

Palestinian Resistance and NONVIOLENCE

ANDREW RIGBY



PASSIA

Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, Jerusalem

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Foreword

Some twenty years ago I wrote a book examining the 'first' Palestinian intifada as a form of civilian-based unarmed resistance. Draft chapters of that book had previously been published as monographs by PASSIA, which was my 'home' during the period of the research. That work was informed by my life-long interest and commitment to nonviolent modes of resistance and change – a commitment that has not weakened in the intervening years.

But something significant has changed. The years of the first intifada was a time of hope. I can remember sitting down with Palestinian friends discussing whether or not there would be prisons in the new Palestinian state that seemed about to be born. I smile at the memory and our 'utopian idealism'. But a large part of me is also pained by the loss of that hope, a hope that grew out of the civilian uprising that challenged the Israeli occupation on the ground in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and internationally.

I started this study expecting to uncover a 'hidden history' of Palestinian nonviolent resistance to set against the crude culture and rhetoric of violence that has been the public face of so much of Palestinian resistance. And it is clear that during each phase of Palestinian resistance to Jewish migration and subsequent Zionist expansion and occupation, the majority of people resisted primarily by nonviolent means – maintaining steadfastness and hope in various ways. But except for the period of the first intifada (1987-91) such nonviolent modes of resistance were subordinated to other means of struggle, particularly those characterised by the rhetoric and practice of violence.

Finally – some apologies. I am very aware that I have not covered the different modes of resistance pursued by the Palestinian citizens of Israel and by Palestinian refugee communities in the Arab world in the years since 1948. I have focused primarily on the strategies and practices of Palestinians inside the occupied territories.

Consequently this is very much a work in progress. There is much research that needs to be done in order to develop a fuller understanding of the myriad ways in which Palestinians have pursued their struggle for individual and collective rights by nonviolent means. In particular there is a need for research on what James Scott has termed the 'hidden transcripts' of resistance, the ways in which Palestinian people who have been 'hidden from history', living their lives subordinated under patterns of domination, have utilised 'off-stage' spaces to give expression to various modes of dissent as a means of preserving temporary zones of relative autonomy and freedom in their everyday life.¹

¹ See J. C. Scott, *Domination and the arts of resistance*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

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Introduction

The aim of this monograph is to review certain phases of the Palestinian national struggle through the lens of nonviolent resistance, seeking to identify the extent to which different periods of struggle manifested a 'nonviolent' dimension. The context for this is the belief that there will be another Palestinian 'uprising' within the very near future, and the conviction that modes of action that intentionally refrain from using violent means that might physically wound or kill the target will be far more effective in achieving Palestinian individual and collective rights than armed struggle.

Gene Sharp has identified three main categories of nonviolent action: protest and persuasion, noncooperation, and interventions.² In a separate study of resistance in the Second World War Werner Rings identified four main categories which I find useful for categorising the types of actions undertaken during the history of the Palestinian national movement.³ The following characterisations are derived from Rings, but developed through the prism of nonviolent resistance.

- i) Symbolic resistance: *I remain what I was and communicate to others by means of gestures, actions or dress continued allegiance to my cause and its values.*
- ii) Polemical resistance: *I oppose the occupier by voicing my protest and trying to encourage others of the need to maintain the struggle.*
- iii) Offensive resistance: *I am prepared to do all that I can to frustrate and overcome the oppressor by nonviolent means, including strikes, demonstrations and other forms of direct action.*
- iv) Defensive resistance: *I aid and protect those in danger or on the run, and thereby preserve human beings and human values endangered by the occupying power.*

² See G. Sharp, *Waging nonviolent struggle: 20th century practice and 21st century potential*, Boston: Porter Sargent, 2005, especially pp. 49-68.

³ W. Rings, *Life with the enemy: Collaboration and resistance in Hitler's Europe 1939-1945*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982.

Ring's typology is based on his study of resistance to the Nazis in occupied Europe during the Second World War, and he omits to discuss a form of resistance that was championed particularly by Gandhi in the Indian freedom struggle – the constructive programme. Consequently a fifth category suggests itself:

- v) Constructive resistance: *I challenge the existing imposed order by seeking to create alternative institutions that embody the values that I hope to see flourish more widely once we are free.*

The approach adopted in this report is to identify and review different periods of Palestinian resistance, drawing on the framework above to identify the forms of nonviolent civilian-based resistance that manifested themselves in each period. The analysis is also informed by research into civilian-based resistance to occupation and oppression which has identified a number of conditions necessary for sustained collective resistance to oppression in general and occupation in particular.⁴

1. The most significant condition is that sufficient people share a strong commitment to a common cause, based on a shared experience of oppression and injustice. A number of other 'enabling conditions' would seem to be significant.
2. A strong sense of social solidarity shared by members of the subject population. One of the necessary conditions for a high degree of social solidarity/sense of social cohesion is the absence of deep horizontal and vertical divisions in society.
3. A strong 'democratic culture' based on a tradition of active citizenship and respect for basic human rights, which thereby renders the experience of oppression and injustice all the more intolerable and about which 'something must be done'.
4. A strong and unified leadership to articulate concerns and help coordinate and give direction to the resistance.

⁴ See, for example, J. Semelin, *Unarmed against Hitler: Civilian resistance in Europe 1939–1943*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993; M. Randle, *Civil resistance*, London: Fontana, 1994; A. Roberts, ed., *The strategy of civilian defence: Nonviolent resistance to aggression*, London: Faber & Faber, 1967.

The above four conditions can help explain the phenomenon of collective resistance, but three other conditions would seem to be necessary for the resistance to take a nonviolent form:

1. The presence of experienced practitioners and advocates of nonviolent modes of resistance within the leadership strata of the resistance.
2. Extreme imbalance in the means of coercive power available, such as when the resisters face an opponent with overwhelming capacity to use violent means in pursuance of their interests in any conflict situation.
3. Absence of strong 'counter-movements' within the society advocating and pursuing violent means of resistance.

Any resistance movement depends on the commitment of its participants and their preparedness to withstand the costs of resistance over time. For this level of commitment, it is imperative that participants are able to sustain a sense of hope in the future, a vision of a time when their goal of liberation might be achieved. Certain conditions would seem to be significant in helping people sustain their commitment to the struggle and be prepared to bear the costs of resistance.

1. The capacity to maintain communication within the resistance movement itself, and with publics and other constituencies of support, including sympathetic bystanders and third parties.
2. Reliable supply of the material resources required to sustain the struggle.
3. Movement successes and other signs of 'progress' that can help people maintain commitment. This also includes 'internal' achievements such as events and processes that reaffirm and strengthen the sense of comradeship and other 'rewards' necessary for struggle to be maintained.
4. Widespread recognition of the legitimacy of the struggle with regard to aim and method, such that significant third parties are prepared to exercise their influence on behalf of the 'just cause'.

The main finding of this report is that at no stage during the different phases of the Palestinian national movement have the conditions been conducive to the existence of a sustainable nonviolent resistance movement, except for a short period during the first intifada between 1988-90. Most crucially,

1. Palestinian society throughout its recent history has been divided both horizontally and vertically, and such divisions have fed into political fractures.
2. Furthermore, the Palestinian national movement has suffered from poor and divided leadership, a leadership moreover with little familiarity with active nonviolence as a mode of resisting oppression and occupation. This failing has continued into the present day.
3. In addition the Palestinian national movement has only rarely succeeded in mobilising significant third party states and other actors to support the struggle with anything more than rhetoric.

Chapter One: Palestinian Protest Against Jewish Immigration Under the Ottomans

Jewish migration to Palestine in order to establish a homeland commenced in the 1880s. The establishment of agricultural settlements by these 'territorial Zionists' on land purchased from Arab landowners caused friction with local shepherds and herders who were used to letting their flocks graze on what had become settlement land, and as early as 1886 there were reports of clashes with the peasants evicted from the newly purchased land.⁵ In 1891 Palestinian notables voiced their protests against the Jewish migration in Constantinople, and in June 1891 the first of a number of petitions was presented to the Grand Vezir requesting that Russian Jews be stopped from entering Palestine and acquiring land.⁶ However, there were early forms of what we might term defensive resistance. For example, in 1897 the Mufti of Jerusalem (Muhammed Taher al-Husayni) presided over a commission which scrutinised applications for transfer of land, and so halted Jewish land purchases for a number of years.⁷

So in the latter decades of the nineteenth century we have a pattern emerging of responses to Jewish migration and land acquisition: offensive resistance by some of the Palestinian peasantry directly affected, whilst the Palestinian elite pursued the route of petitions and persuasion. Resentment against the incomers grew during the first decade of the twentieth century, and was also directed against the absentee landowners who were selling the land, many of whom lived outside Palestine in Lebanon. This was expressed by different forms of polemical resistance in newspaper articles, telegrams and delegations to Constantinople, and questions raised in the Ottoman parliament. In 1910 there was a call for more offensive resistance in the shape of an Arab boycott of Jewish goods and businesses, in retaliation against a Zionist boycott of Arab labour and shops.

⁵ A. S. Kayyali, *The Palestinian Arab Reactions to Zionism and the British Mandate, 1917-1939*, University of London, doctoral thesis, February 1970, p. 10.

⁶ Kayyali, 20.

⁷ Kayyali, 21.

This call became a standard component in the programmes of the early anti-Zionist societies and of Palestinians standing for election to the Ottoman parliament.⁸

So, by the end of the Ottoman period of rule a pattern of protest had formed. The traditional landowning families saw Zionism as a threat to their position and responded by appealing to the authorities, as came naturally to those whose traditional role in the patron-client structure that characterised Palestinian society was to act as intermediary between the Ottoman authorities and the ruled. The more polemical forms of protest was the domain of the middle class professionals, particularly journalists and students who were most vocal in their opposition, whilst the offensive resistance was primarily the response of those who were the direct victims of Zionist land acquisitions – the peasantry. As Kayyali has summarised the situation prior to the establishment of British military rule in Palestine in 1917, ‘within the ranks of the nationalist movement in Palestine, the notables performed the role of the diplomats; the educated middle classes that of the articulators of public opinion; and the peasants that of the actual fighters in the battle against the Zionist presence.’⁹ We might also note in passing certain non-violent initiatives that displayed some of the features of constructive resistance, such as the establishment of private secondary schools in Palestine in the early 20th century that served as precursors of nationalism through the dissemination of European ideas.¹⁰

⁸ Kayyali, 32.

⁹ Kayyali, 61.

¹⁰ See I. Pappe, *A history of modern Palestine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 47.

Chapter Two: British Military Administration, 1917-1920

In November 1914 the Ottoman Empire entered the First World War alongside Germany and Austria, and against Britain, France and Russia. A British and allied army advanced into Palestine and by the end of the war was in occupation of the whole of Syria, whilst another British and Indian force held the whole of Iraq. The Ottoman Empire, under whose political rule Palestinians, like the majority of Arabs, had lived for centuries, was in collapse. These changes had a significant impact on the manner in which politically conscious Arabs thought of themselves, with the emergence of the first stirrings of Arab nationalism.

In 1916 Hussein, the Sharif of Mecca, had provided a force that fought alongside the British and their allies. This allegiance came about in the context of what became known as the McMahon-Hussein Correspondence in which Hussein was led to believe that the reward for his intervention would be some kind of recognition by the British of Arab nationalism and its aspiration for an independent state.¹¹ However, unbeknown to the Arabs, an Anglo-French agreement (Sykes-Picot Agreement, May 1916) divided the Middle East into two zones of imperial influence. And in November 1917 the British government affirmed in the Balfour Declaration its support for the establishment of a homeland for the Jews in Palestine, provided that nothing should be done to prejudice 'the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.' In the words of Hourani, 'It was these documents, and the interests reflected in them, which determined the political fate of the countries.'¹²

When news of the Balfour Declaration reached the Palestinians it led to a new awareness of the need to organise. A Muslim-Christian Association (MCA) was established as a counter to Jewish organisations, with branches around the country alongside new youth clubs and other organisations. On

¹¹ Correspondence between Sir Henry McMahon, British High Commissioner in Egypt, and Hussein, 14th July 1915 – 30th January 1916.

¹² A. Hourani, *A history of the Arab peoples*, London: Faber & Faber, 1991, p. 318.

