1 Introduction

On July 19, 2005, approximately one month before the implementation of the Israeli government's plan for disengagement from the Gaza Strip, a massive gathering of Israeli protesters and security forces confronted each other in an agitated standstill outside the Strip. On one side, tens of thousands of activists and supporters of the Settlement Movement arrived at the scene as part of what they called the "connection march" with the declared intention of breaking into the quarantined Gaza Strip. On the other was an unprecedented force of eighteen thousand armed police and soldiers with the unequivocal governmental directive to defend the quarantined zone at all costs and prevent protesters from infiltrating the Gaza Strip settlements. The tense atmosphere was exacerbated by wide-spread media coverage and by public opinion, partly informed by Israeli General Secret Service evaluations, claiming that the chances of civil war were high. Revealingly, however, the aggrieved mass of protesters quietly turned back after a highly charged exchange between leaders of both sides. The protesters marched into a nearby small town, surrounded by a heavy police force. It took several days of picketing, public prayers, vigils, and provocative attempts to break through the town's fences before the protesters eventually complied with the police order to leave the site.

The "connection march" was the height of an almost eighteen-month-long campaign against the government's disengagement plan, also known as the Gaza Pullout. In early 2004, amidst the ferocious second Palestinian Intifada and as part of a controversial unilateral policy concerning the Occupied Territories,[1] Prime Minister Ariel Sharon made the Plan public (see Figure 1). It was not the first time Sharon had raised the possibility of engaging in painful compromises over territories. Nonetheless, the publicity given to the Plan in early 2004 after an interview with the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* and the degree of specificity with which Sharon presented it made the gravity of the moment clear. The plan entailed the evacuation of more than 9,000 Israeli citizens from all twenty-one Gaza Strip settlements and an additional four settlements in the upper part of the West Bank.

The smaller of the two Palestinian territories occupied by Israel in the June 1967 War (the other being the West Bank), the Gaza Strip differed in several important aspects. Politically and geographically, located along the southern coastline of Israel, it was controlled by Egypt. In contrast, the West Bank was under Jordanian rule and located inland along the center of Israel. Demographically, the Palestinian

---

[1] The term Occupied Territories refers to the Gaza Strip, the West Bank (inclusive of East Jerusalem, renamed Judea and Samaria shortly following the June 1967 War), the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula.

Figure 1 Map of disengagement plan, 2005

Source: Shaul Arieli's Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Maps Archive

population of the Gaza Strip was less spread out and was mainly centered in three exceptionally high-density areas: in the north of the Strip, around the city of Gaza; in the center, around the town of Deir al-Balah; and in the south, around the city of Khan Yunis.

Israel's takeover of these areas in 1967 saw two main developments: The first was the use of measures meant to prevent Palestinian residents from returning to their homes after the war ended, to force them out of the country, or to lure them to do so via a variety of incentives (Segev 2005). The second was Jewish coloniza-tion following a governmental decision in June 1970, and was carried out as part

of a larger program called the Five Fingers Plan. The idea was to establish army footholds throughout the Gaza Strip in order to divide the Strip at five different horizontal lines from north to south. Israel established the first army foothold in October 1970, which became the precursor of the bloc of agricultural villages later to be known as Gush Katif (Hebrew for harvest bloc). While the first colonies were not necessarily religious in affinity, nor did they occupy a central role in the Settlement Movement, the situation gradually changed over the years as a result of economic, security, and political developments (Admoni 1992; Pedatzur 1996; Huberman 2005).

Alarmed by the unprecedented scope and volume of the Pullout, Jewish settler and right-wing organizations that were part of the broader Settlement Movement launched what became the most intensive, wide-ranging, and sustained cycle of contention in the history of Israel: the anti-Pullout campaign. Relying on an unprecedented pool of resources and allies within the political establishment and the general public, the movement mobilized hundreds of thousands of activists and supporters in various institutional and extra-institutional orchestrated contentious events. Between February 2004 and August 2005, movement actors initiated legislative motions, votes of no-confidence, street rallies, mass marches, vigils, and countrywide barricades and traffic jams. They even managed to bring about ministerial resignations and a vote on a public referendum bill for the first time in the history of the Israeli Parliament (the Knesset).

