the occupied West Bank on Saturday, just a day after a Washington Post photojournalist was severely beaten by Jewish extremists.

A convoy ferrying French, Belgian and Polish officials to the Palestinian town of Taybeh for the olive harvest was set upon by a group of masked settlers, according to witness accounts and video from the scene as well as Israeli and European officials.

The attackers demanded identification from the group, threatened to kill them and smashed the window of one of the vehicles.

A visiting French mayor was injured in the incident, according to Belgian deputy prime minister and foreign minister Maxime Prévot, who condemned the assault “in the strongest terms” and said his government would “continue to press for EU sanctions against those responsible for this violence and those who support them”.

“Palestinians face this violence every day,” he added. “Settlers also target journalists reporting on it and diplomats. Harvesting olives, reporting the news or carrying out diplomatic duties should never put anyone at risk of attack.”

Palestinian media reported additional attacks in nearby villages in the central West Bank earlier on Saturday, with Israeli settlers hurling rocks at locals attempting to harvest their olive groves and stealing agricultural equipment. The number of injured was not immediately clear.

The surge in settler violence, already the worst in two decades according to official UN data, follows similar attacks across the West Bank on Friday that injured at least 19 people.

Heidi Levine, a veteran photojournalist for the Washington Post, was badly beaten by dozens of settlers in the village of Abu Falah.

Levine, 63, underwent successful surgery on her hand in an Israeli hospital on Saturday. She is also being treated for lacerations on her legs and injuries to her ribs and vertebrae, according to Israeli medical officials and family members.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday appeared to call into question the “facts surrounding the confrontation” during which Levine was “allegedly assaulted”.

Responding on X, the Washington Post’s executive editor Matt Murray said the facts were “neither in dispute nor unclear” and demanded “a thorough investigation and accountability”.

US ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee also called for an investigation into what he called a “despicable act of terror”. He added that Levine is a US citizen and was clearly identified as a journalist.

“Those who attacked [an] unarmed reporter should spend [years] in prison,” Huckabee wrote on X.

Israeli settlers have long operated with near-total impunity, especially during the past three years under Netanyahu’s far-right government. The Israeli military and police rarely stop settlers from carrying out attacks and only a fraction are ever convicted, according to former Israeli security officials and human rights groups.

According to the UN’s humanitarian arm OCHA, there have been more than 1,600 attacks by Jewish settlers on Palestinians and their property this year, putting 2026 on course to be the worst year since the agency began tracking settler violence in 2006.

Responding to Saturday’s attack on the European convoy, the Israeli military said it “strongly condemns the severe act of violence” and said that it was accompanying police investigators to the scene to collect evidence and gather testimonies.

Gideon Sa’ar, the Israeli foreign minister, condemned the attack and said his ministry was in touch with the relevant embassies to facilitate the investigation and bring the attackers to justice.

“Without detracting from the severity of the incident, it is unfortunate that the visit was not co-ordinated with the IDF in advance. Such co-ordination could have helped safeguard the visitors’ security,” he added.

On Saturday, Netanyahu described the incident as an alleged attack on European diplomats and said “serious accusations require serious evidence”.

“These reports come amid concerns about a co-ordinated campaign to smear Israel and the Jewish residents of [the West Bank] during the annual olive harvest, relying on sensational headlines before the full facts emerge,” he said.

Gadi Eisenkot, Netanyahu’s main challenger in the October 27 parliamentary election, said on X: “What is happening in the West Bank is Jewish terror under the auspices of the Israeli government.”

His condemnation was echoed by Yair Golan, head of the leftwing Democrats party and a former Israeli deputy military chief. He said the Netanyahu government was “drowning us all in a sea of terror” and vowed to fight “Jewish terrorism . . . with an iron fist” if the opposition wins the elections.

“No immunity for Jewish terrorists. No compromise on nationalist violence. Israeli law must apply to everyone,” Golan added.

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