12th April 1918 some Palestinian literary figures put on a theatre presentation in Jerusalem before a big map of Palestine, calling on people to defend their land and not to sell it to the Zionists.¹³ Newspapers were published in the main urban centres of Jaffa, Haifa and Jerusalem, and they were used to organise a national day of protest to mark the first anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. At this time the Arabs still believed they had an assurance from the British about self-government, and as such a Zionist state was unacceptable. Therefore, the formal announcement on 27th February 1920 by the head of the British military administration that Britain intended to implement the Balfour Declaration provoked a number of protest demonstrations, with businesses closing down and protest petitions handed in to the authorities by representatives of the various MCAs.¹⁴ Porath noted,

“The organisation of these demonstrations revealed the degree to which the nationalist associations in Palestine had advanced. For the first time they showed an ability to organise a coordinated action on a nation-wide scale in which all the associations took part. The almost identical language of the protest notes strengthens this impression.”¹⁵

There was considerable support amongst the politically literate strata of Palestinian society at this time for union with Syria under the rule of Sharaf Hussein’s son Faisal, and Faisal’s coronation on 7th March 1920 was the occasion for a series of demonstrations the following day in Palestine. The protests spilled over into violence, with attacks on Jewish passers-by and stores, and open threats to use force as a means of preventing the realisation of the Zionist project.¹⁶ The clashes heightened tension in the country as April approached, an important month in the calendar of the three main faith communities. Sure enough, at the annual Muslim

¹³ Kayyali, 76.

¹⁴ According to Porath 1500 demonstrated in Jerusalem, 2000 in Jaffa and 250 in Haifa. Y. Porath, *The Palestinian-Arab national movement, 1918-1929 (vol. 1)*, London: Frank Cass, 1974, p. 96.

¹⁵ Porath (1974), 96.

¹⁶ Porath (1974), 97. Kayyali notes that two Jewish settlements near the Syrian border were attacked on 1st March 1920 with some casualties inflicted. (Kayyali, 115)

Nabi Musa festival on 4th April 1920 some 60,000 gathered in the Old City of Jerusalem, speeches were delivered urging the assembled to stand up for their homeland, and before long a mob was ransacking the Jewish Quarter, attacking passers-by and looting from Jewish-owned properties. After four days of disturbances the toll was four Arabs and five Jews dead, 22 seriously wounded (including 18 Jewish victims) and 193 Jews slightly wounded.¹⁷ It is possible that these disturbances were orchestrated to pressure the British to agree to the sought-for union with Syria, but if such was the aim it failed. On 24th April 1920 the San Remo Conference confirmed the British Mandate over Palestine and thereby brought an end to the Pan-Syrian vision.¹⁸ Furthermore, the British then proceeded to appoint as High Commissioner a well-known Zionist Jew, Sir Herbert Samuel, who took up his post on 1st July 1920.

On the eve of the British Mandate a number of observations can be made regarding the resistance to the Zionist project.

1. There had been a growth in the organisational capacity of the protest movement, which manifested itself particularly in the spread of various forms of polemic protest and resistance. But it still remained very much an urban phenomenon.
2. Furthermore, when people were mobilised in forms of offensive resistance such as demonstrations and other forms of active protest, events soon turned violent.
3. It was also during this period that the weak and divided nature of the Palestinian political leadership became apparent. A younger and more dynamic strata of leadership was beginning to emerge, mainly middle-class professionals from the ranks of the Palestinian notable families. But their effectiveness was undermined by the rivalry that characterised the relationships between two of the Palestinian notable families, the

¹⁷ Kayyali, 118.

¹⁸ The San Remo Conference awarded France the mandate for Syria. They expelled Faisal from Damascus in July 1920. A year later the British installed him as ruler of Iraq.

Husaynis and the Nashashibis – a conflict that was to mark Palestinian politics throughout the British Mandate period.¹⁹

¹⁹ The occasion was the dismissal of Musa al-Husayni as Mayor of Jerusalem because of the role he was deemed to have played inciting the crowd in the April disturbances, and the appointment of Raghīb al-Nashashibi to replace him on the orders of the British Governor of Jerusalem District.

Chapter Three: British Mandate in the 1920s

The Nashashibi-Hussein split permeated its way through the Palestinian social structure, insofar as each of the families could lay claim to the loyalty and the fealty of families and clans in the rural hinterland, on behalf of whom the elite had acted as patrons in representing their interests to the Ottoman authorities. This network of patron-client relationships was one of the core elements of a fractured and divided Palestinian social structure which was overwhelmingly rural, with a 1921 census revealing that 80% of the indigenous population depended on agriculture for their livelihood. The Palestinian peasantry occupied a life-world vastly different from that of the urbanised political elite. Their loyalty and sense of belonging was to the family, the clan and the village. There was a sense of locality, not nationality. In a society with weak central government and poor communications it was to the local institutions that people looked for security. As Rosemary Sayigh observed, 'From time immemorial Palestinian peasants had found solutions to their problems in village-based collective action.'²⁰ So, not only were there incredible inequalities along the vertical axis of wealth and class, there were also significant divisions along the horizontal axis. Moreover, it was a society where the institution of the feud ensured that divisive conflicts could continue over generations. This was not ripe soil in which a national resistance movement might grow.

Examining the first decade of British civilian rule in Palestine through the prism of nonviolent resistance a number of features become apparent.

1. 'Spontaneous' Clashes Between Peasantry and Jewish Settlers

For the peasantry who experienced eviction through Jewish land purchases, the immediate response was anger and resentment that could lead to clashes with those directly responsible for their dispossession.

But these clashes were localised. There was no attempt to engender a sustainable nation-wide movement of active resistance based on the peasantry.

²⁰ R. Sayigh, *Palestinians: From peasants to revolutionaries*, London: Zed Books, 1979, pp. 14-15.

2. The Absence of a National Leadership

The main reasons for the failure to develop a truly active national movement were two-fold. First, as has been noted above, the world-view of the peasantry was very particularistic and localised. They had no experience of coordinating collective action with those beyond their own village. Secondly, there was no 'national leadership' to lead and direct them along such a path. The social gulf between the urban political elite and the peasantry was immense – they occupied completely different life-worlds. Moreover, the notables had no experience of leading large-scale political movements. In the words of Sayigh, 'Not only did the indigenous ruling class have no experience of mass leadership, but the individual notable would never attempt such a course since it would only jeopardise his access to government, and it was on this access that his influence and status depended.'²¹

3. The Commitment to Negotiation

Throughout the Mandate period the main impulse of the Palestinian political elite was to continue in the role they had traditionally performed under the Ottomans – representing their interests and those of their clients who owed them allegiance to the authorities. They were most at home as members of delegations to the British or the League of Nations, demanding the revocation of the Balfour Declaration, an end to Jewish migration and land purchases, and the establishment of representative self-government in Palestine.

4. Symbolic and Polemic Resistance

In addition to the formal and informal representations to the British, there were numerous instances of collective forms of symbolic and polemic protest. Regular items in the press urged people to oppose the Zionist attempts to establish a homeland in Palestine. Imams spread the message at Friday prayers in the mosques. Strike days were observed to mark the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration and commemorate other days of national historical significance. In March 1925 Balfour himself visited Palestine, and on

²¹ Sayigh, 50.

25th March was in Jerusalem to open the Hebrew University. He was met by black flags and a complete boycott of the occasion by the Palestinians.

5. *From Offensive Resistance to Violence*

From time to time the political leadership would try to mobilise people for protest marches and demonstrations, usually as part of an effort to strengthen their hand in an upcoming round of negotiations with the British. This was what happened on 25th March 1921 when Churchill visited Haifa and was met by a demonstration. The same day there was a large demonstration in Jerusalem where the Muslim shops also closed. There was minimal impact, insofar as Churchill reaffirmed his commitment to the Zionist project before leaving the country.

A few weeks later a May Day march by Jewish socialists in Jaffa clashed with a Communist demonstration of Arabs and Jews. The next day a large Arab demonstration was held. There were violent clashes and driven by rumours that the Jews were killing Arabs the violence spread to other parts of the country. Thousands of Jews fled Jaffa for the safety of nearby Tel Aviv, a state of emergency was declared and reinforcements were summoned from Egypt.²² After several days order was restored, leaving 48 Arabs and 47 Jews dead, and over 200 from both communities wounded. Just as with the Nabi Musa disturbances of the previous year, the Jaffa Riots showed just how little it took for people to give violent expression to their anger, resentment and frustration at the growing Jewish presence in their land.

The British were shaken by the scale of the violence, and on 14th May agreed that henceforth Jewish immigration should be regulated according to the 'economic absorption capacity' of the country. There were further disturbances in November when people assembled to mourn the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, but by then the High Commissioner had taken steps intended to defuse some of the opposition to the Mandate by appointing Haj-Amin Husayni to be head of a newly created Supreme Muslim Council (SMC), which was to become, in the words of one contemporary observer, 'the vanguard of the Nationalist Movement'.²³

²² There were reports that Arab members of the police force were directly responsible for some of the violence inflicted against Jews.

²³ Quoted in Porath (1974), 200.

6. The Timidity of the Palestinian Political Elite

Not all forms of offensive resistance resulted in violence. In 1922 the British sought to introduce a legislative council for Palestine. However, its remit was such as to exclude any questioning of basic issues like the status of the Balfour Declaration, migration and bans on the sale of land. Furthermore, its proposed structure was such that the combined votes of the Jewish members and the government appointees would outnumber the Arabs. Consequently, at the 5th Palestinian Arab Congress held in Nablus in August 1922 it was proposed that elections to the proposed council be boycotted. The boycott campaign was taken up with vigour, with the mosques acting as important vehicles for spreading the message and generating commitment. Non-participation was presented as a religious duty, and in some cases those assembled for prayer would take collective vows to take no part in the process. The result was that when the elections were held, in February 1923, only a small minority of the Palestinian Arab population participated, and the boycott was almost total in some areas, supported by Muslims and Christians alike. The proposed legislative body never met.

But despite this relative success, the Palestinians did not seek to extend the boycott into a fully-fledged non-cooperation movement. If people had resigned from their administrative posts at all levels of the government, they would have presented the Mandate with a major administrative challenge. But this would have been a step too far for many, as was revealed a few months later when, in June 1923, the issue of non-payment of taxes was raised at the Sixth Palestinian Arab Congress. The suggestion was rejected. Too many of the participants were landowners who feared being targeted by the British with punitive fines and other sanctions.

7. Accommodation to Occupation

There were no significant outbreaks of violence between 1922 and 1928. One reason for this relative calm was the decline in Jewish migration during this period. The second reason, according to Kayyali, was 'the overriding predominance of factionalism, the ascendancy of personal rivalries and self-interest among the Palestinian political nobility' as the Husaynis

and the Nashashibis fought for control of the SMC.²⁴ In addition, people had been intimidated by the severity of the individual and collective punishments meted out by the British after the 1921 Jaffa Riots. In such circumstances most Palestinians, like people throughout history, tried to 'make the best of a bad situation' and adapt and accommodate to the harsh and apparently unyielding reality that confronted them. After all, as 'donkeys of the world' the Palestinian peasantry had little experience or confidence in their capacity to change the world they inhabited. Their focus was on the development of coping mechanisms to enhance their chances of survival. The same was true for members of the political elite, according to Porath:

"When at the end of 1923 it became clear to everyone that the political effort to effect a change in the pro-Zionist policy of the British government had failed, the reaction of many Palestinians was one of disappointment, despair, and sometimes a search for ways to get some good out of the situation by a policy of cooperation with the authorities. Under these circumstances it was difficult to resort to violence again. In this fashion Zionism gained seven years of undisturbed activity in Palestine, in the course of which it succeeded in nearly doubling the size of the Jewish yishuv and in enlarging the area of its map of settlement."²⁵

8. Religion as a Prime Mover for Resistance

The calm of those years was superficial, nothing had changed in terms of the basic dynamics and it did not take much to spark off another round of violence. Through 1928 religious tensions had been rising as the Jews sought to extend their rights to worship at the Western Wall, just adjacent to the al-Haram ash-Sharif within which sanctuary was housed the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. Rumours abounded that the Jews had designs on the space. On 15th August 1929 Zionist extremists at the 'Western Wall' provoked a counter-demonstration by Palestinians. The

²⁴ Kayyali, 201.

²⁵ Porath (1974), 135. It is also worth noting that at this stage Haj-Amin Husayni was amongst the most forceful opponents of any suggestion of resorting to violence, as he sought the support of the British in building up his power base within the SMC.

perceived threat to one of their most sacred spaces enabled the Palestinian leadership to cast the struggle in a religious light, and thereby mobilise those who had remained untouched by secular appeals to nationalism, the right of self-determination and other phrases which meant very little to the mass of Palestinians who had virtually no exposure to such ideals nor any experience of self-determination in their own lives. What moved them were direct perceived threats to their material and ideational (including spiritual) interests. Thus it was that the next Friday, 23rd August 1929, worshippers emerging from Al-Aqsa Mosque attacked the Jewish Quarter in the Old City. The violence spread, with the Palestinian political leadership remaining aloof. By the next day 67 Jews had been slaughtered in Hebron and a few days later 45 Jews were killed in Safed. The final death toll was 133 Jews and 116 Arabs, with over 500 wounded.²⁶ Most of the Jewish casualties were at the hands of Arabs, but the bulk of the Arab deaths and injuries were caused by the British as they sought to protect the Jews and restore order. The violence of 1929 marked a turning point. According to Kayyali,

“For the villagers and the masses of Palestinians two important facts were made clearer and sharper by the events of 1929. The first was that Zionism and the Jewish National Home depended, ultimately and inevitably, on British bayonets, and it was therefore necessary to fight Britain if the struggle against Zionism was to achieve its goals. The second concerned the cowardice of the Palestinian notables and their inadequacy to leads the Arabs in the struggle against Zionism and British policy in Palestine.”²⁷

The harsh measures meted out by the British who imposed collective punishments on whole villages and neighbourhoods caused added bitterness, strengthening the hand of those calling for violence.

