**The map of violence along Route 60**

**Shaul Arieli, Haaretz, September 2, 2021**

[**https://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/.premium-1.10176415**](https://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/.premium-1.10176415)

In response to a request he received from 100 soldiers in July regarding settler violence, Defense Minister Bnei Gantz wrote: "Most of the settlers in Judea and Samaria are normative and law-abiding people" (Haaretz, 21.7). A close examination of 423 different incidents of settler violence documented by B'Tselem between January 1, 2020 and July 31, 2021, shows that Ganz was indeed right.

However, the examination clarifies that the directive of the Minister of Defense to the IDF, who was present at most of the incidents, "to act actively to maintain security and order in Judea and Samaria, while exercising all the traditional powers for IDF soldiers in law and in full coordination with the Israel Police" does not materialize. The government, the Knesset, and the Israeli public must act against the perpetrators of violence and ensure success in dealing with them.

All of the documented incidents - shooting, assault on homes, physical assault, property damage and damage to crops - occurred at the back of the mountain, along Route 60, except for a few incidents (in Maskiyot in the northern Jordan Valley). Route 60 serves as a central axis in the West Bank, and along it, settlements of the national religious current, "Gush Emunim", have been established at various points, in order to dismantle the Palestinian territorial continuity and prevent the establishment of a viable Palestinian state.

In the heart of the areas where the violent incidents took place are 19 settlements (which are 15% of all settlements in Judea and Samaria). These settlements - some of which are accompanied by several illegal outposts - are scattered from Shavei Shomron in the northern West Bank to Susya in the south. The leading ones, out of the 19 settlements, in the number of incidents in their area, mainly shooting and assault incidents, are Yitzhar and Bracha, Ali and Shiloh, the Jewish community in Hebron, Maon and Susya. At the end of 2020, 57,400 Israelis lived in these 19 settlements, which is only 12.6% of the total Israeli population in Judea and Samaria.

The most prominent and significant figure in relation to these 19 settlements is the fact that in the last elections, in March 2021, the "Religious Zionism" party led by Bezalel Smutrich, Itamar Ben Gvir and Orit Struck, was the largest party in 16 of them (and most even received more than 50 % Of voters). "Yamina", led by Naftali Bennett and Ayelet Shaked, was the second largest party in most of these settlements, and it even enjoys the primacy in one settlement. Another prominent feature of these localities is their low socio-economic ranking. 37% are ranked in the lower third of the scale (clusters 2–3), and all, except Neve Tzof (cluster 6), are ranked in the lower half of the scale (clusters 2–5).

If the location of the events indicates their perpetrators, then some of the voters of "Religious Zionism" in these settlements are trying to realize the main goals of the party - "Greater Israel, annexation of Judea and Samaria and judicial restraint" - in violation of the law. After failing to achieve a Jewish majority and spatial dominance under Israeli law, which is very "flexible" in their favor, they try to achieve it in violent and illegal ways, and will do everything in their power to prevent a settlement with the Palestinians.

In negotiations with the Palestinians, Israel has never demanded the annexation of any of these small and isolated settlements, which were established deep in the Palestinian densely populated area. Ariel Sharon sought to vacate some of them as part of the disengagement plan in 2005, in order to create a Palestinian territorial continuum that would make it easier for the Palestinian Authority to govern the West Bank, even without a permanent settlement.

The main points of the policy of "Religious Zionism" were described in an interview given by Smutrich to Channel 7 in September 2017, in which he emphasized, among other things, that his program is "the only program that is not willing to leave an Arab collective with a desire to realize national aspirations here in Israel… Therefore, there must be no Arab collective here ... Anyone who thinks he will stay here and continue to undermine our existence and our Jewish identity will meet a determined IDF. After the conscious decision will also come the military decision ... I want to recreate what happened in 1947 on both sides of the Green Line ... the only way to protect the only Jewish state in the world is to cut off the hope of the other side".

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett must make a clear statement against the violent minority, instruct the security forces to act accordingly and, most importantly, ensure that the directive is implemented. And the Minister of Defense, who wrote in his letter that "we must not, as a society, allow individuals seeking to spread the fire of hatred between us and our neighbors to set the tone", to ensure that the IDF does not allow a violent minority to succeed in its activities. It must be ensured that the IDF's presence at the events translates into active involvement in the prevention and arrest of those involved, in cooperation with the police and the Shin Bet. The Knesset and the Israeli public face a greater challenge: they must recognize the dire consequences of the agenda of "Religious Zionism" and the statements of its leaders, which create an atmosphere that encourages violent behavior, and exclude them from the political system in Israel.