Despite noteworthy achievements, the anti-Pullout campaign failed to stop the implementation of the plan. Between August 15, 2005, and September 22, 2005, Israeli security forces ended the almost four-decade-long Jewish presence in the Gaza Strip – organized in settlements, most in the Gush Katif bloc – dismantling as well four settlements located in the northern part of the West Bank. The campaign was highly intense and tumultuous, involving numerous acts of disruption and passive resistance, but was largely nonviolent. Throughout the campaign (and the actual weeks of eviction, for that matter), only a handful of violent incidents aimed against Israeli and Palestinian targets occurred (see Figure 2 below). Some of these violent incidents were not directly related to the pending Pullout; others involved self-harm or were initiated by individuals with no organizational affiliation.[2]

---

[2] This assertion is based on a systematic collection of data on contentious events and the coding of violent events according to whether or not an event resulted in bodily or property damage. All data presented in this Element follow the same coding rules. Treating instances of passive resistance and other disruptive acts as violence, no matter how drastic and threatening they were, would be a gross over-stretch. Including foiled attempts or uncovered plots would be problematic as well, as it conflates different criteria. Though the campaign did involve such events, they were coded as disruption or classified them as intentions (i.e., militant incitement to violence – see Figure 2 below).

1.1 The Context

The full significance of the predominantly nonviolent nature of the struggle against the Gaza Pullout should be evaluated in light of the rich record of engagement in political violence (including terrorist violence) by member factions and groups of the broader settlement movement.[3] Taking shape following the June 1967 War and aiming to settle the territories occupied by Israel after the war, the movement ultimately became the most influential social movement the State of Israel has ever known (Newman 1985; Lustick 1988; Sprinzak 1991; Pedahzur 2012; Hirsch-Hoefler and Mudde 2020).

While settlement attempts had begun shortly after the 1967 War, a full-fledged settlement campaign started only after the October 1973 Yom Kippur War. Alarmed by the territorial withdrawals associated with the armistice agreements with Syria, Egypt, and Jordan, a group of activists formed the Bloc of the Faithful (Gush Emunim) and embarked upon a determined drive to settle Samaria, the northern part of the West Bank. Their relentless campaign to establish a settlement near Sebastia, a Palestinian village located in the West Bank, north of Nablus, lasted from June 1974 until December 1975, and involved eight settlement operations before a compromise with the government was reached.

The Sebastia campaign exemplified several features of the movement that combine to present the tension between two strains of political activism that has kept shifting in one of two directions ever since – one toward militancy and radicalism and the other toward moderation and pragmatism. First, an inherent tension existed between movement actors' commitment to the law of the State (i.e., *Mamlakha* – Hebrew for kingdom) and Jewish law (*Halakha*), often expressed in valuing religious principles and injunctions over those of the State's legal system. At times, this tension extended to two opposing approaches vis-à-vis state institutions and Israeli democracy more broadly, namely *Mamlakhtiyut* (i.e., an integrationist approach) versus *anti-Mamlakhtiyut* (i.e., a segregationist approach) (Lustick 1988; Peleg 2002). Second, seeking to act as a bridge between secular Zionist Israelis and Ultraorthodox Jews and claiming to represent the entire Jewish-Israeli public, the movement nonetheless systematically aimed at catering to the Religious-Zionist[4] public sector. Promoting a separate educational system, youth clubs, and special army units often led to tense relationships between religious and secular elements within the movement and a hostile stance toward Israeli progressive forces

---

[3] In this Element, the term *settler* has a different meaning from *colonist*. A settler is a person seeking to colonize a particular land or territory they believe was promised to them by a divine power, in this case, the God of Israel.

[4] An ideology and a "camp" (or grouping) within the Zionist Movement and, post-independence, within Israeli politics and society. Religious Zionism views Zionism and Jewish nationalism more broadly as a fundamental component of Orthodox Judaism rather than as an anti-thesis of it.