²⁶ It is important to record that 19 local Arab families in Hebron saved 435 Jews by hiding them in their houses during the pogrom. See <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1106426.html> (accessed 22nd April 2010)

²⁷ Kayyali, 217.

Chapter Four: From Unrest to Uprising, 1930-36

The tension continued to rise through the 1930s. It was a period when the economic situation deteriorated, and the suffering of the Palestinians was exacerbated by the rising tide of Jewish immigration, new land purchases and the Jewish boycott of Arab labour, all of which contributed to increased unemployment and indebtedness amongst the Palestinian people. The response was one of heightened active resistance, which can be analysed using the basic categories of resistance introduced earlier.

Symbolic and polemical resistance

The level of media activity intensified, so much so that in the summer of 1931 the British banned the Arabic newspapers for a while. Different organisations continued to meet and pass resolutions and once again the mosques were important venues for encouraging people to be steadfast in their opposition to land sales and the Zionist project. A new initiative during this period was the formation of the *Istiqlal* political party, which called for independence from British rule. To coincide with its launch the 27th August 1932 was celebrated as marking the anniversary of Saladin's victory over the Crusaders at Hattin.

Offensive resistance

Reading the accounts of this period the sense one gets is of a rapid heightening of the tempo of events and developments running way beyond the control capacity of the established political leadership, whose influence consequently declined. Agencies such as the Arab Executive Committee (AEC) which organised the regular meetings of the different political organisations in Palestine were very good at passing resolutions, calling for boycotts of Jewish businesses, demanding an end to land sales and the like. But they continued to drag their feet in ensuring that there was some subsequent substance to such resolutions. The following saga is not untypical. In September 1932 *Istiqlal* persuaded the AEC to pass a resolution

calling for resignations and non-cooperation with the government. The following February *Istiqlal* was urging a more developed non-cooperation campaign involving a social, political and economic boycott – including refusal to pay taxes. Unfortunately, the wealthy landowners that constituted the bulk of the AEC were worried that they might be targeted by the government if they stopped paying tax. As a consequence the agreed protest was confined to a weak form of symbolic resistance – the boycott of government receptions and other formal events alongside the boycott of Jewish goods.²⁸

During this period, as noted, there was a rapid increase in the number of Jewish immigrants which, when combined with the policy of Jewish businesses hiring only Jewish labour, led to an intensification of clashes between Jewish and Arab labour at the picket lines set up by the Jewish workers to enforce the ban. All this led to intensified pressure on the Palestinian political leadership to be more pro-active. In response the AEC called for a general strike, which commenced on 13th October 1933 with a demonstration. This was violently dispersed by the police and a decision was taken to hold another one in Jaffa on 27th October. This met with even more violence and the result was 26 dead (including one Arab policeman) and 60 wounded. This inflamed public opinion and there were further clashes in Haifa, Nablus and Jerusalem, and troops occupied Tulkarm, Nazareth and Safed. In identifying these demonstrations as significant milestones in the history of the Palestine national movement, Porath observed,

“They demonstrated the grave reaction of the Arabs to growing Jewish immigration; they uncovered the growing readiness of the Arabs to challenge the authority of the Mandatory government and to begin their struggle; they revealed that the readiness for sacrifice was far greater than it had been in the past.”²⁹

²⁸ This watering down of the resolution was due in part to Haj Amin Husayni's fear of jeopardising his relationship with the British High Commissioner. (Kayyali, 252)

²⁹ Y. Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement: From riots to rebellion, Vol. 2, 1929-1939*, London: Frank Cass, 1977, p. 45. Porath also claims that at this stage people were establishing secret arms caches and engaging in clandestine military training delivered by former members of the Ottoman forces under the guise of sports clubs and boy scout camps. See Porath (1977), 130-32.

Defensive resistance

As part of the increasing tempo and incidence of resistance during this period, there were a number of examples of defensive resistance – initiatives to strengthen the resources and the resilience of the resistance movement.

- In the Spring of 1932 the Arab National Fund established an ‘Arab Redemption of Lands Corporation’ in order to purchase lands that would otherwise have fallen into Zionist ownership.
- The SMC also attempted to buy land that was for sale, and repeatedly reminded landowners of their religious duty not to sell to Jews, encouraging small landowners to register their land as part of a religious endowment and therefore inalienable.
- An Arab Agricultural Bank was started to help develop Arab agricultural land.
- Arab scout troops were organised to patrol the coast and sound the alert whenever they spied vessels with illegal immigrants.
- Arab Labour Garrisons were formed to protect Arab workers against intimidation in cities with mixed populations such as Jerusalem and Haifa.
- In January 1932 a national youth conference was held, and the participants resolved to mobilise the youth in the villages, in part through organising a national scout movement.

Despite the intensified nature of the protest, the situation for Palestinians seemed to worsen. By the end of 1935 about 20% of Arab villagers were landless, immigration that year was at an all-time high of 60,000. The need to escalate the resistance was imperative. A new element had been injected into the mix by a para-military group called the ‘Black Hand’ made up of recruits from the working-class neighbourhoods of Haifa and led by a Syrian-born preacher called Izzadin Al-Qassem. During the early 1930s

they started attacking Jewish targets and sabotaging government property, but in November 1935 Qassem was killed by the British military near Jenin. His funeral attracted thousands who saw him as a powerful symbol of self-sacrifice and as someone who pointed the way forward in the struggle.

Chapter Five: The Palestinian Revolt, 1936-39

There were two phases to the 1936 Revolt. The first lasted for six months from April to October 1936. This was a period when the dominant forms of resistance were overwhelmingly nonviolent, with a whole range of symbolic, polemical, offensive and defensive forms of resistance practised: protest marches and demonstrations, strikes and boycotts, noncooperation and civil disobedience. These were complemented by attempts to involve wider constituencies of support such as the leaders and the citizens of neighbouring Arab states. The second phase lasted for about two years from September 1937 and took on much more of the character of a guerrilla struggle, a violent one that eventually degenerated such that the targets were increasingly those Arabs considered to be insufficiently loyal to 'the cause'.

Phase One: April – October 1936

It was noted above that tension increased throughout 1935. There were also the stirrings of revolt in the wider region. In November 1935 there were anti-British riots in Egypt, and in January 1936 a general strike was called in Syria which had a powerful impact not only in Syria itself but also on those in Palestine who observed the action with considerable interest. Early in 1936 there were further clashes against Jewish contractors who were refusing to hire Arab labour, and then in April two Jews were murdered whilst travelling on the Tulkarm-Nablus road. A few days later a revenge attack in Peta Tikva resulted in two Palestinians murdered. The funeral in Tel Aviv of one of the murdered Jews led to assaults on Arabs and their property, the violence spread and on 19th April nine Jews were killed in Jaffa.

The next day in Nablus an Arab National Committee was formed which declared a general strike. Strike committees were formed in all the main urban centres, and on 25th April the Arab Higher Committee (AHC) was formed with Haj Amin Husayni at its head. The strike was almost completely solid. Merchants and shop-keepers put up their shutters, there was

a complete transport shut-down except for some trains which continued to function. The port of Jaffa was closed, but Haifa, where there was more Jewish labour, remained open. Early May the call went out that people should stop paying taxes on 15th May and observe a total boycott of Jews. But here, once again, the timidity of the Palestinian political leadership manifested itself. They resisted calls for the strike to be extended to include government officials. It would seem that a key reason for this failure was that the leadership still had faith in the power of negotiation, and did not want to damage relationships with the High Commissioner.³⁰ If the officials had joined the strike it could have crippled the administration and heightened the impact of the resistance.³¹

As it was, the effect of the strike was limited in a number of ways.

1. The refusal to pay taxes was not a significant problem for the British, as very little revenue was obtained from direct taxation.
2. The economic impact of the strike was limited. Unlike in Syria, there was a significant Jewish sector that did not strike and continued to provide goods and services.
3. The strike actually encouraged the Jewish sector to become more self-reliant. In Jewish-owned enterprises that had hired Arab labour Jewish workers came forward to take their place.³²
4. Although the Jewish sector suffered from shortages of fresh vegetables and fruit, alternative supplies were obtained from the vegetable merchants of Egypt and Syria.
5. The boycott of Jewish goods and services had a significant impact on Jewish-owned industries, but the effect was alleviated by the sale of the goods to Lebanese merchants, who then resold them to the Palestinians.³³

³⁰ See Kayyali, pp. 168-9.

³¹ As a substitute for striking, officials were required to pay a percentage of their salaries into a strike fund. They were also expected to pass on to the resistance any confidential information that came their way, and senior officials were required to sign a declaration expressing solidarity with the aims of the strike. (Porath, 1977, p. 170)

³² It was the awareness of the risk to their jobs from Jewish workers that caused the Arab dock workers of Haifa to refuse to heed the call to strike until early August 1936, when they finally succumbed to sustained pressure. (Porath, 1977, p. 166)

³³ Porath claims that this practice was approved by the Palestinian boycott committee. (Porath, 1977, p. 220)

6. The strike caused considerable suffering amongst the poorer sections of Palestinian society who depended on their earnings to survive. Nourishment and Supply Committees were formed to provide staple food items to the needy. In addition, some key workers/strikers received strike pay from the Central Relief Committee. Funds were raised from the levy on government officials. Women's Committees organised house-to-house collections, and funds were also received from sympathisers in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

The British responded to the strike with draconian emergency measures including mass arrests, house demolitions, collective fines and deportations. Such actions provoked the protesters to take to the streets in anger. In late May 1936 a large crowd tried to attack the government offices in Tulkarm. Such actions were met with force which further escalated the tension and in some cases led to an armed response. In Jaffa there was repeated sniping at the British forces, who responded by bulldozing much of the old quarter in order to create clear lines of fire.

In fact, although the strike continued until mid-October 1936, after the first few weeks the resistance was never wholly nonviolent. There was plenty of violence against property, including sabotage of the Egypt-Palestine rail link near Gaza. Then, on 16th May 1936, someone fired at a crowd leaving a cinema in Jerusalem and killed three. There were also attacks by armed bands of peasants on Jewish settlements and British guard-posts in the latter half of May. In June 1936 a British official reported:

“Armed bands which a fortnight previously consisted of 15-20 men were now encountered in large parties of 50-70. The bands were not out for loot. They were fighting what they believed to be a patriotic war in defence of their country against injustice and the threat of Jewish domination.”³⁴

By July the Samaria area was in full revolt, with Nablus at the centre. Matters were far beyond the control of the nominal Palestinian political leadership, who were coming under increasing pressure from citrus-growers to

³⁴ Quoted in Kayyali, p. 292.

end the strike so that the citrus harvest could be gathered. The problem was how to find a face-saving way out so that it did not appear as if the leadership were submitting to the threats of the British. It was agreed that if the Arab leaders issued an appeal to end the strike, then their wishes would be followed. On 10th October an appeal from the Arab rulers was duly issued. The Palestinians were urged to bring an end to the disorder and avoid further bloodshed, and trust the good intentions of the British. The Arab Higher Committee called for an end to the strike that same day.

Phase Two: September 1937 – September 1939

Following the cessation of the strike the British appointed a Commission of Inquiry led by Lord Peel. Its report was published in July 1937 and was met with anger and indignation by the Palestinian leadership. There were petitions of protest and the AHC rejected the proposed partition of the land not only because of the loss of central and northern Galilee to the proposed Jewish state, but also because it proposed that the Palestinian sector be linked with Abdullah's kingdom across the River Jordan.

The spark that set alight the second phase of the revolt occurred some weeks later. On 26th September 1937 the British district commissioner for the Galilee was assassinated in Nazareth. This was the first time a senior British government figure had been targeted, and the British responded quickly, outlawing the AHC and arresting its members.³⁵ A protest strike was called and by mid-October armed bands were roaming the countryside attacking Jewish settlements, destroying railway stations and cutting communication lines. Jewish para-military groups such as *Irgun* responded in kind, and the wave of violence only eased with the onset of the rainy season in November.

The violence resumed in June 1938 with the end of the harvest season. By August the armed bands controlled most of the roads and many of the towns. According to Porath,

³⁵ Haj Amin Husayni evaded arrest and eventually escaped to Syria.

