

Palestinians' daily settler nightmare

Mohammed S. Abu Johaysha

Hebron, West Bank

“They stole my bicycle,” sobbed 9-year-old Marwan Sharabati outside his home, pointing at Jewish settlers walking undeterred down Martyr Street in the old quarters of Hebron, south of the West Bank.

His father, Mufeed, rushed to comfort him: “You will get it back, son. Don’t worry”.

“This is part of the daily practices of Jewish settlers, who also shower us with stones, beat our women and kidnap and kill our children with the support of Israeli soldiers,” lamented the older Sharabati, resuming an interview with The Arab Weekly he interrupted to console his son.

A few months ago, Jewish settlers kidnapped Marwan as he played with his sister near their house, his father said. “I raised hell with Israeli police until they fetched him from Jewish settlers and brought him back home,” he said.

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houses were demolished in Israeli attacks

“He’s traumatised and usually screams and kicks if someone taps him from the back while he’s inattentive, thinking it’s Jewish settlers attempting to abduct him again.”

Marwan Sharabati is one of scores of Palestinian children who have been kidnapped, harassed or even burned alive by extremist Jewish settlers under the watchful eye, or allegedly as part of a larger violent campaign, of the Israeli Army, according to accounts by Palestinian and Israeli residents of the West Bank.

Avi Issacharoff, a Middle East analyst for the Times of Israel, argued in a recent opinion piece that the violence will persist because the “state has demonstrated untenable tolerance and turned a blind eye, time after time” on “terrorism” committed by extremist Jewish settlers against Palestinians.

In a gruesome act, Israeli settlers burned to death Palestinian toddler Ali Dawabsheh as the 18-month-old boy slept at home with his parents and brother, Ahmed, 4.

On July 31st, an extremist group calling itself “Price Tag” torched the Dawabshehs’ home in the village of Duma near the West Bank city of Nablus, throwing Molotov cocktails inside, trapping the family. Ahmed and his parents were severely burned. The boys’ father, Saad Dawabsheh, died eight days after the attack.

His mother, Riham Dawabsha, died on September 6th.

A year earlier, Palestinian teenager Mohammed Abu-Khdeir was abducted by Israeli settlers on a street in traditionally Arab East Jerusalem. His charred body was found hours later at Givat Shaul settlement in the Jerusalem forest. An autopsy suggested he was beaten and burned alive.

The murder suspects, Jewish settlers, said the attack as a response to the abduction and killing of three Israeli teens a month earlier.

A spokesman for Rabbis for Human Rights said the Dawabshehs crime was the 10th deadly attack by settlers against Palestinians in Nablus in July. The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), however, provides a more disturbing account. It said the number of Jewish settlers’ attacks on Palestinian civilians, one-third of them lethal, stood at 11,000 from January through June.

Violence against Palestinians is part and parcel of Israel’s occupation policy, draped in numerous crimes that have gone unpunished.

Ali Dawabsheh is no different from the 490 Palestinian children killed in Israel’s 51-day war on the



Marwan Sharabati, 9, stands in a Hebron street guarded by an Israeli soldier and adorned by Israeli flags. (Photos: Mohammed Jhaysha)

Gaza Strip in July 2014. More than 2,200 Palestinians, mostly civilians, died and more than 20,000 houses were demolished in Israeli attacks, said to be retaliation for missiles being fired from the area.

Adel Shadid, a Palestinian expert on Israeli affairs, said Israeli violence emanates from biblical beliefs.

“A growing number of ultra-orthodox Jews, who are rising to prominence in Israeli settler societies, insist that the West Bank and Gaza are for the Jews in line with God’s promise to them,” Shadid said.

“They are killing even children because they think they will grow up to become enemies of Israel.”

Hebron has a Palestinian majority of 170,000 and a small Jewish populace, estimated at 500-800, living mainly near the outskirts of the city. An area, called the H1 sector of He-

bron and home to around 130,000 Palestinians, is governed by the Palestinian Authority responsible for the rest of the West Bank.

H2, which is inhabited by 40,000 Palestinians, is under Israeli military control to protect Jews living in the old quarters of Hebron hills, near Al Haram Al Ibrahimy, Arabic for the Ibrahimy Mosque, also known to Muslims as the Sanctuary of Abraham.

The site is also revered by Jews. It is known as the Cave of the Patriarchs, a series of subterranean chambers that reflect Jewish tradition of double tombs for Abraham and his wife, Sarah, and others. Jewish and Muslim tradition have it that the cave and the adjoining field were purchased by Abraham as a burial plot.

Mufeed Sharabati, the father of

the boy whose bicycle was taken by Israeli settlers, said he and other members of his family have not been spared in the violence by Jewish settlers.

