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Netanyahu Plots More Illegal West Bank Colonies

The Israeli prime minister's statement on Sunday was presented as a retaliation against countries that recently joined the majority of the international community in recognizing Palestinian statehood.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in April 2021. (DoD, Jack Sanders)

Top Israeli officials on Sunday discussed plans to expand illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank as an act of retaliation against countries that recently joined the majority of the international community in recognizing Palestinian statehood.

The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu released a statement Sunday announcing that government officials “discussed steps to strengthen settlement in Judea and Samaria, including in response to the countries that unilaterally recognized a Palestinian state after October 7, as well as a series of responses against the [Palestinian Authority] following its actions against Israel in [international] bodies.”

“The defense minister and the attorney general requested additional time to comment on several of the proposed clauses,” the statement added.

The government's announcement, released hours before Netanyahu dissolved Israel's war cabinet, comes amid an unprecedented wave of settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank — violence that Israeli soldiers have abetted and frequently joined.

Settlers and Israeli forces have demolished homes, razed refugee camps, set fire to cars and businesses, and carried out summary executions of West Bank residents — including children — in the eight months since Israel launched its assault on Gaza.

Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who has vocally supported the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian territories, recently threatened that Israel's military would turn the West Bank into “ruined cities like in the Gaza Strip.”

CNN noted Sunday that Smotrich suggested last month that “Israel should approve 10,000 settlements in the West Bank, establish a new settlement for every country that recognizes a state of Palestine, and cancel travel permits for Palestinian Authority officials.”

“This is what total unchecked impunity sounds like,” researcher Abe Silberstein wrote on social media following the latest news of Israel’s settlement-expansion plans. “Netanyahu knows Biden will do nothing, and that he will in fact stop others from doing anything.”

The Biden administration, which acknowledged earlier this year that Israeli settlements are “inconsistent with international law,” has sanctioned a handful of settlers as well as an entity accused of fundraising for them, but critics say the actions were largely a public relations stunt.



Israeli soldiers searching a Palestinian in Tel Rumaida, Gilbert checkpoint in the occupied West Bank city of Hebron, January 2012. (Friends123, CC0, Wikimedia Commons)

In May — amid growing global outrage over Israel’s brutalization of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank — Norway, Ireland, and Spain announced their decision to formally

recognize Palestinian statehood, drawing a furious response from Israel's right-wing government, which warned of "severe consequences" for the move.

Earlier this month, Slovenia's Parliament overwhelmingly voted to recognize Palestine, becoming the latest European country to do so.

Meanwhile, Israeli leaders — including Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant — are facing the possibility of arrest warrants from the International Criminal Court's top prosecutor, who applied for the warrants against Israeli officials and Hamas leaders last month.

A United Nations report published last week found that Israeli forces in the West Bank have "committed acts of sexual violence, torture, and inhuman or cruel treatment and outrages upon personal dignity, all of which are war crimes."

"Furthermore," according to the report, "the government of Israel and Israeli forces permitted, fostered, and instigated a campaign of settler violence against Palestinian communities in the West Bank."

U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) said in a statement Friday that "while the world is understandably focused on the destruction unfolding in Gaza, we should not lose sight of what is happening in the West Bank — actions which are in violation of both American and international law."

"Let's be clear: The right-wing, extremist Netanyahu government is not only breaking international law in Gaza, they are doing the same in the West Bank, where they are pursuing illegal annexation by force," said Sanders. "Netanyahu should be facing serious consequences for these violations, not receiving an invitation to address a joint session of Congress."

Jake Johnson is a staff writer for Common Dreams.

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