

## WEEKEND

## Who's afraid of Mansour Abbas?

The war against Iran may move up the elections. Will that help spur voters from centrist parties to consider joining forces with the Arab parties?

Michal Sella and Noam Gidron

As of now, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appears to be buoyed by Israel's ostensible wartime achievements, which is why members of his Likud party are increasingly discussing his desire to move the elections up to June. The expectation is that an early election would shift those of the "bloc of change" into high gear and strengthen cooperation between all the opposition parties, especially after Arab party leaders recently announced their joint run. That move is expected to boost Arab voter turnout, which has declined in recent years, and to make it harder for Netanyahu to form a new government.

If so, why did we not hear jubilant cries from the leaders of the opposition parties after this announcement?

The reason is that October 7, 2023, produced a new oxymoron in Israeli politics: The leaders of the "government of change" (from June 2021 until December 2022, under rotating premiers Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid) – who were only able to cobble together their ruling coalition thanks to a partnership with the United Arab List, led by Mansour Abbas – are now ruling out any possibility of cooperating with an Arab party. They are taking this position even though it's clear to everyone that cooperation between the two sides could significantly increase the prospects of replacing the present government.

Nevertheless, opposition leader MK Lapid (Yesh Atid) is refusing to sit in a coalition with Arabs; and MK Benny Gantz (leader of the National Unity Party) has launched a campaign against "extremists on both sides," which draws a comparison between a pyromaniac national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir (Otzma Yehudit), and Abbas, who consistently reiterates his commitment to forging a Jewish-Arab partnership. Meanwhile, Naftali Bennett filed a complaint with the Central Elections Committee against Likud; the committee recently ordered that the party delete a doctored photo from its X account showing the former prime minister with leaders of the Arab parties when they made their declaration of unity.

Let's return to those cries of jubilation (or, rather, their absence). Until October 6, there had been a spectacular, months-long public protest in the country against the government's regime coup. Masses took to the streets in the name of democracy, which was being



United Arab List leader Mansour Abbas. There is a good chance that the way to power of the parties leading the opposition will have to entail cooperation with the Arab parties.

Olivier Fitoussi

trampled underfoot; after all, one must remember, equal political rights are a basic tenet of democracy. But since the war broke out in Gaza, some of our opposition leaders have stopped leading and are now being led in many areas – notably, when it comes to their attitude toward the Arab parties.

Every morning they stick a finger out the window to check which way the wind is blowing. They look at the polls in order to ascertain whether they are allowed to broach the idea of a partnership with the Arab parties that day, instead of working to shape public opinion in a way that will facilitate their rise to power.

Moreover, they are becoming captive to Netanyahu's moves. When he flirts with the idea of forming a coalition with Abbas' UAL, these leaders don't object. But when the right wing treats the Arab community like a punching bag in order to divert the public's attention from the debacle of October 7, some of them actually help intensify that distraction instead of fighting it.

Thus, the opposition leaders' only excuse for taking this approach is that after October 7, their imagined base isn't capable of entertaining the idea of an Arab party in the coalition.

However, the latest "Partnership Index," based on an annual survey conducted by Givat Haviva – The Center for Shared Society, shows that the vaunted base takes a different view. The index is based on a survey conducted together with Midgam, a market research and public opinion firm, and its founder, Mano Geva, among 422 respondents who constitute a representative sample of the adult Jewish population, and 280 others who constitute a representative sample of the adult Arab population.

The question posed by the Partnership Index survey was: "Do you support or oppose involving an Arab party in the coalition?" An analysis of the data based on respondents' self-described political worldview (right, center or left) found that among those identifying as centrists 41 percent support the co-option of an Arab party into a future coalition, 47 percent said they are against that and 12 percent said they don't know. An analysis of respondents supporting the so-called bloc of change revealed that 43 percent support bringing in an Arab party, 48 percent are against and 8 percent don't know.

These figures show that there is no

clear preference one way or the other among centrist voters on this issue, but instead a feeling of openness vis-à-vis broader political and moral considerations.