His said his daughter was run over by a car belonging to a Jewish settler in 2014 and he was beaten until unconscious by Jewish settlers and police.

“When I woke up in the hospital hours later, I was told the beating caused a blood clot near the brain and fractured my spinal cord,” he sighed. He said he underwent urgent surgery in Jordan, where parts of his spinal cord and four discs were replaced with artificial implants.

Mohammed S. Abu Johaysha, based in Hebron, the West Bank, has covered Palestinian affairs for ten years.

Abbas faces most dire moment of his presidency

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Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas faces the most dire time in his presidency: divisions that have ripped apart Palestinian ranks, failed peace talks with Israel that have undermined his long-sought quest for statehood, the rise of Islamic militancy in the Middle East and the growing influence of Shia Iran that is drawing the attention of the Arabs away from the Palestinian issue.

Drastic options have been recently floated in Palestinian circles or are at least being talked about as a way to draw attention back to the plight of Palestinians.

Another idea would be for Abbas to dissolve the Palestinian Authority

One idea being circulated is to annul all peace agreements with Israel, starting with the fundamental 1992 Oslo accords, which failed to achieve its primary goal of Palestinian statehood.

Another idea would be for Abbas to dissolve the Palestinian Authority (PA), which Israel virtually stripped of all powers.

Under that move, one or more steps could follow. One is to announce a government-in-exile, shouldering financial, administra-

tive and other responsibilities of nearly 4.5 million Palestinians and their lands in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip on the Israeli occupation.

An alternative is to unilaterally proclaim an independent Palestinian state and immediately declare it under Israeli occupation.

PA official Ahmed Majdalani said he consulted with Palestinian factions, including some in Syria, considering “some decisive options”.

“We can’t remain under the Israeli status quo any longer,” he said. “It’s been 23 years since the peace negotiations kicked off and things are only getting worse for the Palestinian people.”

Abbas’s announcement of a Palestinian state under occupation could come during the UN General Assembly, which recognised a “state of Palestine” in 2012, Majdalani said.

The level of Abbas’s frustration was evident when he and nine other members of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) resigned August 22nd. Reports on the resignations and their reasons were contradictory.

While Abbas said the decision was “irreversible”, Saeb Erekat, the chief Palestinian negotiator with Israel who was recently named the PLO’s secretary-general, said the resignations were “unofficial” until approved or refused by Palestinian legislators.

Ghassan Shakaa, one of the officials who quit, said the move was aimed at “injecting new blood in



Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (C) addresses Palestinian leaders’ meeting, on March 4, 2015.

the PLO” to “renew the work and the legitimacy of the Executive Committee”.

But another Executive Committee member, Mustafa Barghouti, told The Arab Weekly that the purported resignations were “technical means” to ensure the quick assembly of the Palestinian parliament-in-exile, known as the Palestine National Council (PNC).

Even that institution was dragged into the Palestinian tumultuous debate. A meeting of the PNC was called shortly after the resignations. The PNC was supposed to convene September 14th.

But on September 9th, PNC Speaker Salim Zaanoun announced that the meeting was postponed indefinitely, saying

more preparations were needed to convene the largely lethargic and long-ignored body, which had last met in Gaza in 1996.

Abbas appeared eager to have the congress assemble, clearly to consolidate his power by garnering renewed support from the people’s representatives as he weighs his options.

Abbas has voiced impatience with Israel’s intransigence in peacemaking. The talks have been stalled for years and there is little chance that they will resume under the current Israeli cabinet, the most hard line in recent history.

The Palestinian president is also nervous about Israel’s negotiations with his rival, the militant Hamas rulers in Gaza. Dealings

between Israel and the Palestinian group it considers a terrorist organisation may further sideline the PA and deepen existing Palestinian divisions. Hamas violently seized Gaza from the PA in June 2007, sparking a deep rift with the PLO’s influential Fatah faction headed by Abbas.

Adding fuel to the fire is what Palestinians see as a lackadaisical US approach towards their peacemaking with Israel. Palestinians worry that the issue will be shelved until a new US administration is in place in 2017.

Regionally, Abbas’s Arab “brothers” are preoccupied with civil wars or militant violence, such as in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya, while others are anxious over Iran’s growing influence in a Sunni-dominated Arab world.

Al Quds Open University lecturer Adel Shadid said Palestinians were at a “crucial, historic juncture” in the wake of the “catastrophic failure of the peacemaking process”.

“Israel used the negotiations as a ploy to undermine our quest for statehood and claims to East Jerusalem as the capital of our state.”

It has also been beefing up settlements in East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank to create a new reality on the ground and impede any viable negotiated settlement,” Shadid said.

Therefore, Shadid added, what is needed are crucial moves, such as “reconsidering Palestinian recognition of Israel, declaring an end to the political process and ceasing economic and security relations with Israel”.