(Dalsheim 2011). Finally, due to the settlement population's broadening presence inside the Occupied Territories and daily friction with the Palestinian population, the relationship between it and Israeli security forces was frequently tenuous. The tension between normative and instrumental stances among movement actors toward Israel's defense forces became particularly acute during heightened Palestinian unrest and upheaval. Alongside compliance, cooperation, and at times collusion with the defense forces, were also growing signs of vigilantism and willingness to raise arms against soldiers and police officers (Weisburd 1989; Levy 2007; Gazit 2015)

Whenever the government endorsed a policy restricting settlement activity or considered territorial compromises, the movement experienced intense internal factionalism and, at times, the splintering away of radical factions engaging in violent actions against Palestinian and Israeli targets. Some examples were the formation of a clandestine network called the Jewish Underground during the implementation stages of the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt, which initiated attacks against Palestinian targets; the Sicarii underground group active during the first Palestinian Intifada, which carried out a terrorist campaign against Israeli leftwing intellectuals; and, later, a small underground group formed by Yigal Amir and his brother, which was responsible for assassinating Prime Minister Rabin in late 1995 in the context of the Oslo Accords.

Without underestimating the importance and gravity of these (and other) challenges, the Gaza Pullout plan was unprecedented in its adverse consequences for the settler community and the settlement enterprise. It was the first time the Israeli government had evacuated a predominantly religious settler population of such a magnitude and from so many settlements – all located in territories many Israeli Jews considered to be an integral part of the biblical promised land of Israel (i.e., Greater Israel). Moreover, the plan was announced amidst the ferocious second Palestinian Intifada and was seen by many as the continuation of a highly controversial and submissive unilateral policy toward the Occupied Territories (i.e., the construction of a separation barrier). Finally, the anti-Pullout campaign witnessed constant Palestinian attacks on settlements, increasingly vocal Israeli opposition groups, and escalation of incitement to violence by ultra-radical settler groups. Public polls and assessments by security advisors and specialists reported in the Israeli press offered dark predictions of a civil war. As it turned out, however, there was little violence in the anti-Pullout campaign.

This Element's account of why there was little violence during the anti-Pullout campaign represents an attempt to add something meaningful to our understanding of a highly recurring and pertinent phenomenon: *Radicalization*.

Radicalization is commonly defined as the systematic, frequent adoption of more unruly and violent forms of contention by a group that is part of an opposition movement.[5] When radicalization slows down or reverses, it is often called *De-radicalization* (e.g., Bjørgo and Horgan 2009; Alimi et al. 2012, 2015; della Porta 2018). This Element is about the prevention of radicalization, namely, instances of contention wherein contending actors put a brake on the systematic, frequent adoption of violence – labeled here *Contained Radicalization* (Goodwin 2007; Alimi 2018; Brooke 2018; Malkki 2020; Busher et al. 2023). Specifically, it is about the history of relation-building within the settlement movement and between it and the Israeli state and its agents, which made it a story of contained radicalization despite the presence of factors identified in the literature as drivers of radicalization. Studying "exceptions to the rule" or negative cases is at least as important as learning "cases that prove the rule" (Emigh 1997; Burawoy 1998). As will be demonstrated, contained radicalization is not simply the absence of radicalization or its reversal, but a process in its own right.

1.2 The Puzzle

One dominant explanation for radicalization (and contained radicalization, for that matter) follows cognitive lines. Works in this cognitive tradition share the assumption that ideologies, worldviews, and other perceptual and cultural templates, such as identity, discourse, and consciousness, shape behavior, sometimes compellingly.[6] It follows then that a focus on values and ideologies held by movement actors suggests much about the development of a sense of inefficacy, counterculture, and, consequently, willingness to raise arms. Broadly speaking, then, when a given group holds an ideology or values that tolerate and justify the use of violence, we should expect the adoption of more unruly and violent forms of contention (e.g., Sprinzak 1998; Stern 2003; Asal and Rethemeyer 2008).

---

[5] Two clarifications. The omission of cognitive aspects from the definition is purposeful. It is possible to have group activists holding beliefs that increasingly justify intergroup violence (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008) without them engaging in actual violent behavior. While references to radical ideologies and goals constitute a central part of the analysis, they are seen as necessary yet insufficient drivers leading to engagement in violence. This is consistent with the Element's explanatory organizing principle according to which relations mediate the salience of such cognitive forces. To avoid further convolution, I use the terms *militants* and *militancy* when referring to instances where violence remains at the level of rhetoric (see della Porta 2013; Alimi et al. 2015).

[6] What I label here as cognitive, environmental, and relational lines of explanation is consistent with Tilly's (2003) classification of three camps in the study of collective violence. I prefer "cognitive" over Tilly's "idea people," and "environmental" over "behavioral people" to avoid confusion with this Element's focus on behavioral radicalization.