In addition, a majority of 58 percent who categorize themselves as centrists as well as 56 percent of those who stated that they would vote for an opposition party do not harbor unequivocal views on this question, but are only "somewhat against" (26 percent) or "somewhat support" bringing an Arab party into the government.

As for the idea of a coalition being supported by an Arab party "from the outside," among those who declared they opposed including such a party in a coalition, more than a quarter (26 percent, constituting 15 percent of all centrist voters) would agree to having outside support from such a party; among right-wing voters who are against a coalition partnership, 12 percent responded that they would accept outside support.

In other words, there is a sizable proportion of supporters of opposition parties who might support leaders intent on forging Jewish-Arab cooperation. And there is good reason to assume that this could happen – not least because it has al-

ready happened in the past, in the case of the successful cooperation with the UAL during the period of the Bennett-Lapid government.

Moreover, data collected by one of us (Noam Gidron) together with Prof. Lior Sheffer, from Tel Aviv University's School of Political Science, Government, and International Affairs, shows that when leaders of the parties in the Bennett-Lapid government opted for cooperation with the UAL, many of their voters followed suit.

Surveys conducted before the formation of the government of change, and afterward, examined how the Jewish public feels toward different parties by asking a simple question: How would you rate the parties on a scale of 0 (negative feeling) to 10 (positive feeling). After formation of that government, voters for the diverse parties that were part of the Bennett-Lapid coalition expressed more positive feelings toward the UAL.

This finding is valid not only for "immediate suspects" such as Yesh Atid voters; it also holds for supporters of Yisrael Beiteinu, led by MK Avigdor Lieberman, which has a long history of slamming the country's Arab community and its representatives in the Knesset.

These results – indicating a positive shift in the way the public perceives an Arab party, namely UAL, in the wake of its participation in the previous coalition – may appear surprising. But in fact they reflect well-established findings in political science studies that relate to affective polarization, i.e., dislike and animosity across political divides, between supporters of rival parties. Coalitions are not only the embodiment of an agreement to apportion rule to different politicians; they also function as a strong, clear message to the general public as to which parties are considered to belong to "our side."

The cardinal issue that will affect the coming election, no less, will hinge on the ability of the heads of the centrist parties and of the bloc of change to assume the role of leaders and not followers.

Studies conducted over time in various countries have found that cooperation in the framework of a coalition leads to more positive feelings among the voters affiliated with the various parties that banded together to form that coalition. In other words, the actions of the parties influence the attitudes of their voters. The positive change in attitude toward the UAL among voters for the parties in the Bennett-Lapid government – keeping in mind all the unique circumstances of the Israeli case – precisely reflects patterns found overseas. Determined leaders can definitely take focused action to influence attitudes among the public that supports them, including on questions of who should belong to a particular coalition.

The cardinal issue that will affect the coming election, no less, will thus hinge on the ability of the heads of the centrist parties and of the bloc of change to assume the role of leaders and not followers. In other words, their realization of the fact that they indeed have the ability to influence their voters and to lead them toward the only path that could facilitate political change and renewal.

This point is particularly important when it comes to the political representation of 20 percent of Israel's citizens. There is a good chance that the way to power of the parties leading the opposition will have to entail cooperation with the Arab parties. There apparently is a significant group of opposition voters who are receptive to this idea. They deserve a leadership that knows how to lead.

Michal Sella is CEO of Givat Haviva – The Center for a Shared Society. Prof. Noam Gidron is on the faculty of the Department of Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

## ‘Like a fire in the heart’

Residents of the village of Susya in the South Hebron Hills are forced to seek refuge from Iranian missiles in a tent that was torched by a group of violent settlers. As the skies above them thunder and sirens wail, they simply have no place to hide

The Twilight Zone  
Gideon Levy and Alex Levac

First the cellphone vibrates, warning of a possible real-time missile alert. Even if it's for the umpteenth time, panic ensues – especially when there's no place to flee. And indeed a few minutes later a siren can be heard, wailing from a distance – from the lush, thriving settlement of Sussia.

