

Rampaging Israeli settlers burn Palestinian homes, cars in Nablus

Israel and Palestinians agree steps to curb violence

Israeli settlers have carried out arson attacks on Palestinian houses in Nablus hours after Israeli and Palestinian officials pledged to implement measures to de-escalate tensions amid a surge in violence in the occupied West Bank.

Abdullah Al-Huwari, 36, an eyewitness, reported that "large numbers of settlers attacked the village of Huwara [in occupied West Bank], setting fire to homes and cars, Al Jazeera reported.

"Wherever I turn my eyes, I see the flames of a burning house," he said.

The Palestinian Red Cross said 98 people were treated, most after inhaling tear gas, while Israeli emergency services reported three Israelis were injured after being hit by stones.

In a joint statement at the end of the meeting in the Red Sea resort of Aqaba in Jordan on Sunday, Israeli and Palestinian officials said that they would work closely to prevent "further violence" and that they "reaffirmed the necessity of committing to de-escalation on the ground".

They emphasized the "joint readiness and commitment to work immediately to stop unilateral measures" for three to six

months, according to the statement.

Israel was committed to stop "discussing setting up any new settlement units for four months and stop approving any new settlements for six months", a joint statement said.

Host nation Jordan, along with Egypt and the US, considered "these understandings as major progress towards re-establishing and deepening relations between the two sides", the statement said. White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan in a statement said the US recognised the meeting was a "starting point".

"There is much work to do over the coming weeks and months to build a stable and prosperous future for Israelis and Palestinians alike," Sullivan said of the Aqaba meeting.

"Implementation will be critical."

The two sides also agreed to meet again next month in Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt.

Hamas: Meeting was 'worthless'

The Hamas group, which governs the besieged Gaza Strip, condemned the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority for taking part.



An official from the group said the meeting was "worthless" and would not change anything.

The ruling Fatah movement of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas had earlier defended the meeting.

"The decision to take part in the Aqaba meeting despite the pain and massacres being endured by the Palestinian people comes from a desire to bring an

end to the bloodshed," it said on Twitter.

Israel's Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who also has responsibilities over Israeli settlements in the West Bank, quickly said he would not abide by any agreement on freezing settlement construction.

"I have no idea what they spoke about or not in Jordan," Smotrich wrote on Twitter.

"But one thing I do know: there will not be a freeze on the building and development in settlements, not even for one day (it is under my authority)."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has also tweeted saying that settlements won't be frozen, which seems to be contradicting the statement that was released from the meeting in Jordan.



An aerial view of a yard shows cars were torched overnight in the Palestinian town of Huwara near Nablus in the occupied West Bank. **RONALDO SCHEMIDT/AFP**

China: US 'endangered' peace with Taiwan Strait fly-through



REUTERS

China accused the United States of "endangering" peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait after a US military plane flew through the sensitive wa-

terway on Monday, with the US Navy responding that it had been in international airspace.

Beijing has been incensed by US military missions through the narrow strait, most frequently of warships but occasionally of aircraft, saying China "has sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction" over the waterway, according to Reuters.

Taiwan and the United States dispute that, saying it is an international waterway.

The Eastern Theatre Com-

mand of China's People's Liberation Army said its forces closely monitored the P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol and reconnaissance plane, which is also used for anti-submarine missions, as it flew through the strait which separates China from Taiwan.

"The US side's actions deliberately interfered with and disrupted the regional situation and endangered peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. We firmly oppose this," it said in a short statement.

"Theatre forces remain on high alert at all times and resolutely defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity."

The US Navy's 7th Fleet said the aircraft had flown in international airspace and that the United States will continue to fly, sail, and operate anywhere international law allows including within the Taiwan Strait.

"The aircraft's transit of the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the United States' commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific," it ad-

ed in a statement.

Taiwan's Defence Ministry said the aircraft had flown in a southerly direction through the strait.

Taiwan's forces tracked the aircraft as it flew through the strait, the ministry said, noting the situation was "as normal". Washington is Taiwan's most important international backer and seller of arms despite the absence of formal diplomatic ties, and US support for the island is a constant irritant in Sino-US relations.

UN appeals for \$4.3bn to help war-torn Yemen

The United Nations (UN) said it needed \$4.3 billion this year to help more than 17 million people in war-ravaged Yemen, ahead of a donors' conference on Monday.

The Saudi-led coalition's siege has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and plunged the poorest country on the Arabian Peninsula into one of the world's worst humanitarian tragedies, AFP wrote.

Yemen is also at the forefront of the climate crisis,

with severe drought and flooding threatening lives, the UN said.

It acknowledged that "record global humanitarian needs are stretching donor support like never before".

"But without sustained support for the aid operation in Yemen, the lives of millions of Yemenis will hang in the balance, and efforts to end the conflict once and for all will become even more challenging," it said in a statement.

UN chief Antonio Guterres,

who will attend Monday's donor conference in Geneva, said the international community had "the power and the means to end this crisis".

"And it begins by funding our appeal fully and committing to disbursing funds quickly," he said in the statement.

Last year, the UN raised more than \$2.2 billion to enable aid agencies to reach nearly 11 million people across the country every month.



Displaced Yemenis receive humanitarian aid provided by the World Food Programme in Yemen's northern province of Hajjah. **ESSA AHMED/AFP**

NEWS IN BRIEF

Egyptian FM visits Syria after a decade



Sameh Shoukry (L) and Bashar al-Assad **TWITTER**

AFP - Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry on Monday pledged solidarity with the Syrian people after a deadly quake that sparked rare Arab outreach, during a rare visit to the country.

He is the third Arab foreign minister to meet Syrian President Bashar al-Assad since the February 6 quake struck Syria and neighbouring Turkey killing more than 46,000 people, after the United Arab Emirates and Jordan sent their top diplomats.

Belarusian group attacked Russian plane



REUTERS - A Russian A-50 military surveillance aircraft has been damaged in a drone attack at an airfield near the Belarusian capital of Minsk, according to Belarus partisans and members of the exiled opposition.

Belarusian antigovernment organisation BYPOL, which includes former law enforcement officers who support opposition politicians, has been branded a "terrorist" organisation.

Serbia, Kosovo weigh EU proposals



AP - The leaders of Serbia and Kosovo are holding talks on Monday on European Union proposals aimed at ending a long series of political crises and setting the two on the path to better relations and ultimately mutual recognition. Tensions have simmered between Serbia and its former territory since Kosovo unilaterally broke away in 2008; a move recognized by many Western countries but opposed by Serbia, with the backing of Russia and China.