

## **“Only New Israeli Policy Will Bring Peace”**

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As the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians continues with no peace deal in sight, some historical perspective might be of help.

Israel's anger at terrorist attacks is understandable, but its demand that the violence cease *entirely* before peace talks are rekindled is unlikely to be met.

Decolonization, after all, has always been a painful process, especially when settlers were involved. In most cases, tragically, the political violence began to wind down only when settlers withdrew or relinquished power.

Today, hundreds of thousands of Israelis live in enclaves scattered through the West Bank and Gaza. Their presence stems chiefly from ideology, but the broader political dynamic resembles other instances of European colonization in the developing world.

Then, as now, settler lobbies were a powerful conservative force, slowing political negotiations down and blocking the decolonisation process.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon says that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is the source of his country's security problems. Israel, however, must also examine its own policies. Thirty years of Jewish settlement on Palestinian lands, combined with military occupation, must also be at fault.

For peace to truly be possible, Israeli authorities must confront Jewish settlers with the same determination they display towards Palestinians, forcing them to withdraw into Israel proper. Until they do so, the political violence is not likely to end.

Consider French involvement in Algeria, where European troops finally left in 1964 amidst bombings and bitter internal unrest. The French republic almost collapsed, and army units rebelled against orders to leave. As is true in today's Israel, many French citizens were disenchanted with the colonial enterprise long before the war ended. Like their counterparts in the West Bank and Gaza, settlers blocked a French withdrawal for years, arguing the government must not bow to terror. After the death of 1 million people, mostly Algerians, decolonisation took place and the settlers finally left.

The war did not end, however, until the French government risked all in a painful showdown with the settlers and their allies. The French leader, Charles de Gaulle, finally confronted his domestic opponents and forced French troops to withdraw.

In sub-Saharan Africa, similarly, decolonization was always bloodiest when settler communities were involved. In the British colony of Rhodesia, for example, whites revolted in 1965 and declared independence, torpedoing Britain's offer of political rights to the African majority.

Subsequently, Rhodesian settlers helped trigger a bloody civil war that dragged on until 1980, when Zimbabwe was finally created. Today, white settlers are still playing a key role in that country's crisis over land entitlements and political power.

In Mozambique and Angola, the Portuguese government's 1974 attempt to end colonial rule also prompted settler protests. Whites launched violent attacks on Africans, hoping to trigger reprisals that would delay Portugal's withdrawal. The attempt failed, but the violence made decolonization a more painful affair.

In African countries without European settlers, by contrast, decolonization was markedly less brutal. States such as Nigeria, Uganda, Ghana, and Gabon had their share of problems, but with no settlers to block change, European rule could end with little real violence.

Why did these settler colonialism end so bitterly? Settler populations, whose identity and material well-being were vested in the colonies -- often for several generations -- were often reluctant to abandon their homes without a fight.

In many cases, moreover, European residents formed powerful political lobbies to protect their interests. Working with allies in the European army and legislature, settlers blocked political change and manipulated notions of patriotism, racial identity and democracy.

Finally, the presence of die-hard settler outposts also provoked tit-for-tat cycles of attack and reprisal, increasing the number of civilian casualties and radicalizing combatants on all sides.

European governments always came to regret their early support for settlement activity and decolonisation always involved confrontation between the settlers and metropolitan authorities. Although colonial troops fought bitter wars with indigenous rebels, confrontation with the settlers themselves was also required.

Today, Israel says it will continue to hold the West Bank and parts of Gaza until a final deal with the Palestinians is reached. Jewish settlers are to remain in their homes, protected by Israeli troops. In the meantime, Israeli leaders say Palestinians must halt the violence entirely.

The historical record suggests Israel's demands will not be met. Having injected settlers into Palestinians areas in the first place, the Israeli government now faces a painful reality of its own creation. The violence will slowly begin to subside when the settlers leave, not vice versa.

Eventually, Palestinians may become true partners in peace, but this can come only after they can control their own politics, borders, and natural resources.

Functioning partnerships such as those built between Israel, Egypt and Jordan, can only arise between sovereign states of equal stature and political status.

Israeli leaders must confront the powerful settler lobby today and begin to de-escalate the Jewish-Arabs wars.

If they fail to do so, the Arab-Israeli conflict will drag on for years, claiming more innocent lives.

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