In Jewish Sussia the inhabitants enter their safe rooms; in Palestinian Susya – which is part of the Masafer Yatta complex of hamlets in the South Hebron Hills – you have a choice between continuing to sit inside a burned-out tent, or going outside and watching the trajectory of the missiles and the interceptions, and the long, white plumes of smoke spreading across the sky. There are thunderous booms and the tent shakes intensely, under the dome of the heavens.

What do you usually do, we asked our hosts during a visit earlier this week. "We will either die from the attacks of the settlers, or from the bullets of the soldiers, or from the missile," says Nasser Nawaj'ah, a resident of Susya and field researcher for B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories.

"Do you think this burned-out tent

could possibly protect us? It's our life," he says. "What can we do? Nothing. We embrace the missile; in any case, there is no point in continuing to live like this."

The sheep went on grazing, the dogs covered while the ear-splitting alarm was sounded at the settlement – and we stood beneath the azure sky and looked up at the crisscross of feathery white trails.

The Israel Defense Forces Home Front Command's list of places that receive heads-ups about a possible missile strike includes all the settlements in the area, among them "the Jewish settlement in Hebron." The city of Hebron itself, with a population of a quarter of a million Palestinians, and the Palestinian villages surrounding it, clearly don't exist for the Home Front Command. No one in Israel gives two hoots about the lives of their inhabitants.

So it goes in an apartheid state that no longer feels any shame about its apartheid. In another reality, a bit saner and more humane, the dispossessed would have invited their dispossessed neighbors to their shelters in wartime. But here that's a totally surreal concept. Here the former torch the latter's villages.

Susya, with its population of 350, lies between the ancient archaeological site of Sussia and the settlement of the same name. The Palestinians, who were born and grew up in caves amid the antiquities, were expelled from their village in 1986 and moved to the other side of the road, settling on what remained of their land. At the original site a settler outpost was created.

Since then the Palestinians have lived

here in the shadow of fear and violence caused by the settlers, the army and the police. When the settlers' attacks intensified last year, the villagers petitioned the High Court of Justice, which ordered the army to prevent Israelis from entering Susya, in order to protect the inhabitants from the marauders.

The High Court's decision was never honored here in this lawless land: The pogromists launch raids almost every day. Nawaj'ah, from B'Tselem, says that every time they call the army to complain after settlers raid their homes, the residents remind the IDF of the High Court ruling that bans the settlers' entry. The soldiers say they'll check the situation out – but never lift a finger to expel the intruders.

The white plumes in the sky having dissipated, we could take a closer look at the sooty area around us. The contents of the tent nearby are scorched, charred, blackened. Mattresses, furniture, school-

Field researcher Nawaj'ah has no doubt: "Someone decided when and how to do it, where to enter from and how to leave. It's not just a matter of a few violent kids, as Netanyahu puts it; it's an organized operation."

books, clothes, shoes and of course the tent itself – all were torched about 10 days ago. A red fire extinguisher also lies among the objects set ablaze. An iron stove in the center of the tent still emits weak heat. The family was not sleeping in the tent that terrible night, but in a one-room structure next to it, to their good fortune.

This is the home of Halima and Ahmed Jaber – she's 38, he's a shepherd of 40 – and their two daughters, Sara, 11, and Siwar, 10. Settlers showed up here on Tuesday last week at 8:10 P.M. and set about torching their compound, setting fire to the tent, the fence of the sheep pen and the chicken coop.

Spotting the flames from the window of his home, about 300 meters away, Nasser Nawaj'ah rushed to the scene with his 18-year-old son, Ahmed-Nasser. The video clip he filmed shows flames shooting up and Halima shouting: "The house is on fire... Water, water, call the firefighters! ... I hope the [cooking] gas canisters don't blow up!" It was terrifying.

