

Israel's Doomsday E-1 Settlement. Diabolical Encroachment to Prospective Palestinian State

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has definitely crossed an international red line to vindicate a swift and firm rejection from Israel's closest allies when he announced plans recently to build a new settlement on a corridor of occupied Palestinian land in East Jerusalem, which will render any prospective Palestinian contiguous state territorially impossible. Daniel Seidemann, the Israeli founder of Terrestrial Jerusalem, has condemned it as "the doomsday settlement" and "not a routine" one.

Netanyahu risks a diplomatic confrontation that will not develop into a diplomatic isolation of Israel because Israel's allies have decided to pressure him to backtrack by "incentives and disincentives" instead of "sanctions," in the words of the British Foreign Secretary William Hague.

Summoning Israeli ambassadors to protest Netanyahu's plans by Australia, Brazil, France, UK, Sweden, Denmark and Spain was nonetheless an unusual international outcry because "if implemented," his "plans would alter the situation, with Jerusalem as a shared capital increasingly difficult to achieve," according to William Hague, thus "seriously undermining the two - state solution" of the Palestinian - Israeli conflict according to the French foreign ministry spokesman Philippe Lalliot, which is a "solution without which there will never be security in Israel," according to the Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr.

The international outcry is not against the Israeli policy of settlements on Palestinian occupied land per se, but against this one particular E-1 settlement, which was Netanyahu's answer to the overwhelming recent recognition of Palestine as a non-member state by the UN General Assembly.

Because, on the ground, the site of some 4.6 square miles (12 square km) of this settlement on the easternmost edge of eastern Jerusalem will close the only territorial link between the north and south of the West Bank and sever it from East Jerusalem, the prospective capital of the State of Palestine, thus undermining any viable and contiguous Palestinian state on the territories occupied by Israel in 1967 and turning the recognition of the UN General Assembly on November 29, 2012 as merely a Palestinian paper achievement.

The U.S. and the EU opposed the E-1 (East One) plan since it was taken out of Israeli drawers in 2005; because they were alert to its potential undermining effect on the "peace process." Now, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and the United Nations have all warned against the E-1 plan.

The White House and US State Department described the plan as "unilateral," "counterproductive," "sets back" peace efforts, "especially damaging to efforts to achieve a

two-state solution,” “complicate efforts to resume direct, bilateral negotiations” and “risk prejudging the outcome” of such negotiations, and “contrary to US policy.”

The EU high Representative Catherine Ashton on Dec. 2 said she was “extremely concerned,” described the plan as “an obstacle to peace,” condemning “all settlement construction” as “illegal under international law,” a judgment shared by UK’s William Hague who added the plan “would undermine Israel’s international reputation and create doubts about its stated commitment to achieving peace.” Italian Premier Mario Monti and French President Francois Hollande in a joint statement said they were “deeply worried” by the plan. German government spokesman Steffen Seibert said his country was “deeply concerned.” Sweden’s Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said the plan was “extremely worrying.”

China’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said his country “has always firmly opposed Israel’s construction of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory of East Jerusalem and the West Bank.” Russia “views” the plan “with the most serious concern” because it “would have a very negative effect.” UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon warned the plan “would represent an almost fatal blow to remaining chances of securing a two-state solution.”

All the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and the United Nations called on Israel to “rescind,” “reconsider,” “reverse” its plans, “go back on them,” “exercise restraint” and “eliminate obstacles to the peace talks with Palestine.”

However, when it comes to translating their words into action they stand helpless, to render all their statements “an audio phenomenon” as described by Abdul Bari Atwan, the editor-in-chief of the London – based Arabic daily Al-Quds Al-Arabi, a hollow outcry short of an overdue action by the world community.

It is no surprise therefore that Netanyahu is encouraged enough to insist on pursuing his plans.

The international community’s inaction could not but vindicate the expected Palestinian reaction. President Mahmoud Abbas late on Dec. 4 chaired a Palestinian leadership meeting in Ramallah, attended for the first time by the representatives of the rival Hamas and Islamic Jihad movements. They decided to ask the UN Security Council to adopt a binding resolution obliging Israel to stop all settlement activities in the occupied State of Palestine, concluding that Israel “is forcing us to go to the International Criminal Court (ICC).”

Netanyahu’s defiance and the Palestinian leadership’s decision will both put the credibility of all the five permanent members of the UN Security Council to an historic test: They either decide to act on their own words or their inaction will inevitably leave the Palestinians with the only option of defending their very existence by all the means available to them.

For Palestinians, to be or not to be has become an existential issue that could no longer be entrusted to international community.

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