



The Strategic Answer to the Temple Mount Crisis: Settlement

by Prof. Hillel Frisch

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Conflict management, when applied to the Israeli-Palestinian problem, is insufficient to achieve Israel's interests. What is needed is a strategy of renewed settlement that will educate the Palestinians about the costs of their actions, divide their ranks instead of tactically unifying them, and keep it a conflict over land – which can eventually be resolved – rather than over religion, which is probably unsolvable.

Israel's bureaucratic establishment – the IDF, Shabak, and Mossad, as well as many politicians, opinion makers, and commentators – supports the idea of conflict management in the relationship between Israel, the PA, and Hamas until some future time that might be more auspicious for peace.

They are wrong. As any businessperson knows, maintaining market share means losing ground to the competition. The same is true of politics in our region. Absorbing and containing Palestinian violence is a losing strategy, as the recent events on the Temple Mount prove.

The answer lies in the vision and strategy of settlement.

Why settlement and not some other strategy?

Israel's policy of conflict management has encouraged the Palestinians to focus on the Temple Mount. Throughout the conflict, the Temple Mount has been the Palestinians' most successful rallying point.

In 1929, when the Mufti popularized the slogan "al-Aqsa Is In Danger", the population of Mandate Palestine rallied to defend it. It was only on the Temple Mount, 33 years after the Six Day War, that Israeli Arab citizens rioted in large

numbers together with their counterparts from over the Green Line. They chanted, "In spirit and blood we will defend al-Aqsa". Never before had they rallied over any other symbol of Palestinian nationalism.

The strategy of conflict management – the approach of dealing tactically with Palestinian violence – is turning the clash into a religious conflict, and religious conflicts are notoriously difficult to resolve. A renewed strategy of Israeli settlement would shift the conflict once again to nationalist land claims. Conflicts over land are by no means easily solved, but they at least have the potential to be resolved at some future date.

A strategy of Israeli settlement in Judea and Samaria is also tactically wise. Conflict management promotes tactical unity among the Palestinians, who agree that because Israel wants to contain violence, it is in their interest to continue to foment it. A settlement strategy would divide the enemy rather than unite it. Abbas's PA and its ruling party would almost certainly turn their attention to stopping settlement, while the Islamists – Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hizb al-Tahrir, and their supporters – would champion the defense of al-Aqsa. Dividing the energies of Israel's foes would go a long way towards reducing violence.

A settlement strategy would signal to the other side that there is a cost to continued violence. Under the present strategy, the only costs are the deaths of young Palestinians. Those who incite them not only do not regard their deaths as a cost, but do everything they can to increase their numbers.

Strategic settlement would impose a flexible price list on the other side. The extent of settlement would be commensurate with the Palestinians' political actions (as in the PA's activities at the UN) and their acts of violence. It is important to recall that what brought Arafat to the Oslo process and the acceptance of autonomy (however temporary), to which he was violently opposed for decades, was the need to "sav[e] what can be saved" – i.e., to take control of territory that Israel had not yet settled.

The knowledge of a painful anticipated cost to a contemplated action can prompt restraint. In numerous analyses of crises of war and peace, prior knowledge of an undesirable likely result of a provocative or violent act has been shown to reduce the dimensions of conflict.

Settlement as a policy also maintains the high moral ground. As long as the conflict continues, Israel – hearkening back to the Zionist movement of the past as well as the Israel of the future – will build. The message is clear: they burn, maim, and kill; Israel builds.

Settlement is emblematic of Israeli ingenuity. Israelis are poor at static bureaucratic action but much better at innovation. Maaleh Adumim, Ariel, Gush Etzion, and Kiryat Arba are some of the finest examples of Israeli state-building. Settlement befits the start-up nation. Doing nothing but absorbing Palestinian violence does not.

A renewed strategy of settlement can be a welcome antidote to the pathological tendency of Israel's political elite towards tactical thinking, as was seen during the Temple Mount crisis and the crisis of the Gaza tunnels. The tunnels should have been left to Southern Command to resolve. Instead, a state commission, headed by a judge whose understanding of security matters is questionable, decided the prime minister and security cabinet should have dealt with them.

A settlement strategy would restore the right way to govern: strategically. This cannot be done by bureaucrats at the IDF, Mossad, or Shabak. Strategic thinking is the art of politicians and statesmen, not bureaucrats.

Absorbing Palestinian violence is folly. Settlement is strategy.

Prof. Hillel Frisch is a professor of political studies and Middle East studies at Bar-Ilan University and a senior research associate at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies.

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