

Analysis: Palestinians saw chance for violence, and took it

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**Palestinian protestors rolling burning tyres last Tuesday in East Jerusalem during clashes with Israeli security forces**

The conflict between Israel and the US over construction in Jerusalem could have been turned into a positive opportunity. Instead, the bumbling of both governments has given Palestinian radicals another excuse for violence.

While the northern Jerusalem area of Ramat Shlomo, where the units are planned, is adjacent to the 1948 "green line", and far from areas of friction, the timing of the decision reflected a wider Israeli insensitivity. Vice President Biden was understandably embarrassed and angry when this attitude was highlighted during his visit. And PM Netanyahu was exposed as lacking control over his own government on issues of central importance.

Had the Obama administration made do with Mr Biden's disapproval, and used this incident to launch a much-needed discussion over Jerusalem, boundaries and settlements, the results could have been significant.

Instead, the flood of American condemnations and attacks, perhaps aimed naively at toppling Mr Netanyahu, were interpreted by Palestinians as a green light to launch another round of conflict over Jerusalem. Since the 1929 Arab riots, which began at the Western Wall and ended with the Hebron massacre, cries over the "Judaisation of Jerusalem" have been used to ignite wider conflagrations. Just before Mr Biden's visit, clashes in Silwan, and attacks from Palestinian youths using the Temple Mount to rain rocks on Jewish worshippers below, resulting in heightened tensions. In this atmosphere, the repeated and unprecedented attacks against Israeli policy in Jerusalem from the Obama administration added fuel to the fire.

Egged on by Al Jazeera and other partisans, Muslims were told to come to the defence of Jerusalem, using the excuse of the long-planned dedication of the restored Hurva synagogue. The heads of Hamas attacked Fatah under Mahmoud Abbas for their willingness to talk about peace, and radical Israeli Arab leaders called for "a day of rage", chartering buses for reinforcements.

At this stage, some US officials recognised the dangers of escalating violence, and the State Department added condemnations of Palestinian violence to their stern words for Israel. But this was scarcely noticed, and came too late to influence the events on the ground.

For Israelis, these events serve as a bitter reminder of the silence of the international community during the desecration of the Jewish Quarter, and the

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