The fire extinguishers the local council distributed a few months ago to every home in Susya – this was not the first arson attempt – finally put out the fire in the tent. Halima recalls how frightened she was, and adds that she was even more afraid when settlers tried to break into the hut where she had taken refuge with her husband and daughters.

"We have seen every type of violence here, but a fire is something else," she tells us. "You see flames coming out of your home and it's like a fire in the heart. Since then I have been incapable not only



Halima Jaber with her daughters Sara and Siwar in their tent, in Susya this week. "We have seen every type of violence here, but a fire is something else," she says.

of going outside in the dark, but even of looking out the window."

After torching the Jabers' chicken coop and the pen, the settlers moved on to the next family.

The home of Fatma and Khader Nawaj'ah, both 56, and of their daughter Ilin, 23, is about 40 meters south of where we're standing. The Fiat truck in their yard is a blackened hulk, and a jeep was damaged as well.

"We were all home," Fatma relates. "We had finished the Ramadan prayers and were about to go to sleep. Suddenly Ilin said, 'Dad, there are three settlers next to your jeep.'"

Immediately afterward they saw on the feed of the security cameras they erected outside – there is no home here without such cameras – dozens of settlers, all of them masked and wielding

clubs, streaming toward their home. They smashed the jeep and set it ablaze, then torched the Fiat.

Before moving on, they tried to break into the house where the family was hiding behind a locked door. Unable to force it open, they pepper-sprayed the room through the window screen. Fatma recalls that shortly before the attack, they saw the settlers driving around outside near the house.

As soon as the invaders left, Khader went outside and managed to save the jeep from total destruction. As he was dousing the flames, settlers approached again – but then they noticed soldiers who had arrived on the scene in the interim and beat a cowardly retreat.

Field researcher Nawaj'ah, who is

Continued on page 13

## Idan Yaron

The SUV speeds closer. Four masked Jewish assailants quickly leap out. They jump from the vehicle, clubs in hand, and move toward the camera. The blows begin at once. The woman filming pleads – “Help, no, no, please, no!” – but it makes no difference. They beat her mercilessly and brutally attack another man, drawing blood. Even after both collapse, the assault continues, while the attackers demand: “Where are the Arabs?”

The incident took place last weekend in Qusra, in the West Bank. This time the victims were Jews, left-wing activists, but it was only a glimpse of a quickly changing reality. The “hilltop and farm youth” (the latter element being most dominant today) are shedding their skin – or at least exposing their dark nature. Developments in recent years, intensified after the October 7 massacre, are starkly visible against the backdrop of the war with Iran.

The emerging leaders of the violent settler movement, who once preferred to operate under the radar, have in recent years embraced digital platforms and thrust themselves into the open. They have launched an amplified campaign steeped in hatred, killing and destruction. On social media they openly call for expanding the war with Iran to all fronts, urge people “not to take their eyes off Judea and Samaria,” and implore followers to “eradicate the evil from the face of the earth.” They say it outright: “If we don’t seize the opportunity to expel them now, they will go on sitting and planning how to kill as many Jews as possible.” Most alarmingly, it appears there are those – in high echelons – who respond to their poisonous message.

Contrary to common perception, the so-called hilltop and farm youth never operated as an unruly mob. Their activity was always grounded in a coherent ideology, not random hooliganism. Nor was it uncontrolled. They did not function as an anonymous crowd without responsible parties. As a sociologist, I am well acquainted with the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci, who argued that no social movement is ever truly spontaneous. Even those that appear to be are in fact led by committed activists with a history of deep engagement with their core aims. A few years ago, the phenomenon struck me as amorphous and diffuse. I saw the hilltop youth as a social movement built on compartmentalized “hills” – isolated cells with little direct communication, no clear hierarchy and no formal command structure. In that sense it resembled decentralized movements such as Islamic Jihad networks operating in the West, which have posed real challenges to authorities. It seemed spontaneous and apolitical, a form of leaderless resistance – a concept developed in the United States by an intelligence officer, Col. Ulius Louis Amoss, and later refined by the neofascist leader Louis Beam.

