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Could E1 be the trigger that sparks a new round of violence?

Israeli intentions to build in E1 have both the material and the symbolic significant that could turn into a trigger for a new uprising. It's time for a new path.

By Jamie Levin and Craig D. Smith

A good number of pundits have recently heralded the demise of the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The culprit, they argue, is Netanyahu's [proposed settlement expansion](#) in the area unceremoniously dubbed E1. While there seems to be consensus on a terminal prognosis for a Palestinian state, few have investigated what this will mean for the future of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship, which will inevitably degrade.

The timing of the announcement is the clearest possible statement that Netanyahu and his coalition partners do not recognize the legitimate Palestinian desire for statehood, and will take extraordinary steps to prevent it. While Israel failed to block the largely symbolic Palestinian bid for [self-determination at the UN](#), it retains the ability to eliminate the possibility of a viable Palestinian state on the ground. If building in E1 goes ahead, the West Bank will be bifurcated between north and south, and East Jerusalem, the would-be capital of any Palestinian state, will be permanently severed from the rest of the West Bank.

Equally important, however, is the fact that Netanyahu's announcement acts to undermine the moderate government of Mahmoud Abbas, whose tenuous claims to authority will be fundamentally undermined by the loss of Palestinian land. If Abbas cannot stop Israeli bulldozers, Palestinians will continue to question his legitimacy as a leader.

Against this backdrop, negotiations will seem futile. So too will the non-violent Palestinian protests in places like Bil'in and Susia, which garner little attention in the mainstream Israeli press. Instead, violent resistance to Israel, characterized by the actions of Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, and others, will prove ever more attractive.

Historically, when other avenues to statehood have been frustrated, Palestinians have resorted to resistance against Israel, sometimes peaceful, sometimes violent. The [First Intifada](#) started in 1987 after twenty years of Israeli occupation of the territories seized in 1967, with no end in sight. It lasted until 1993 and the signing of the Oslo Peace Process, when Israelis and Palestinians for the first time engaged in serious dialogue meant to end the occupation through the establishment of a Palestinian state. The Second Intifada began after the collapse of Oslo and with it hopes for Palestinian statehood.

While the narratives, tactics, and consequences associated with both Intifadas are subject to endless interpretation, what should be clear is that both were motivated by Palestinian frustrations with the Israeli occupation. Psychologists term this reaction the frustration-aggression hypothesis. When aspirations are frustrated individuals and groups lash out, often violently.

Contemporary life in the West Bank provides no shortage of frustration. Anyone who has spent even a day traveling in the West Bank will understand the almost super-human patience involved in navigating the web of settlements, bypass roads, checkpoints, and the [separation barrier](#), particularly as it meanders away from the Green Line. And the majority of Palestinian interactions with Israelis are often of the worst possible kind. Violent, fanatical, and destructive settlers are often protected by the IDF. Night raids and home demolitions are regular occurrences throughout the West Bank. Palestinians rarely interact with Israelis in such a way that would engender empathy or understanding (and vice versa). The two peoples couldn't be further from a sense of common destiny.

Under such circumstances all that is needed for the next Palestinian uprising is a trigger. The catalyst for the First Intifada was a collision between an Israeli armoured vehicle and a group of youth from the Jabalia refugee camp, which injured seven and left four dead. The Second Intifada erupted soon after then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon made a symbolic visit to the Temple Mount/Haram Al Sharif, accompanied by over 1,000 security personnel.

Settlement expansion in E 1 has both a strong material effect, as did the trigger for the First Intifada, as well as deep symbolic meaning, as did the trigger for the Second. Construction in E1 will end any hope of a contiguous Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. It frustrates Palestinian aspirations on both counts. Thus, Netanyahu's recent announcement should be genuine cause for alarm for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Rocket fire from Gaza aside, the relative quiet of the past seven years has meant that a majority of Israelis live in a bubble of imagined security. The bus that exploded on November 21 in Tel Aviv is a terrible reminder of the massive human toll that a return to open hostilities will reap. A new settlement bloc cannot possibly be worth the price.

Time is short. The settlement construction in E1 might prove to be the last stop on the road to a third Intifada. Israel's leaders must finally come to accept that the frustration of Palestinian national aspirations leads to serious consequences. It's time for a new path.

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