“In summer 1938, the rebels were in control of most of the mountainous parts of the country. They were walking fully armed in the streets of Nablus without any hindrance. The Arab civil servants bought their lives by disclosing all official documents and secrets to the rebels, and their wounded were hospitalised in government hospitals. By September 1938 ‘the situation was such that civil administration and control of the country was, to all practical purposes, non-existent.’”³⁶

Kayyali distinguished three types of resister at this time – the full-time guerrillas, the ‘town commandos’ who passed as civilians but who carried out particular tasks as requested, including the targeting of alleged collaborators, and the ‘auxiliaries’, civilians who took up arms if there was an engagement in their vicinity.³⁷ It has been estimated that at the height of the armed revolt there were 3000 full-timers, 1000 ‘town commandos’ and 6000 auxiliaries who could be called upon in time of need.³⁸

MaoTse Tung is quoted as saying ‘The guerrilla must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea.’ He was drawing attention to the principle that the guerrilla depends upon ‘the people’ and must be in harmony with them, like the fish is at home in the sea. He went on to assert that ‘It is only undisciplined troops who make the people their enemies and who, like the fish out of its native element, cannot live.’³⁹ This is what happened during the armed revolt of 1937-39, as the armed bands forfeited the support of many of their fellow-citizens. In 1937 they had revived the Court of Revolt to deal with all criminal, civil and personal disputes that occurred within their area of control. At one level this was a classic piece of constructive resistance alongside the network of committees that had been created to provide support, sustenance and other resources to the armed bands and to the ordinary Palestinians during the period of the revolt. By 1938, however, there were allegations of corruption and excesses. The military successes of the British had restricted the flow of weapons

³⁶ Porath (1977), p. 238. In the last sentence he quotes a British military officer.

³⁷ Kayyali, p. 293.

³⁸ Porath (1977), p. 249.

³⁹ <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1937/guerrilla-warfare/ch06.htm> (25th April 2010)

and other supplies to the rebels, who were therefore forced to rely increasingly on the villages for support. However, the levies on villagers and others started to seem like extortion for private ends, whilst the charge of collaboration was being levelled against those moderates suspected of being in favour of partition, in addition to those accused of selling land to the Jews and being informers.

Those associated with the Nashashibis were targeted in particular, and so they formed their own defence bands for self-protection.⁴⁰ Certain villages followed their example, establishing their own militias to defend themselves against the predations of the rebels. The British obviously encouraged such moves, providing them with weapons in exchange for information. Also contributing to the degeneration of the revolt was the age-old phenomenon of clan rivalries and feuds within Palestinian society. From the start, but particularly during the second phase, the rebel bands were torn by political, family and regional dissensions, and personal jealousies. A British teacher, a Miss H. Wilson, based in Bir Zeit observed that in early 1939.

“... the rebellion seemed now to be turning into a struggle between the two Arab political parties: the Mufti’s faction, who had organised it and who commanded the loyalty of the great majority of Arabs, and the Nashashibis, who hoped to get the power away from them by making up to the British.

More and more the rebellion was tending to degenerate from a national movement into squabbles between rival rebel bands. Bir Zayt, like many other villages, was no little better than a hornets’ nest of long-standing family feuds, stirred up afresh in the hope of getting some advantage through the help of this or that party of rebels.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ The Nashashibis had aligned themselves with the British and were supportive of the partition proposal.

⁴¹ Miss H. Wilson, quoted in Porath, 1977, pp. 254-5.

As the rebels weakened, more left their ranks and increasing numbers of villages felt sufficiently emboldened to turn their backs on the revolt and align themselves with the British. The result was the creation of more feuds that was to scar the face of Palestinian society for many years to come. Through the summer and autumn of 1939 there were sporadic acts of violence, but the rebels were tired, short of supplies and lacking in popular support, and the revolt died out.

The Failure of the Revolt

The failure of the Palestinians to achieve their aims during the 1936-39 revolt can be attributed to a number of factors.

1. Theories of nonviolent resistance advise us that all oppressive regimes rely on different sources of support, and the challenge for nonviolent resisters is to erode those pillars upon which all regimes rely. One key means by which this can be achieved is by getting key workers and personnel to withdraw their cooperation and deprive the regime of their essential services. But, as we have seen, the economic impact of the general strike was limited in part because there was a whole sector of society (the Jewish sector) that continued to work and provide for the basic needs of their population. In the Palestinian case, the real suffering was borne by the strikers themselves.
2. The British Mandate was dependent on its many Arab administrative officers and officials, from the level of the local municipality up to the office of the High Commissioner himself. If these officers had withdrawn their labour and cooperation the impact on the capacity of the British administration to function would have been significant. But for some unfathomable reason the political leadership of the Palestinians refused to order the officials to withhold their services. In hindsight it would seem to have been a monumental error of judgement.
3. The main reason the strike call was not issued to the officials would seem to be that the Palestinian notables were too reluctant to risk their vested interests (property, wealth, status and influence) which, to a significant degree, depended on maintaining good relations with the gov-

ernment. They prioritised the protection of their personal and family interests above that of the nation.

4. The leadership revealed an almost sociopathic persistence in their pursuit of achieving their goals through the power of persuasion and sitting around the negotiating table. Again and again representations were made to the British, delegations sent to London, and memoranda scripted. They failed to grasp the absolute commitment of the British to the Zionist project of establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine.
5. The Palestinians suffered from a severe imbalance of power which they were unable to rectify. Their appeals to the Arab and Muslim worlds failed to produce significant interventions, in part because the targets of such appeals were themselves under foreign domination and had their own interests. An obvious example of this was Abdullah of Transjordan who had aspirations to absorb Palestine into his own kingdom.
6. The Palestinian leadership was weak and divided, reflecting in some way the fissured social structure from which they had emerged. They faced a Zionist society that was highly organised, well-financed and with a determined leadership. Whenever it seemed that the Palestinians might have gained some concession from the British, the Zionists would arrange counter-lobbies in Jerusalem and London, mobilise constituencies of support in key locations, and get the concession reversed. One example was the Passfield White Paper published by the British in October 1930 in the wake of the August 1929 riots, which recommended the establishment of a legislative council and heavy restrictions on Jewish immigration, land acquisitions and settlement. It provoked outrage in Zionist circles. Large parts of the Jewish population in Palestine went on strike and the British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, came under strong domestic pressure, so that he felt obliged to distance himself from the White Paper in a 'letter of clarification' to Chaim Weizmann.⁴²

⁴² The MacDonald letter became known as the 'Black Letter' among Arabs. See G. Kramer, *A history of Palestine: From the Ottoman conquest to the founding of the state of Israel*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008, pp. 234-5.

Chapter Six: The Period of Partition: 1939-49

The divisions in the Palestinian camp that had been such a debilitating factor undermining the resistance during the 1936-39 revolt continued to be a feature of the period of partition. The British declared war on Germany on 3rd September 1939. In Palestine the Arab population was relatively quiescent. The members of the Arab Higher Committee were in exile or jail, and the local-level cadres who were not in prison were exhausted and demoralised. The Jewish population in Palestine was driven by concern about the plight of their fellows in Europe. They were encouraged by their leadership to volunteer for the British military, and the *Haganah* (Defence) force coordinated its actions with the British forces, whilst using every opportunity to build up its infrastructure and resources.

Germany surrendered on 8th May 1945 and Japan followed a few months later on 15th August. The British were exhausted and war-weary. The Jews, on the other hand, were desperate to channel every possible Jewish refugee from Europe to Palestine in order to create facts on the ground and prove the necessity of a Jewish Homeland. Much to their anger the British stood by their pre-war commitment to maintain quotas on immigration, which provoked a violent reaction from the Jews. A state of emergency was declared and around 100,000 British troops were stationed in Palestine to combat the threat of Jewish armed struggle.

On 25th February 1947 the British announced they were handing over the responsibility of Palestine to the United Nations (UN). During June and July of that year the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) carried out its enquiries. It was boycotted by the Arab League, which had been established in 1945 and to whom the enfeebled AHC had handed over its negotiating rights. On 31st August 1947 UNSCOP issued its majority report recommending partition, and on 2nd November the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 181 in favour of partition. The Jews were delighted, the Arabs appalled. Fighting began almost immediately, and what followed in the subsequent months was a slow degeneration into civil war.

On 1st December 1947 the AHC issued a call for a three-day general strike. As in 1936 a network of local committees came into existence to coordinate action and organise resistance. Armed bands began to form, and in January 1948 the first Arab volunteers entered Palestine as part of an 'Arab Salvation Army'. Eventually they were to number 5000, but they remained poorly organised and ill-equipped.⁴³ Jewish forces, meanwhile, had started to seize control of abandoned British military bases. The sense of insecurity and fear amongst Palestinians grew as those who lived in mixed-cities such as Haifa were driven from their homes. The confusion was heightened by the flight of significant sections of the local Palestinian elite who left in fear of becoming embroiled in the intensifying violence, anticipating that they would return once matters had quietened down. But as the Spring of 1948 progressed the level of ethnic cleansing increased as the military campaigns on both sides began in earnest. For the Zionists the aim was to cleanse those zones scheduled for them by the UN partition proposals, along with gaining control of other areas where there was a significant Jewish population or particular security interests to be safeguarded. Both sides committed atrocities. On 9th April 1948 over 100 people were killed in the Dir Yassin massacre, whilst a month later on 13th May 130 Jews were slaughtered in Hebron after they had surrendered.

In such a situation of bloody conflict it is difficult to imagine how any nonviolent initiatives other than defensive could have any impact on the unfolding events. Indeed, nonviolence proved to be no defence whatsoever against the power of armed might. The villagers of Deir Yassin were raped and slaughtered despite having signed a non-aggression pact with their Jewish neighbours.⁴⁴ Further north in the mixed-town of Tiberias the community leaders of both communities had also signed a non-aggression pact in March 1948. The following month the *hagana* took control of the city and expelled the Arab residents.

By the time the British left and the state of Israel had been declared into existence on 15th May 1948 one third of the Palestinian population had been evicted from their homes.⁴⁵ This was when the armies from the Arab

⁴³ Kramer, 310.

⁴⁴ Kramer, p. 313.

⁴⁵ Pappé, p. 130.

League entered the fray. The newcomers were poorly equipped and there was no significant coordination between the different divisions. Indeed, according to Kramer, every attempt at coordinated action failed as a result of inter-Arab rivalry.⁴⁶ This is a verdict echoed by Pappé:

“That the Arab states succeeded in fielding any soldiers at all is remarkable. Only at the end of April 1948 did the politicians in the Arab world prepare a plan to save Palestine, which in practice was a scheme to annex as much of it as possible to the Arab countries participating in the war.”⁴⁷

The most significant illustration of this phenomenon concerned the machinations of Abdullah of Jordan who, with the connivance of the British, had reached an understanding with the Zionists to divide Palestine between them, with the territory apportioned to the Palestinians by the UN to come under the control of the Hashemite kingdom. As a consequence of this understanding Abdullah kept his well-trained Arab Legion in check during the war, restricting its advances to the control of the territory it was intended to annex.

By the end of October 1948 what had now become the Israeli army controlled 77 per cent of the former Palestinian territory. A final comprehensive ceasefire was agreed on 7th January 1949 and over the following months a series of armistice lines were agreed between Israel and its Arab neighbours setting borders which were to last virtually unchanged until 1967.

The defeat for the Palestinians was total. Over 400 villages had been destroyed or rendered uninhabitable. Around 75-80% of the Palestinian population had been displaced and dispossessed. The Gaza Strip was under Egyptian military rule, whilst Jordan annexed the West Bank and installed Raghīb Nashashibi as governor. In the new state of Israel all immigration restrictions were lifted for Jews, who flooded in and took over the abandoned properties of their previous Palestinian owners. Israel celebrated victory in its national liberation struggle, Palestinians mourned the catastrophe that had overcome them.

⁴⁶ Kramer, p. 315.

⁴⁷ Pappé, p. 131.

Reviewing this period during which Palestine was partitioned, the impression is that the fate of the Palestinians had moved out of their hands. Bigger forces were at play – the British, the United Nations, and a vigorous and driven Zionist movement whose goal, a Jewish state, was acknowledged as legitimate by the major powers of the USA and the USSR. The Palestinians emerged out of the 1936-39 revolt exhausted and demoralised, divided and dispirited. They handed over their representation in the international arena to the newly formed Arab League, but their Arab neighbours faced their own challenges as newly independent states and failed dismally to live up to the trust invested in them by their Palestinian cousins. It is almost as if the Palestinian experience of these years followed the pattern of a Greek tragedy, where the tragic outcome is an inevitable result of the protagonist's weaknesses.