In recent years, especially since October 7, I’ve come to realize that the hilltop and farm youth have undergone a genuine transformation. From a shapeless, diffuse structure whose strength lay in its resilience, the movement has begun consolidating into a more institutional organization. In place of an absence of leadership, a kind of virtual leadership has emerged – and, as I see it, one with tangible, real-world influence.

Still, it does not operate as a formal organization in the sense described by Max Weber – one governed by legitimate authority exercised through explicit norms and defined offices. If it resembles such an organization at all, it is mainly in its sense of *Politik als Beruf* (politics as vocation): the expectation that activists devote their full energies to shared goals.

This evolution has been accompanied by two key trends on the ground. First, the hilltop and farm youth – albeit belatedly – have embraced digital communication technologies, from mobile phones to online networks. Second, the movement has grown more centralized and hierarchical, even if it still lacks a genuine supervisory bureaucracy.



A settler in Ras Ein al-Auja, a Bedouin community in the West Bank, whose residents fled in January due to harassment. Deployed in the area and equipped with mobile phones and recording devices, hilltop and farm youth activists have become a kind of forward-acting unit for the settlement enterprise.

Hai Ron

## Not a few bad apples, rather quasi-militias

They operate as part of a sprawling network that is centralized, hierarchical and internet savvy. The so-called hilltop and farm youth have undergone a transformation and are more dangerous than ever

Until recently, their use of digital tools was relatively limited. That stemmed not only from technical or operational considerations, but also – perhaps chiefly – from values and principles. Many activists believed such tools distracted them from their primary duties: Torah study and the observance of commandments, foremost among them the commandment to settle the Land of Israel. Over time, however, the importance of the internet in general, and social media in particular, became clear. These platforms were understood to complement and reinforce – even if not to replace – face-to-face interaction.

The government’s greatest fear is not a single hierarchical organization but thousands of phantom cells acting against it – a nightmare for counterintelligence, as it provides no fulcrum through which to strike at the core.

Without them, a movement like the hilltop and farm youth would likely have dispersed, lacking mechanisms of coordination and control.

Today their communications network – from leading figures to the last activist or “foot soldier” in the field – appears far more integrated and coordinated, even if it remains widespread and complex. The internet and social media have paved the way for networked organizations; in business contexts these tend to be more decentralized and less hierarchical, but in the case at hand they are more struc-

tured and organized than in the past. A striking example is the U.S. far-right “alt-right” movement, which in some respects resembles the hilltop youth. Under such conditions, a small number of highly motivated activists can disseminate extreme messages, enabling the emergence of local – and at times even global – terrorist cells.

This phenomenon was previously described in the context of Palestinian “lone wolf” terrorism, in an article by Eric Barbing (Harris) and Or Glick. Through computers and mobile phones, young people connect to platforms that allow them to communicate and share files – messages, videos, images and location data. For many young people worldwide, particularly Palestinians, this is almost their exclusive mode of communication, through which they sustain operational ties, plan attacks and even declare their intent to carry them out.

Deployed in the area and equipped with mobile phones and recording devices, hilltop and farm youth activists have in recent years become a kind of forward-acting unit for the settlement enterprise. Positioned at direct friction interfaces with Palestinians and Bedouin communities, they report any perceived opportunity for harassment, repression, dispossession or expulsion. Satellite phones are installed at the agricultural farms-outposts from which the shepherd youths operate. Those on-site receive real-time updates and feed social media and relevant central (responsible) bodies with intelligence. When trouble arises, reinforcements are summoned quickly, and a local clash can rapidly escalate into a large, charged and violent confrontation, sometimes with deadly results.

On social media, a distinct leadership layer is taking shape. Even on platforms perceived as horizontal and egalitarian, soft leaders operate in practice: a relatively small group of energetic, influential and well-connected activists who exercise considerable control over the

flow of information. This control is not institutional but rests on unequal distributions of social capital online. Those with greater online presence attract larger audiences, enjoy higher levels of trust and exert influence that is not only horizontal but also vertical. Prominent activists thus become influencers. Figures such as Elisha Yered, Elhanan Gruner, Meir Ettinger and Ariel Danino maintain X accounts and use them to engage with the secular-liberal public in an effort to explain and justify their actions, goals and means.