Works that follow cognitive lines to explain the radicalization of member groups of the settlement movement are in no short supply (Lustick 1988; Sprinzak 1991; Aran and Hassner 2013). Weisburd and Lernau's (2006) explanation for the lack of higher levels of violence during the anti-Pullout campaign is particularly noteworthy. The authors argue that the lack of settler violence related to what they call "normative balance." While many Jewish settlers held ideologies and values that justified violence, they "also voiced what can be defined as countervailing norms that discourage violence with other Israelis and encourage lawful behavior" (p. 43). Given the involvement of both Gaza Strip and West Bank settlers and the differences in their claims, ideology, and goals, as well as action strategy and tactics, the question remains of how such a normative balance was managed in actual situations and varying contexts relating, for example, to Palestinian attacks.

A second dominant explanation for radicalization follows environmental lines. Focusing on the autonomy of motives, impulses, and opportunities in the face of environmental stimuli as the origin of aggression, works following this tradition point to depletion of resources, greed, incentives for benefits, and an acute need for protection (e.g., Collier and Hoeffler 1999; Piazza 2006; Gupta 2008). From this point of view, when a group is exposed to environmental changes or events that undermine basic needs, such as security, or experiences profound perceptions of deprivation and anger, we should expect its members to engage in violence.

Among the settlement community, it would be difficult to exaggerate the shock, disbelief, and anger following the publication of the Gaza Pullout plan. This was particularly so in light of the continuing, at times intensifying, Palestinian attacks and rocket fire (inclusive of mortar shells – see Figure 2). Historically, instances of Jewish-settler violence against Palestinians increased whenever the former felt the Israeli political and security authorities provided them with insufficient protection or endorsed conciliatory measures and policies toward the latter (Weisburd 1989; Zertal and Eldar 2004; Pedahzur and Perliger 2009). During the Gaza Pullout campaign, a handful of violent attacks against Palestinians did take place close to and during the implementation of the plan, two of which resulted in the loss of Palestinian lives. It is telling, however, that the two lethal attacks were carried out when Palestinian rocket fire was no longer an issue, by individuals with no apparent organizational affiliations. Of greater significance is the fact that Palestinian attacks and rocket fire were a non-issue throughout the protest campaign in the sense of being unrelated to the level and form of contention of movement actors.

Figure 2 offers a graphic illustration of the puzzle. It plots weekly data on forms of contention by settlement movement member groups, incitements to
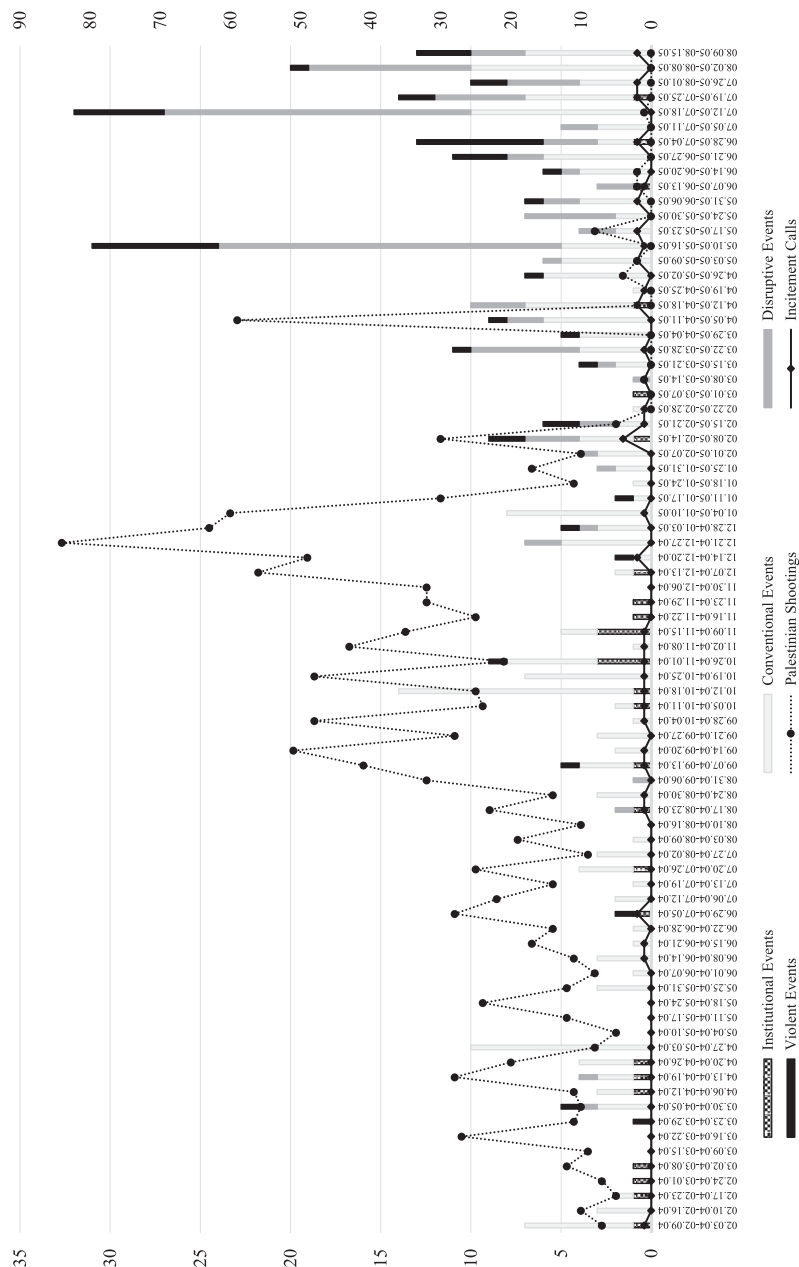
Figure 2 Level and form of contention during the anti-Pullout campaign