Chapter Seven:

A Small Victory in the Midst of Tragedy – the Case of Battir⁴⁸

There were some spaces for manoeuvre available to the Palestinians, but it needed people with the insight and imagination to identify these zones of relative autonomy, the courage and determination to try to widen them, and the status and authority to mobilise and influence others in pursuit of what can only be described as ‘small victories’ in the context of the overall tragedy that was the Palestinian experience of partition.

Battir in 1948 was a small village of about 1000 inhabitants some six miles south-west of Jerusalem abutting the Jerusalem-Jaffa railway line. It had been on the front-line during the fighting, experiencing shelling and skirmishing but had never been over-run. As has been noted, Abdullah’s war aim was to annex what subsequently became known as the West Bank (of the River Jordan), and in pursuit of this goal had come to an understanding with the Jewish Agency that his Arab Legion would not attack Jewish troops. The only contentious issue concerned Jerusalem, and it was understood that the future of the city would be decided on the battlefield. In May 1948 the Jordanians eventually advanced and took control of the Old City and the eastern neighbourhoods. The Israelis occupied the western sector, and by September 1948 Jerusalem had become a divided city.

In March 1949 a bilateral armistice agreement was signed between Israel and Jordan, with the agreed border being based largely on the front-line positions held at the time of the UN-sponsored ceasefire of June 1948. Where there was disagreement two boundary lines were drawn on the map, with the land in-between designated ‘no-man’s-land’ (NML) whilst the matter was referred to a special bilateral armistice committee charged with reaching agreement over such disputes. Battir was one of the villages that fell within the strip of NML south of Jerusalem, which meant that the village should have been evacuated. It seemed that Battir would suffer the same fate that had befallen other villages that were ‘trapped’ on the wrong

⁴⁸ This section is based on the unpublished MA dissertation of Jawad Botmeh, *Civil resistance in Palestine: the village of Battir in 1948*, Coventry University, September 2006. Accessible at <http://www.coventry.ac.uk/researchnet/peacestudies/a/1136>

side of the new border. However, Battir avoided the trauma of neighbouring villagers who were dispossessed and displaced, largely due to the civil resistance campaign orchestrated by a 'son of the village', Hasan Mustafa.

Mustafa was the son of a local tribal leader and as such a respected member of the village community. He had been active organising the defence of the village during the war and was determined that a village that had remained unoccupied during the hostilities should not be lost as a consequence of the peace. To defend the village he followed a two-pronged strategy: 1) Active and persistent lobbying of the members of the armistice committee, arguing that Battir had never been conquered and therefore should not be evacuated; 2) Creating the appearance of a village that was fully inhabited and ready to defend itself against attack in order to deter the Israelis from making any pre-emptive assault.

Mustafa was helped in his lobbying by the fact that there were several Jordanian military officers involved in the deliberations who were unhappy with Abdullah's conduct of the war and were sympathetic to Battir's cause. On 18th April 1949 his efforts bore fruit when the committee routed the armistice line such that the bulk of the village remained under Jordanian control, whilst allowing Israel to take control of the railway line running alongside the village. The decision was to come into force on 1st May, and to deter any unilateral action by the Israelis to create more facts on the ground Mustafa organised young men to go and light lamps in the village houses at night, put out washing on lines, make as much noise as possible, and generally do all that they could to give the impression that the village was fully inhabited, when in fact most of the villagers spent their nights in a neighbouring village out of fear of an Israeli assault.

On 1st May when the agreement about the new armistice line came into effect Mustafa went to meet the Israeli officer (Moshe Dayan) and came to an agreement with him that the villagers would be allowed to cultivate their lands on the other side of the railway line, so long as they only used the access routes under the railway bridges and did not cross over the railway track itself. Once this agreement was reached Mustafa sent vehicles to collect those villagers who had been staying outside the village so they could

get back to their homes as quickly as possible. He then had to persuade them to start farming their fields, after all it took some nerve to cross the new 'green line' under the watching presence of Israeli troops in order to access their land. So Mustafa accompanied them, knowing that if the agreements were to be recognised and respected they needed to be implemented to the full.

Despite the various examples of offensive resistance displayed by the villagers under Hasan Mustafa's leadership, they could not escape the collective trauma of partition and the loss of the old familiar world. Mustafa was to recall, '... the days passed into months and the effect of isolation, loss of income, of health and educational services began to be reflected in bitterness and unhappiness. Something needed to be done if this village was to be saved.'⁴⁹ It was in this context that Mustafa led the village in various community development schemes, forms of constructive resistance. Improvements to the water supply and irrigation system was followed by the opening of a girls school, adult literacy classes and vocational training facilities. He persuaded UNWRA to construct a road linking the village with Bethlehem and encouraged an on-going tree-planting programme. In the words of one of Mustafa's grandsons, Jawad Botmeh:

"This community development drive managed to foster hope, provide employment and make the villagers understand that not only could they survive but they could also improve their lives markedly. This strengthened internal discipline in face of continued Israeli threat to the village and its land. In addition, Battir became an example of community development and its success brought the village many external admirers. Hasan Mustafa harnessed the power of external allies to make sure that outsiders had a stake in or at least witnessed Battir's prosperity and progress, bringing it protection and support. His real achievement, though, had been in harnessing the power of the indigenous concept of *a'aoneh* (community service/public help), infusing it with enlightened thinking and transforming it into a collective, potent, positive community force."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ H. Mustafa, *Welcome to Battir* (Battir, Jordan, July 1959) Accessible at <http://www.battiri8.com/hasan.html> (6th May 2010)

⁵⁰ Botmeh, p. 45. A number of villagers were killed by Israeli troops during the early 1950s. See B. Morris, *Israel's border wars, 1949-1956*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, p. 138.

Observations on the Battir Case-Study

The small victory that Battir represented in the broader context of the overwhelming catastrophe experienced by the bulk of Palestinians during the partition period was only possible because there was a space, a window of opportunity to be exploited, in the edifice that was being constructed by the key players in the drama. Analysing the case study using the framework presented in the introduction highlights a number of significant factors that help explain the relative success of this resistance movement.

1. Strong leadership

The resistance would not have taken place without the leadership of Hasan Mustafa. He was involved in organising the armed defence of the village during the war that meant that it was never over-run by the Israeli troops. He was the key player in the civil resistance during the deliberations of the Armistice Committee and initiated the community development programme that enabled the village to survive during the post-partition period. The fact that he was not only a 'son of the village' but also the son of the headman gave him the status and authority to influence and mobilise people. He also had the courage to lead by example, accompanying the villagers as they risked their lives in accessing their fields across the 'green line'. He also had the self-confidence and the status to negotiate with Moshe Dayan, the officer in charge of the Israeli troops facing the village on the day the new border was to come into force, asserting the villagers' right of access to their farm-land.

2. Social solidarity and shared commitment to the cause

As has been noted above, loyalty to one's clan and one's village ranked higher for most Palestinians than loyalty to an abstract concept like the nation. Moreover, nothing is likely to mobilise people more than a perceivable and immediate threat to their homes and their means of livelihood, and this is what the villagers of Battir faced. The alternative they faced was dispossession and displacement.

3. Imbalance in the means of coercive power and absence of any significant 'counter-movement'

The challenge facing Hasan Mustafa in the immediate aftermath of the war was to display the appropriate degree of defiance to deter the Israelis from attacking whilst avoiding any action that might provoke such an attack. In such circumstances, and in the context of the ceasefire having been agreed and the overwhelming military resources of the Israeli military, violent resistance was not a serious option, except conceivably as an absolute last resort in the event of an Israeli assault.

4. Recognition of the legitimacy of the struggle and good communications with sympathetic bystanders, third parties and constituencies of support

Hasan Mustafa was able to convince disgruntled Jordanian officers that the village had never been occupied, and as a consequence they were able to present his case to the Armistice Committee, which agreed on a re-routing of the border that took account of the Israeli interest in gaining control of the rail line whilst also accommodating the village interest in ensuring its own future existence. Later, during the post-partition community development phase, he was able to attract the interest of external humanitarian relief agencies who supported him in his constructive activities aimed at restoring the social, economic and cultural well-being of the village community.⁵¹

The experience of Battir stands in contrast to that of the 400 or more Palestinian villages that were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable during the 1947-49 period. As such it bears repeating that it was made possible by a particular conjunction of factors and conditions that created a slight 'window of opportunity' that Hasan Mustafa chose to exploit to the full. It also seems appropriate to remark that the quality of his leadership stands in stark and painful contrast to the woeful role played by so many of his contemporaries amongst the ranks of the national and local leadership strata.

⁵¹ The tragic irony is that having defended the village and its lands in 1949, on 20th February 2005 the Israeli government approved a new route for the Separation Wall which required the expropriation of large tracts of Battir land and thereby threatened the 1949 agreement.

Chapter Eight: The Lost Years of the 1950s

Between the disaster of 1947-48 and the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1964 there was virtually no significant public manifestation of Palestinian nationalism of any sort. The reasons for this are not hard to find.

1. Dispersal, Dispossession and Division

Palestinian society had been devastated by the defeats of 1947-48, which were in fact the culmination of a long chronology of failure. The immediate result was the dispersal of about 50 per cent of the Palestinian population to refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Less than 200,000 remained in the territory that had become Israel. Not only were they divided geographically, they also confronted different host regimes. In the West Bank, which was annexed by Jordan in 1949, they received Jordanian nationality. The Gaza Strip was under Egyptian military administration, whilst the Palestinians left in Israel received Israeli citizenship but lived under military rule until 1966. Conditions for the refugees in Lebanon and Syria varied over time and according to the political climate.

2. The Trauma of Loss

Whilst they were scattered and separated from each other, Palestinians were also disempowered by the deep trauma and shock suffered by those with a deep attachment to place who found themselves uprooted, no longer a majority in their own homeland but relegated to minority and subordinate status in states that were not their own.⁵²

⁵² It is interesting to note Pappé's observation that for Palestinians within Israel, 'Poetry was the one area in which national identity survived the Nakbah unscathed. What political activists did not dare express, poets sang out with force. Poetry was one medium through which the daily events of love and hate, birth and death, marriage and family could be intertwined with the political issues of land confiscation and state oppression and aired in public at special poetry festivals ... The Israeli secret service was powerless to decide whether this phenomenon was a subversive act or a cultural event.' (Pappé, p. 157)

3. Faith in Pan-Arabism

Another reason the Palestinians were so quiescent through the 1950s was their identification with the ideology of pan-Arabism, as embodied above all in Nasser's rise to power in Egypt in 1952. The claim was that the Arabs constituted a single people, sharing language, history and culture, who had been divided by the machinations of imperialist powers. It is easy to understand the appeal of this movement for a people who had been dispossessed – they could regain their strength and their agency through the resurgent power of the Arab nation. It offered the hope of support from their fellow-Arabs in their struggle against the Israeli enemy. Palestine would be 'liberated' in the context of the renewal of the Arab nation and associated political unification. The role for Palestinians in the meantime was to be patient.

4. The Priority of Economic Survival

For most Palestinians reduced to poverty and subordinate status in their new anomic conditions, the priority was survival – particularly economic survival. This was particularly challenging in the face of discriminatory regulations and practices that limited employment opportunities in Jordan, Lebanon and Israel. For many education became the main avenue for personal advancement.

Chapter Nine: The Emergence of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Israeli Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, 1964-1989

Historical experience shows us that a major spur for radicalism in whatever political context is the experience of discrimination and unemployment by educated young people – and this is what also happened with the Palestinians. In 1950 a young engineering student at Cairo University who was later to be known as Yasser Arafat set up a ‘Union of Palestinian Students’ with some friends. A short while later in Beirut, George Habash, a medical student at the American University, set up another student group with the rather grand title of the ‘Arab National Movement’. Grass-roots organisations were also being established in the Gaza Strip, and by the mid-1950s there was the beginning of a network of nationalist organisations, all of them very small and very weak. Incursions into Israel from Gaza and the West Bank started in an ad hoc fashion, monitored closely by the Egyptian and Jordanian authorities who had no desire to provoke Israel. It was out of this network that the main resistance organisation, Fatah, emerged. In 1964 the Palestine Liberation Organisation was formed. In 1967 the debacle of the ‘Six day war’ rang the death-knell of popular faith in pan-Arabism and boosted the fortunes of Fatah which became the prime agency of the Palestinian national movement.

Looking back on this period prior to the first intifada through the lens of nonviolent resistance, a number of observations come to mind.