Beyond this, distinctive “nodes” are emerging online. Particularly important nodes that both channel and absorb information are known as super-nodes. In the West Bank they are sometimes referred to as security dispatchers or operations rooms. A central super-node is the news platform HaKol HaYehudi (The Jewish Voice, in Hebrew), founded in 2009 by a group from the Yitzhar settlement associated with followers of Yitzchak Ginsburgh, an American-born Israeli rabbi affiliated with the Chabad movement. The initiative evolved into an independent media organization funded by donations. With the outbreak of the Gaza war, its investigative desk expanded, as did the number of volunteers operating what they described as an “intelligence operations room,” tasked with collecting information from Arab networks and passing it to security authorities.

Another super-node is the activist group that coalesced around the Nilhamim Al Hahaim (Fighting for Life) Headquarters, which openly incite to violent extremism and even encourages vigilante terrorism. Its Telegram channel states that it aims to provide mental and security backing to the residents of Israel in general, and Judea and Samaria in particular; with an emphasis on “protecting open areas, monitoring Arab incitement and suspicious Arab movement.” Another example is what is called the Struggle Channel group, which shares Palestinian

reports of so-called price-tag (retaliatory) attacks carried out by “joyful Jews” and of “Jewish takeover of territory.”

The Spanish sociologist Paolo Gerbaudo has argued that digital communication technologies transform how social movements communicate internally and externally, as well as how they recruit and organize activists. He notes that the rise of radical and extreme right-wing movements in many Western countries has been accompanied by their growing centrality online. The combination of these two trends – the adoption of digital communication and the parallel shift in organizational structure – has exposed much

Internet use in general, and particularly social media, generates digital signatures. Their accumulation forms patterns that can expose both the structure and dynamics of a virtual network, as well as the real-world phenomenon it reflects.

of the movement’s skeleton, including its backbone. As described by Ori Brafman, who writes about decentralized leadership and network empowerment, the hilltop and farm youth have begun to behave more like a “spider” than a “starfish.”

In this sense, the new reality brings the movement closer to an underground model. The hilltop and farm youth have long felt an affinity with the pre-state Jewish undergrounds, especially Lehi (the militant Fighters for the Freedom of Israel). Yet they have avoided replicat-

ing their operational patterns. Above all, they internalized the lessons of the radical right-wing fundamentalist organization, the Jewish Underground, of the late 1970s and early ‘80s, understanding that overt organizing vis-à-vis the authorities is undesirable.

These insights were reflected in documents drafted by movement leaders. In a June 2012 paper titled “A Practical Plan to Save the Outposts and the Hills in the Holy Land,” it was stated that “leadership in times of struggle is actually detrimental.” A 2013 document, “For Revolt 2,” was even more explicit: “Unlike a revolt based on an underground or an organization, the intention here is not a structured body managing the activity.” The authors added that “there are many reasons for this,” and that “it is enough to note that the current situation does not permit such an organization to survive.” Accordingly, an earlier document, “For Revolt 1,” emphasized that “the role of the revolt’s leadership (if such exists) is limited to supporting activity, publicizing it and creating appropriate resonance and public-intellectual backing as needed.”

Beam, the neofascist, who developed the concept of “leaderless resistance,” understood that the central government’s greatest fear is not a single hierarchical organization but thousands of small phantom cells acting against it. Such a situation is a nightmare for counterintelligence, as it provides no fulcrum through which to strike at the core. Even if one or several cells are exposed and neutralized, the broader network remains largely intact.

Beam also warned that processes of institutionalization and consolidation into command-and-control structures are particularly dangerous in technologically advanced societies – such as a high-tech state like Israel – where resistance organizations become easy targets for intelligence penetration. The risk increases in dense networks with numerous sustained mutual connections, which can be analyzed to extract information about meaningful patterns.