Source: Author's data.

Note: Unless stated otherwise, I obtained data on contention and response to contention from the coverage of the Israeli dailies *Yediot Achronot* and *Ha 'Tzofe* and data on Palestinian rocket firings from the IDF Spokesperson's Unit.

violence by these groups, and the number of Palestinian rockets and mortar firings during the entire campaign. Four points that stand out are the predominance of nonviolent forms of contention (i.e., events that do not involve property or bodily damage); the weak, inverse relation between movement actors' violence and Palestinian attacks ($r = -.24$), offering no support for the environmental line of explanation; the weak correlation ($r = .28$) between militancy and actual engagement in violence by movement activists, offering slim support for the cognitive line of explanation; and finally, the considerable portion of contentious activity clustered around specific events, for example, the Knesset's first reading of the "Disengagement Law" in late October 2004. The analysis of contained radicalization pays particular attention to these events, seen as representing critical shifts in patterns of contention and in media and public discourse (Staggenborg 1993; Alimi and Maney 2018).

1.3 The Solution: Relational Dynamics

The solution to the puzzle comes from relational sociology, particularly a strand called *relational realism*. Relational realism considers contacts, transactions, social ties, networks, and conversations as constituting the central stuff of social life, hence vital to understanding social and political phenomena (Emirbayer 1997; Tilly 2002, 2003; Diani 2003; Mische 2011). Relational sociologists contend that cognitive and environmental forces operate and gain (or lose) salience within social relations. Building on this reasoning, we can expect relational dynamics, for example, the ability of movement actors to mobilize consensus over strategy, tactics, and goals, to mitigate the influence of cognitive and environmental forces and, in turn, contain radicalization.

This Element builds on cumulative wisdom in relational realist-oriented research on radicalization processes to tell the story of contained radicalization in a potentially violent situation. This includes focusing on robust and recurring causal mechanisms to capture changes in relations as they unfold in arenas or fields of interaction between contending parties and actors within parties (e.g., the ability of two or more social movement groups to mobilize consensus over strategy, tactics, and goals). Recognizing that several forces usually constitute complicated processes like radicalization, relational realists pay analytical attention to the mutual influence of relational mechanisms as they combine to drive (or put a brake on) processes of radicalization (e.g., McAdam et al. 2001; Alimi et al. 2012, 2015; de Fazio 2013; della Porta 2013, 2018; Drevon 2022).[7]

---

[7] Instances of radicalization analyzed in this Element stop short at the stage of engagement in political violence by a social movement member organization. Processes of radicalization, however, may have additional stages, what has been labeled enhanced or post-radicalization (e.g., Alimi et al. 2015; Busher et al. 2023). At this enhanced stage, some mechanisms may