1. The Glorification of Armed Struggle

It was with the rise of Fatah and the PLO that we witness the growth of the iconic figure of the Palestinian fighter with his weaponry that became the symbol of Palestinian resistance in subsequent decades. Palestine was to be ‘liberated’ – ie. a Palestinian state established – through ‘armed struggle’. Indeed, resistance was synonymous with armed struggle. The gun became the symbol of power. In this the PLO was sharing the ico-

nography and the rhetoric of other contemporary liberation movements who all spoke the language of third world nationalism and anti-imperialist struggle. An element in this was a belief in the transformative power of revolutionary violence. Violence was the only language that the oppressor understood. Violence would set the oppressed free. In the words of Frantz Fanon, 'Violence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organised and educated by its leaders, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths and gives the key to them.'⁵³

Following the 1967 war the initial strategy of the PLO was the fanciful one of using the occupied territories as a base for a popular guerrilla struggle. After a few months this was abandoned and Jordan was identified as the most appropriate launch pad for guerrilla raids. This was complemented by a terrorist campaign outside, characterised by plane hijackings intended to force a change in western policies towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

2. *Palestinians as Victims*

In an insightful discussion of the sources of Palestinian identity Rashid Khalidi has pointed to the fact that according to Palestinian perceptions they have experienced a series of crushing defeats throughout their recent history at the hands of an array of enemies so powerful as to have been virtually unassailable. Again and again Palestinian history is presented as one of heroic struggle against impossible odds betrayed by traditional leaders and perfidious Arab states.⁵⁴ One consequence of this world-view is that in the context of such asymmetric power relationships, the Palestinians can be absolved from responsibility for their failures. As Khalidi remarks, 'From this perspective, if their enemies were so numerous and powerful, it is hardly surprising that they were defeated.'⁵⁵

⁵³ Fanon, quoted in J. Meyerding, ed., *We are all part of one another: A Barbara Deming reader*, Philadelphia, PA.: New Society, 1984, p. 170.

⁵⁴ R. Khalidi, *Palestinian identity: The construction of modern national consciousness*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 196.

⁵⁵ Khalidi, p. 195.

3. *The Portrayal of Defeat as Triumph*

Developing his analysis Khalidi has pointed to a related peculiarity of the Palestinian experience: the manner in which failures have been portrayed as victories, or at least as heroic perseverance against impossible odds. According to his analysis, "This narrative of failure as triumph began during the Mandate, but reached its apogee in the years after 1948, when it was picked up and elaborated by the grassroots underground Palestinian nationalist organisations that would emerge and take over the PLO in the mid-1960s."⁵⁶ Amongst the examples he cites is the martyrdom of Izzadin Al-Qassem, the 1936-39 revolt, the 1947-49 catastrophe, the battle of Karama on 21st March 1968, Black September of 1970 when the PLO were expelled from Jordan by force of arms, and the subsequent expulsion from Beirut in 1982. A few months after the exodus from Lebanon there was a meeting of the Palestine National Council (PNC) in Algiers, when attempts were made to present the evacuation as a victory. Khalidi quotes the caustic comment of Issam Sartawi who observed, "One more "victory" like this one, and we will have the next meeting of the PNC in the Seychelles Islands!"⁵⁷

4. *Shifts in the Palestinian Political Centre of Gravity*

During the years when the PLO, and Fatah in particular, was a burgeoning force, the Palestinian political centre of gravity shifted. After 1967 the move was from the territories that were once part of the Palestinian Mandate to the refugee communities and camps in Jordan, and after 1970 to Lebanon. It was the refugees who were seen by the PLO as potential recruits for the armed liberation struggle, and it was amongst the refugee communities, especially in Lebanon, that the PLO pursued its own form of constructive resistance with the establishment of its own broad welfare infrastructure, which in turn enhanced its standing among the refugees. This focus distanced the PLO from the Palestinians in the occupied territories, a separation heightened by the problems of communication after the 1967 war and the ensuing Israeli occupation.

⁵⁶ Khalidi, p. 195.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Khalidi, pp. 198-9. Sartawi was subsequently murdered in Lisbon. In 1983. The assassination was presumed to be the work of the dissident Abu Nidal group.

The Situation of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories

The message for the Palestinians in the occupied territories embodied in all these developments became clear: stay steadfast, make babies, and eventually you will be liberated as a consequence of the pressure generated by the PLO and its allies outside. In essence their allotted role was a passive one. In truth, the space available for organising any form of collective resistance to the occupation was severely circumscribed. Any signs of opposition to the occupation met with severe repression. Four East Jerusalemites were expelled as early as July 1967 after calling for a non-violent resistance campaign of non-cooperation and civil disobedience.⁵⁸ That same month the Israelis destroyed half the homes in Qalqilya after reports of armed resistance in the town – the first of many acts of collective punishment directed at those regarded as resisters. In the Gaza Strip there were numerous protests and demonstrations against the occupation, some of them involving Molotov cocktails and other weaponry, but all were quashed. The assault on the basic human rights of the Palestinian population continued, accompanied by the confiscation of land and the establishment of settlements.⁵⁹

The emergence of any coordinated leadership that could organise resistance to the occupation within the Palestinian territories was hampered by the Israeli tactic of deporting any suspected resistance leader, but it was also exacerbated by the suspicions of the the PLO leadership outside regarding potential rivals to its own leadership position. The grouping they were most wary of were the communists who were the most advanced underground political organisation. As early as 1968 the communists had established National Guidance Committees, but in 1973 it was the PLO that was instrumental in establishing the Palestinian National Front (PNF) as an attempt to coordinate nationalist activities in the occupied territories within a PLO framework. The Front was led by an eight member committee representing the communists and various PLO organisations. Although most of its activities were carried out clandestinely, its work was severely curtailed by the Israelis, and it was eventually outlawed in October 1979.

⁵⁸ Pappe, p. 195.

⁵⁹ By 1972 almost 28 percent of the West Bank had been confiscated. (Pappe, p. 200)

Denied the opportunity to express themselves openly in any overtly political organisation, the young nationalists established other vehicles for education and mobilisation. Student and professional associations, trade unions, women's societies, social and cultural associations, and other grass-roots organisations became the main agencies for promoting the struggle against the occupation. The activists received encouragement in this constructive resistance work from the outside leadership after the PLO had agreed in 1974 upon an intermediate goal of establishing a 'national authority' on any part of Palestine from which the Israelis might withdraw. In anticipating the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, the leadership of the PLO was concerned to create the institutional infrastructure for such a state as early as possible. In fact, the grass-roots organisations that were established during the 1970s were seen as having a dual role. On the one hand, they were to serve as agencies for the political organisation and mobilisation of the people, seedbeds of offensive resistance. On the other hand, they also existed as forms of constructive resistance providing basic personal and community services that were not provided by the Israeli occupiers. Thus, in a somewhat paradoxical manner, the absence of certain state services created the institutional space for the development of alternative, Palestinian 'quasi-state' organisations and agencies. Through the provision of much-needed services and facilities, such grass-roots organisations gained the allegiance of the majority of the Palestinian population, and as such constituted the nucleus of an alternative structure of authority and power to rival that of Israeli military government. Indeed, according to Salim Tamari,⁶⁰

"this strategy of informal resistance ... or institutional resistance was actually far more successful than even its own designers envisioned. By the late 1970s, it had established the complete political hegemony of Palestinian nationalism and the PLO as the single articulator of Palestinian aspirations."

This growth in nationalist sentiment and commitment amongst the inhabitants of the occupied territories was not due solely to the influence of the political activists amongst their number. It also reflected the enhanced prestige of the PLO following the October 1973 War and the 1974 Arab

⁶⁰ S. Tamari, 'What the uprising means', *Middle East Report*, May-June 1988, p. 26.

Summit at Rabat. Primarily, however, it was due to the growth in anti-Israeli sentiment aroused by the burgeoning settlements and the harsh treatment of protesters meted out by Israeli troops. The spread of nationalist feeling was illustrated most graphically in the 1976 municipal elections, which the Israelis allowed to be held. Most of the councillors and mayors elected were part of the 'National Bloc', openly identified with the PLO. Although the bulk of the new mayors were young members of old established families, the 1976 elections nonetheless marked the political ascendancy of a newer, more radical, nationalist constituency. Whilst the PLO was heartened by the 1976 results, its organisers were worried that the newly elected representatives would be cultivated by the Israelis as an alternative Palestinian leadership. The dominance of Fatah within the PLO outside the occupied territories was not reflected to the same degree inside.

Following the election of the Likud government in 1977 and the subsequent Camp David Accords, the new mayors were instrumental in establishing the National Guidance Committee. Formed in October 1978, the Committee reflected a very wide spectrum of Palestinian nationalist political orientations, including the nationalist mayors and representatives of trade unions, societies and associations. The aim was to organise and coordinate an open political struggle against the occupation in general and the autonomy proposals of Camp David in particular. However, its non-clandestine form and the fact that many of its members were public figures made the Committee particularly vulnerable to Israeli counter-measures. Its effectiveness was greatly reduced by the imposition of restriction orders, arrests and the deportation of leading figures in the Committee, whilst in June 1980 the mayors of Nablus and Ramallah were severely maimed by car bombs. In March 1982, the remaining mayors were dismissed and the Committee outlawed by the Israeli Defence Minister, Ariel Sharon.

Whilst they attempted to suppress this embryonic Palestinian government in the occupied territories and uproot the influence of the PLO, the Israelis continued to pursue their second track: the creation of a more pliant leadership amongst the Palestinians through the promotion of the so-called 'Village Leagues'. The Israelis attempted to invest their nominees with the powers of the disbanded municipalities, but they were singularly unsuccessful, with most Palestinians considering the members of the Village Leagues as little more than criminals and collaborators.

During the period following the destruction of the PLO's infrastructure in Beirut in 1982, morale within the occupied territories was low. The PLO appeared to have little alternative other than to pursue the diplomatic path to some kind of settlement as a subordinate partner to Jordan's King Hussein. The Arab world was in disarray as a consequence of the Iran-Iraq war, and the inhabitants of the occupied territories were left feeling isolated and alone. Even the effectiveness of the National Guidance Committee had been debilitated before its final demise by factional splits and personal rivalries. In part this was due to the on-going distrust of the communists by the Fatah leadership of the PLO. As members of the Palestinian Communist Party (PCP) were influential in popular organisations and trade unions in the occupied territories, the suspicion extended to all those structures within which the communists played a key role. The situation deteriorated to such a point that the leadership outside precipitated a split in the trade union movement in 1981, directing the flow of 'steadfastness' funds to its own 'clients'.⁶¹

According to Sarah Graham-Brown, by 1983 Fatah had become the strongest political current in the occupied territories, followed by the Communist Party, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and lastly the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).⁶² Unable to organise openly, these different political factions had used the trade unions, professional associations, student union groups and the different grassroots organisations as arenas for political competition. Even in the 1970s there had always been considerable rivalry between the different political organisations, with a consequent duplication of service-provision agencies in some areas, each affiliated with a different political faction. In the first half of the 1980s relationships between the different nationalist factions deteriorated, considerably. Such political and organisational rivalries served as a fertile ground for mutual suspicion and rumour, with rampant allegations of corruption relating to the receipt and use of funds from outside.

The divisions also facilitated the task of the Israelis in trying to prevent the emergence of an all-Palestine political authority that could command allegiance and coordinate the collective resistance of the inhabitants throughout the occupied territories. The Israelis also attempted to encourage the

⁶¹ See A. Gresh, *The PLO: The struggle within*, London: Zed Books, 1988, p. 222.

⁶² S. Graham-Brown, 'Report from the occupied territories', *MERIP Reports*, 115, June 1983, p. 5.

fragmentation process by trying to promote Islamic groups as rivals to the secular nationalists.

The level of disunity and factional rivalry within the nationalist camp in the occupied territories was a reflection of the condition of the PLO itself during the years after 1982. Arafat's courtship of Hussein, and his seeming preparedness to consider some kind of Jordanian-Israeli condominium over the occupied territories, helped to provoke a rebellion from within the ranks of Fatah itself. This was undoubtedly fomented by Syria, who also sponsored the formation of a National Salvation Front in opposition to Arafat, consisting of the rebel Fatah factions, the PFLP, the PFLP-General Command, and Saiqa.

However, in February 1986, negotiations between Hussein and Arafat finally broke down, whilst the pressure for the reunification of the PLO grew as Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon were besieged by Syria's clients, the militia forces of Amal. Increasingly urgent demands were also coming from the inhabitants of the occupied territories, who were calling for some political initiative before it was too late and all their land was expropriated for the use of Israeli settlers. The USSR also played a key role as mediator helping to bring about a reconciliation between the different groupings. All this came to fruition at the 18th Palestine National Council (PNC) meeting of April 1987 in Algiers. It was at this meeting also that the PCP was welcomed as a full member of the PLO for the first time. This unprecedented display of unity provided a necessary basis for coordination and cooperation between the different nationalist factions within the occupied territories.

Palestinians in the occupied territories felt they had reached an impasse. As conditions under the Israeli occupation worsened, where could they look for help? The Arab states had lost interest. Europe and the USSR seemed happy enough to stay on the margins, and the United States remained as committed to Israel as it had ever been. This was the world into which the Intifada erupted - a mass civilian-based unarmed resistance movement initiated by youths who knew no other existence beyond that of living under occupation.