Beyond the obvious advantages of digital tools, there are significant drawbacks. Internet use in general, and social media in particular, generates digital signatures – records, likes, comments, audio clips and technical data related to time and location. Their accumulation creates patterns that can expose both the static structure of a virtual network and its dynamics, as well as the real-world phenomenon it reflects. Monitoring based on social network analysis, location and usage data, and structural mapping can identify leaders and activists, and uncover additional cells and groups. Super-nodes such as HaKol HaYehudi or Nilhamim Al Hahaim Headquarters are especially vulnerable, since much communication flows through them. Such nodes are more exposed today than ever before.

At the same time, a vacuum on the ground – while security and law enforcement authorities turn a blind eye to violence by hilltop and farm youth against Palestinians and Bedouin – has strengthened these groups’ sense that they are on a roll. This feeling was amplified after some settlers began celebrating them as avant-garde. Such dynamics almost inevitably breed complacency.

These manifestations – including graffiti claiming acts of arson and vandalism for the “King’s Battalions,” portrayed as quasi-militias, and openly boasting of violent and terrorist acts – increasingly expose the movement and its spokespeople. The consequences of this complacency and overexposure may become fully apparent in the foreseeable future, if not sooner, depending on the political and social circumstances that unfold in the state. When Mao Zedong declared “let a hundred flowers bloom,” he later explained that he intended to entice snakes out of their lairs and to get them to raise their heads – so they could then be crushed. Those who raise their heads would do well to remember this historical lesson – unless they will be condemned to repeat it.

Idan Yaron, Ph.D., is a sociologist and social anthropologist specializing in the far-right in Israel.

Continued from page 12

related to the family that was attacked, has no doubt: This time it was a well-planned, organized assault. “Someone decided when and how to do it, where to enter from and how to leave,” he says. “It’s not just a matter of a few violent kids, as [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu put it; it’s an organized operation. After dividing into squads, the settlers set fire to a number of homes in the village simultaneously and left exactly 12 minutes after launching their raid on Susya.”

They also torched one of the cars that transported them – a *mashtaba*, or unlicensed rundown vehicle, which the settlers had confiscated from a Palestinian to use in their attack. That night, in total, the marauders set fire to three vehicles, as well as torching three structures and tents, a chicken coop and an animal pen. They also ripped open the barbed-wire fence that surrounds the residential compound, to facilitate their intrusions.

One of the videos shows a settler throwing a stone at a security camera, to knock it out. The locals turned over the cameras that had documented the incident to the police, who arrived in the village to investigate the assault that same night.

In the meantime the wailing of another siren can be heard from the direction of the settlement.

Now the fire extinguishers have to

In another reality, a bit saner and more humane, the dispossessors would have invited their dispossessed neighbors to their shelters in wartime. But here that’s a totally surreal concept. Here the former torch the latter’s villages.

be fixed, for use in the next arson attack, which is sure to come. Nawaj’ah of B’Tselem says the village needs a proper fire station. For their part, he says, the settlers have no more red lines to abide by. Last Saturday, he continues, one of the settlers he recognized from Sussia’s emergency squad showed up in uniform. The locals told him that a court decision forbids him from entering, and he retorted: “For me there is no law and no court. No law.”

No one has been arrested yet for the attack. A spokesperson for the Israel Police told Haaretz: “Immediately upon receiving report of the incident, an investigation was launched. Thus far findings and testimonies have been collected with the aim of discovering the identity of those involved and finding them. The investigation is still underway.”

Right, still underway – without even one arrest having been made from among the 30 men who tried to torch and destroy the village, as part of an incident that was, as it happened, filmed and documented, over a week ago.



Fatma Nawaj’ah with her family’s burned truck this week. After torching the vehicles, the masked, armed settlers tried to break into the house. Unable to force the door open, they pepper-sprayed the room through the window.