Chapter Ten: The First Intifada: December 1987 – October 1991

In looking at the first intifada through the lens of nonviolence it is useful to distinguish two phases - from late 1987 through to early 1990, and the subsequent period through to the Madrid Peace Conference of October 1991.

Phase One (December 1987-1990): Horizontal Escalation of the Struggle - Mass Civilian-Based Unarmed Resistance Against Occupation

Unarmed Versus Nonviolent Resistance

In early December 1987 riots broke out in the Gaza Strip and there were violent clashes between Palestinians and Israeli forces. The confrontations spread from the refugee camps to the cities, from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank, and developed into a sustained attempt to throw off the burden of Israeli occupation by means of mass protest and non-cooperation. During this phase the mode of Palestinian resistance could not be characterised as nonviolent - those who threw stones did so in order to inflict violence on the targets. However it could be characterised as 'unarmed' insofar as the weapons used were in the main not lethal in the sense of being designed to maim and kill.

Horizontal Escalation of the Struggle

The outbreak of the uprising came as a surprise to the leadership of the PLO in their headquarters in Tunis. They were even more surprised by its scale and its coordinated nature. This was achieved through the creation of a 'Unified National Command' (UNC) representing the different political factions. This clandestine body attempted to coordinate the resistance through regular communiqués and leaflets, the content of which was usually agreed beforehand with the PLO leadership in Tunis. The UNC was supported by an organisational infrastructure of popular committees, and together they took on the character of an embryonic state - coordinating activities, administering the provision of basic services and seek-

ing to control the use of force within its territorial boundaries. The goal was to create a counter-authority to that of the Israeli occupiers, thereby undermining the Israeli capacity to command obedience. With such an organisational framework, organically linked to the different sections of Palestinian society, the months following the outbreak of the intifada saw a mass social mobilisation - a horizontal escalation of the struggle which embraced all sectors of society.

Different Forms of Unarmed Resistance

Symbolic resistance

Whilst stone-throwing and other direct confrontations with the occupiers was primarily the preserve of young males, the majority of Palestinians bore witness to their resistance by less drastic yet symbolically powerful means. They boycotted Israeli products as much as possible. They wore clothes in their national colours, women wore pendants and jewellery incorporating the outline of historic Palestine. People followed 'Palestinian time' by switching between summer and winter time a week earlier than the Israelis.

Polemical resistance

The authority of the UNC and the popular committees was revealed during the first phase of the intifada by the solidarity of the response to strike calls and the instructions to merchants to restrict their opening hours to the mornings on non-strike days. Moreover, as part of its attempt to undermine the authority of the Israeli occupiers the UNC called on all those Palestinians who worked for the Israeli administration to resign. Those who ignored such instructions faced sanctions - Palestinians referred to this process as 'cleaning out our national home'.

Offensive resistance

Whilst the closure of shops and work-places at mid-day represented a powerful display of the authority of the UNC and the solidarity of the population, it also meant that by mid-afternoon the streets and public

spaces were clear of 'civilians' and could become the domain of the strike forces in their direct confrontations with the Israeli occupiers. This was the dimension of the intifada that lent itself most to the world's media - stone-throwing youths with *keffiyahs* wrapped round their faces clashing with Israeli soldiers armed with tear-gas grenades, rubber-bullets and other weaponry. This was the visual representation of the 'David versus Goliath' conflict that the Palestinians sought to communicate to the rest of the world.

Defensive resistance

Each neighbourhood and community had its own 'strike force' of young men engaged in direct confrontations with the occupier. Rarely would they spend more than one night a week with their families. They moved from house to house (and cave to cave) in order to avoid arrest and imprisonment, depending on a network that also included medical relief and other support services.

Constructive resistance

Less visual than the confrontations was the constructive work that was integral to the first phase of the intifada. As people began to suffer economic hardship as a consequence of the calls to disengage from the Israeli economy, the loss of income through strikes, and the boycott of Israeli produce, so families began to develop their household economy in their efforts to become more self-reliant, cultivating vegetable plots and rearing poultry. Women's committees were particularly active in promoting new forms of home-based economic activity. Homes were also the base for the clandestine education classes that were held as a means of countering the Israeli closure of schools and colleges.

Dimensions of the Intifada Strategy

Underpinning the different types of unarmed resistance were a number of strategic goals.

Regeneration of a spirit of resistance

One of the main targets of the different forms of resistance was the Palestinians themselves. The verb from which the term *intifada* is derived refers to the action of 'shaking off' or 'shaking out'. It can also refer to recovery or recuperation. This expresses the fundamental aim of generating a national spirit of solidarity necessary for the liberation struggle to be sustained. The strikes, the boycott of Israeli goods, the efforts to disengage from the Israeli economy and state, the different forms of symbolic resistance, the constructive programme - they were all symbolic of the 'shaking off' of subservience and dependency and the restoration of communal and national pride.

Increasing the costs of occupation

Through the various forms of resistance the Palestinians sought to inflict pain upon the Israelis, causing them to question whether the costs of occupation outweighed the benefits. These costs were not so much the loss of lives and physical injuries suffered as the impact on the economy, the erosion of morale within Israel and within the Israeli Defence Force itself, and the damage to Israel's standing in the world and in the eyes of significant sections of world Jewry.

Shame power and links in the chain of nonviolence

Gandhi laid considerable emphasis on the transformative power of self-suffering in the struggle for justice. He believed that through a preparedness to suffer in the 'firm holding on to truth', resisters (*satyagrahis*) might convert the oppressor, revealing to them the shameful consequences of their actions and offering up the possibility of mutual liberation in the creative struggle for a better future.

Such was the belief, but in practice we know that oppressors can remain immune to the suffering of their victims so long as they see a significant social distance between themselves and the 'other'. Aware of this, Palestinians adopted a step-by-step model for influencing the Israeli public and decision-makers. They developed a dialogue first of all with Israeli

peace groups opposed to the occupation. These Israeli sympathisers were then able to exercise a greater impact on their fellow-citizens closer to the mainstream of Israeli politics, and so on link by link along what Johan Galtung has depicted as the 'great chain of nonviolence' towards decision-making centres and significant opinion leaders.

The intervention of third parties

The combined impact of these different forces and pressures would, it was hoped, bring about a situation in which significant third parties - the United States in particular - would intervene to exercise pressure on Israel to agree to begin peace discussions leading to its eventual withdrawal from the occupied territories.

Phase Two: Post 1990 Deterioration

Over the Christmas/New Year of 1989-1990 thousands of international peace activists joined Israelis and Palestinians in a series of demonstrations in Jerusalem under the banner of 'Time For Peace'. In retrospect this was the high point of the intifada as an unarmed mass-based civilian resistance movement. The months following were to see a deterioration in the 'health' of the movement. There were a number of reasons for this weakening of the struggle.

1. The relative failure of disengagement and non-cooperation

It is one of the axioms of nonviolent resistance that if sufficient people, especially those in strategic institutional positions, withdraw their cooperation then they will thereby undermine the sources of the oppressor's power. One of the goals of the intifada was to raise the costs of the occupation to such a level by means of their direct opposition and the withdrawal of cooperation that the Israelis would consider withdrawing. The weakness was that whilst Israel desires the territory of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, it does not want the people - the Palestinians. Therefore it was prepared to carry the costs of the intifada whilst increasing the screws of repression on the Palestinian people. In a nutshell, the Israelis did not require Palestinian cooperation to maintain the occupation, and this seriously weakened the impact of the unarmed resistance.

2. The escalating costs of resistance

Furthermore, it turned out that in many ways the Palestinians were more dependent on the Israelis than the other way round. The Israelis could find replacements for the Palestinians who withdrew their labour, the Palestinians could not find alternative sources of employment and income. Moreover, Israel remained the only source for many of the basic necessities of life within the occupied territories. Therefore, as the months passed the costs of resistance borne by everyday Palestinians rose, whilst Israel showed no weakening of its resolve. People began to question the commitment to unarmed resistance - Was it causing the Israelis sufficient suffering to force them to consider withdrawing?

3. The weakness of 'shame power' and the appeal of 'vertical escalation'

There were two dimensions to the Palestinian leverage power in relation to the Israeli public - the attempt to convert and persuade by means of their preparedness to suffer for their just cause (shame power) and the attempt to force the Israelis to consider withdrawal by increasing the costs of continued occupation. Unfortunately these two dimensions - conversion and coercion - do not rest easily together. Thus, the vulnerability to shame power of the many liberal Israelis uneasy about the morality of occupation could be (and was) negated by any act of Palestinian violence resulting in injury and death for Israelis. The dominant emotion within Israel, then as now, was fear - and any act of violence triggered that fear of a people surrounded by hostile neighbours who believe that their very survival as a nation and a state depends on the maintenance of their physical/military strength and to show signs of weakness would be suicidal. Therefore, as the months passed and Palestinians became frustrated with the lack of tangible achievements realised through unarmed resistance, so the appeal of a 'vertical' escalation of the struggle towards armed resistance grew. As the incidence of violent attacks on Israeli targets increased, so the gains achieved through 'shame power' were eroded, sympathy for the Palestinian cause being replaced by a fear of Palestinian 'terrorists'.

4. *The fragmentation of resistance and the weakening of political control*

One of the strengths of the intifada lay in the coordination between the different political factions achieved through the UNC and the popular committee structure. However, by 1990 not only were the tensions between the different factions increasing in the light of the perceived weaknesses of the unarmed struggle and the temptations of vertical escalation, but the majority of the experienced cadres who had been able to maintain cohesion in the struggle had been apprehended and imprisoned (or deported) by the Israelis. Their places were taken by relatively inexperienced young men from the ranks of the strike forces who lacked the political skills and organisational experience of the older generation.

5. *Third parties and the impact of external events*

Palestinians lacked the resources to affect the self-interest of the United States, and thereby prompt it to intervene constructively in the conflict. This was highlighted by the American response to Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait in August 1990. Within days the build-up of American troops in Saudi Arabia was under way. Inexcusable as the invasion was, Saddam Hussein's actions were popular in many parts of the Arab world, including Palestine – here was a man who refused to be intimidated by American power and hence restored some sense of pride to the Arab nation. The result was that financial support for the Palestinian cause from the Gulf States dried up. During Operation Desert Storm Iraq launched missiles at Israel, which meant that Palestinians were subjected to lengthy curfews, the hardship and the suffering intensified and so did the bitterness. By mid-1991 more Palestinians were being killed by their fellow Palestinians than by the Israelis as anger and resentment turned against those suspected of collaboration and betrayal of the uprising.

Let Israelis experience something of our suffering!

Of the many memories of the first intifada, one in particular stays in my mind. It was 1991 at the time of the war against Iraq. A friend of mine told me later how he used to go up on the roof of his house in Nablus and

cheer as the Scud missiles flew over on their way to strike at Tel Aviv. Why did he cheer, when he knew there was a possibility they were armed with chemical weapons? The answer was clear - he cheered because the Israelis would begin to feel something of the pain and the fear that was such a part of the everyday life of Palestinians! This was the logic of revenge.

Chapter Eleven: The Oslo Process, September 1993 – September 2000

In October 1991 peace talks commenced in Madrid sponsored by the USA and the USSR. Seeking to use the political capital generated by Operation Desert Storm (and meet the commitments made to their Egyptian and Syrian allies who had lent their support to the war against Iraq) in order to kick-start an Arab-Israeli peace process, the US administration under the presidency of George Bush Senior had exerted significant financial leverage on Israel to force the Likud-led government to the table.⁶³

The multi-lateral talks continued intermittently for a number of years, with no apparent progress. However, changes were taking place. In June 1992 a Labour-led coalition came to power in Israel that was publicly committed to 'land for peace', whilst the PLO was feeling diplomatically isolated on the world stage and feared the growing influence of Hamas within the occupied territories. This was the context for the 'track two' negotiations facilitated by Norway that came to be known as the Oslo Process, and which resulted in the joint Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles (on Interim Self-government Arrangements) that was signed at the White House in Washington on 13th September 1993.

In the preamble to the Declaration both sides agreed:

“... it is time to put an end to decades of confrontation and conflict, recognize their mutual legitimate and political rights, and strive to live in peaceful coexistence and mutual dignity and security and achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement and historic reconciliation through the agreed political process.”

There was widespread euphoria at the announcement, which we now know to have been tragically misplaced. Israel continued to negotiate from its position of strength, imposing its demands on its weaker partner. As Martin Woollacott noted in *The Guardian* (16th March 1994),

⁶³ Israel had requested \$10 billion loan guarantees from the USA so that they could fund the absorption of the Russian Jews who were flooding into the country.

“The sense that Israel is about winning, not losing, about standing up to enemies rather than submitting to them, runs across the whole political spectrum. Its roots in Jewish history and above all in the Holocaust have been documented. Yet it seems clear that there cannot be a true peace unless Israel can learn to lose ...”

On 1st July 1994 Arafat established himself in the Gaza Strip. But as one observer commented at the time, “The Palestinian flag flies over the Gaza Strip and Jericho, but Israel holds the boundaries, dictates the security policy and, to a large extent, controls the economy, of the autonomous areas.”⁶⁴ What followed was a cycle of violence fuelled on the Palestinian side by a growing sense of frustration at the lack of any substantive progress towards the realisation of any significant ‘peace dividend’. It was also driven by those Islamist political groups who considered the Oslo Accords a sell-out and betrayal of the Palestinian patrimony and who recruited suicide bombers to target civilians within Israel. The Israelis responded with targeted assassinations, collective sanctions (particularly the closure policy that prevented movement of Palestinians within the occupied territories), new expropriations of land for settlements, the suspension of negotiations, and renewed pressure on the Palestinian Authority (PA) to deal with the ‘terrorists’.

The impact of the closures was particularly harsh, resulting in escalating unemployment and levels of poverty, whilst enforcing the separation of the West Bank from the Gaza Strip, with Israel controlling all movement between the two territories. Meantime Israel continued to construct and expand the settlements along with a large network of connecting roads to serve them. In effect the territories were being divided into separate segments by these new ‘facts on the ground’, a situation that was formalised by the second ‘Interim Agreement’ signed on 28th September 1995. ‘Oslo II’, as it came to be known, designated a patchwork of zones embracing the main population centres of the West Bank over which the PA could enjoy a degree of functional autonomy relating to civil affairs. But each of these zones was separated from the others by territory over which Israel retained control.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Derek Brown, *The Guardian*, 25th July 1994:

⁶⁵ A similar pattern had already been imposed in the Gaza Strip, with Jewish settlements divided into three blocs covering about one third of the territory, with the remaining two thirds cut into cantons for the 1.1 million Palestinians.

The combined impact of these developments was to bring about a set of conditions that undermined any possibility of launching any new mass-based unarmed civilian resistance movement against the occupation.

1. First of all, any initiative had to deal with the PA that had been tasked by Israel and its international backers with controlling dissent within the Palestinian community. From the start the PA had shown a marked suspicion and antipathy towards any civil society organisation that evidenced signs of independence of thought, action and funding.⁶⁶ Moreover, the PA had rapidly developed a track record for corruption and nepotism rather than respect for human rights and democratic processes.
2. Secondly, for the majority of the Palestinian population the occupation was experienced 'at a distance'. The Israeli soldiers were no longer entering the streets of the towns and villages on a daily basis, they were manning the check-points that controlled the movement of Palestinians between their zones of relative autonomy. Moreover, the settlers now travelled along highways specially designated for them from which Palestinians were banned. As a consequence there were no immediate sites of contention at which Palestinian protestors might confront the agents of the occupation, except at the growing number of check-points and road-blocs.
3. The leverage power over the Israelis that could be exerted by Palestinian non-cooperation was virtually nil. Drawing the lessons from the intifada, Israel had attracted guest-workers from around the globe to take the place of the Palestinian labour upon which significant sectors of the Israeli economy had once depended.
4. There was a lack of potential leaders of any coordinated nonviolent resistance movement. The cadres from the intifada followed different trajectories, but two career paths were common. Some joined the new PA, whilst others founded or joined non-governmental organisations concerned with themes like democratisation and peace-building. During

⁶⁶ The organisational infrastructure of popular committees that had directed and guided the first intifada had been superseded by the agencies of the PA.

the 1990s there were significant international funds directed to the promotion of warmer relationships between Palestinians and Israelis through 'people-to-people' dialogue projects. Such programmes often included a conflict resolution training and capacity-building component, but they did not include training for nonviolent resistance.⁶⁷

As a consequence of these factors, by the summer of 2000 the occupation seemed more firmly entrenched than ever. Since the signing of the Declaration of Principles the confiscation of land and the expansion of settlements had continued at an accelerated pace. The West Bank and Gaza Strip had been divided into cantons separated from each other by Israeli controlled territory. Innumerable check-points and barriers had been set up throughout the territories controlling the movement of Palestinians and enabling the Israelis to lock them into their particular enclaves, with disastrous consequences for economic activity and general living standards. Moreover, as Sarah Roy observed, 'In these policies Israel relied on the Palestinian Authority and its vast security apparatus to maintain control of the population, suppress any visible forms of opposition, and provide protection for Israeli actions.'⁶⁸

⁶⁷ It has been estimated that between September 1993 and October 2000 there were about 500 people-to-people projects involving over 100 organisations and a total budget of \$20-30 million. S. Herzon & A. Hai, 'What do people mean when they say "people-to-people"?', *Palestine-Israel Journal*, v.12-13, no. 4, 2005-6. Accessible at <http://www.pij.org/details.php?id=395> (20th July 2010)

⁶⁸ S. Roy, *Failing peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict*, London: Pluto, 2007, p. 245

Chapter Twelve: The Second Intifada, 2000-2005

The Al-Aqsa Intifada began in September 2000 following Ariel Sharon's provocative entry into the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif area. But the deeper cause was the build up of frustration, resentment and anger resulting from seven years of a peace process that only served to deepen Palestinian dispossession and deprivation whilst strengthening the Israeli occupation, a situation made worse by the malfunctioning of the Palestinian Authority and its leadership. The rapid militarisation of the uprising effectively sidelined any significant role for civil society groups in the struggle, as a younger and more militant generation of cadres came to the fore, superseding to some extent the discredited older generation of leaders. They were influenced to a significant degree by the example of Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon whose guerrilla tactics had succeeded in forcing Israel to withdraw in May 2000. Thus it was that within a short while every Palestinian faction, secular and Islamic, had spawned its own armed militia, each seeking to contribute to the collapse of the occupation through violent confrontation and armed struggle. Amongst these the armed wing of Hamas re-emerged and took the fight beyond the borders into Israel itself.

The suicide bombings inevitably brought about massive Israeli retaliation, culminating in the destruction of the Jenin refugee camp and the slaughter of over 50 Palestinians in April 2002 following the killing of 30 Israeli Jews at a restaurant in Netanya a few days earlier. Amidst this carnage, and the associated destruction of the socio-economic fabric of Palestinian society, there was no space for any large-scale nonviolent resistance.

The second intifada thus stood in stark contrast to the first, its violent character limiting both internal participation and external third party involvement and support.⁶⁹ The main points of contrast are indicated in the following table:

⁶⁹ For a discussion of some of the points of contrast, see G. Andoni, 'A comparative study of intifada 1987 and intifada 2000', In R. Carey, ed., *The new intifada*, London: Verso, 2001, pp. 209-218.

<u>1st Intifada</u>	<u>2nd Intifada</u>
Predominantly unarmed resistance	Predominantly armed/violent resistance
Mass civilian involvement	Civilians confined to 'support' functions
Cohesion & unity via popular committees	Fragmentation with power to local militias
Predominantly secular	Enhanced confessional character
Attempts to influence Israeli publics through dialogue of words and actions, shame power etc.	Attempts to influence Israeli publics through intimidation and fear.
Active support from Israeli peace groups	Limited role for Israeli peace groups in context of suicide bombings/terror attacks
Significant international support & third party pressure for peace settlement	Particularly after 11th September 2001 resistance viewed through the lens of 'war on terror'

During the second intifada civilians were primarily restricted to performing subordinate support functions for the front-line fighters. They were also used, as were their Israeli counterparts, as vehicles for propaganda in their capacity as 'innocent victims' of the barbaric outrages of the 'other'.

The Israelis launched Operation Defensive Shield in March-May 2002 and re-occupied the Palestinian enclaves from which they had withdrawn under the terms of the 'Interim Agreement' of September 1995 and intensified their domination of every aspect of Palestinian life – enforcing curfews and closures, demolishing dwellings and forcing people out of their homes, effecting mass arrests, assassinating alleged militants and other 'terrorists'. They also decided to embark on the building of a separation wall to act as a physical barrier between the West Bank and Israel.

They commenced construction in the spring of 2002, and by September 2003 it had become the focus of international attention. It seemed clear to many observers that whilst the Israeli government justified the barrier in terms of the security needs of Israeli civilians (ie. the need to keep out the bombers), its route was also determined by the desire to expropriate even more Palestinian territory and impose an additional layer of suffering on the Palestinians. Within a very short while it had impacted deleteriously on the lives of tens of thousands of Palestinians who were forced from their homes, denied access to their fields, prevented from reaching their places of work, and forced to travel circuitous routes and negotiate armed checkpoints to get to school, university or medical centre.

The construction of such a new, direct and visible challenge to their well-being provoked a wave of resistance amongst those most directly affected, and for the most part the ensuing struggle against the 'separation/apartheid wall' has been nonviolent in character, with protestors using a range of techniques available from the nonviolent activist tool-box.⁷⁰

1. Legal Challenges

In 2004 Palestinians working with Israeli human rights lawyers raised the question of the legality of the Wall before the International Court of Justice at The Hague. The ruling that the Wall violated international law was non-binding, but it served to attract considerable media attention around the world, and as such was a successful form of polemical resistance. Petitions have also been brought before the Israeli Supreme Court on a number of occasions. In 2004 and again in 2007 the Court ruled that the proposed route of the wall and associated expropriation of Palestinian land could not be justified by the security needs of Israeli citizens. However, in the majority of cases the Court has rejected petitions, accepting the state's position that the barrier's route properly balanced security considerations against the rights of Palestinians.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Many of the confrontations with Israeli military aimed at preventing or disrupting the construction of the wall have involved stone-throwing by Palestinian youth, and as such perhaps the term 'unarmed resistance' would be more appropriate as a descriptor than nonviolent resistance in such cases.

⁷¹ For details of legal challenges to the Wall, see http://www.btselem.org/english/Separation_Barrier/Beit_Surik_Ruling.asp (accessed 2nd August 2010)

2. Demonstrations and Other Forms of Symbolic and Polemical Protest

There were regular demonstrations, marches, vigils and other forms of protest taking place throughout the second intifada. Most of them were directed against the Wall but others targeted particular road-blocks, check-points and army posts. However, in the context of the culture of violence that predominated on both sides during this period, the only way Palestinians could engage in nonviolent protest without incurring potentially lethal violence from the Israeli security forces was under the 'protection' provided by international and Israeli participants. As Ghassan Andoni commented in an interview from October 2002, '... the presence of Israelis and Internationals can defuse the ability of the Israeli army to use greater force against protestors and make soldiers think twice before starting to shoot or use force.'⁷²

3. Direct Action and Offensive Resistance

The sustained involvement of international activists in the struggle against the Wall and other forms of domination and oppression was one of the key features of nonviolent resistance during the second intifada. As noted above, one of their most important functions was to provide a degree of protection through accompanying Palestinian resisters during their protest actions, a role also performed by Israeli activists. This was and has continued to be evidenced most prominently in some of the direct actions against the Wall, such as those initiated by the villagers of Bil'in. In February 2005 a popular committee was formed to coordinate the resistance to the construction of the barrier which threatened to cut off the village from over 2000 dunums (500 acres) of its agricultural land. By June 2005 more than 45 actions had been initiated by the committee.⁷³ Typical of these was one which took place in May 2005 after it was learned that a grove of olive trees was to be uprooted. To prevent this village activists accompanied by several Israeli supporters tied themselves to the trees. One of the participants later reported,

⁷² G. Andoni in J. Sandercock et al, *Peace under fire: Israel/Palestine and the International Solidarity Movement*, London: Verson, 2004, p. 14.

⁷³ V. Dudouet, 'Cross-border nonviolent advocacy during the second Palestinian intifada: The International Solidarity Movement', in H. Clark, ed. *People power: Unarmed resistance and global solidarity*, London: Pluto, 2009, pp. 125-134.

“... it was successful because the soldiers couldn’t do anything, like arrest us or beat us. We weren’t doing anything illegal, we weren’t aiming at them, we didn’t damage their property, and they couldn’t claim it as a military zone since it was clearly our land. So this started a new way in our resistance.”⁷⁴

Without doubt the fact that the soldiers did not use force on this occasion was also due to the presence of Israeli citizens.

4. *Accompaniment and Defensive Resistance*

As noted above, the involvement of Israeli and international activists in protest actions could create a kind of protective shield under which Palestinian participants might seek shelter.⁷⁵ As such, the involvement of internationals in the support of Palestinian activists grew during the second intifada. The Christian Peacemakers Teams had established a presence in Hebron in 1995, where they concentrated on monitoring and documenting human rights abuses, protective accompaniment and other forms of nonviolent intervention. In 2002 another faith-based international initiative began after the World Council of Churches had set up its Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). Since its launch at the height of the violence of the second intifada many hundreds of volunteers from different participating countries have spent periods of three months in different locations in the West Bank providing protection by their presence and supporting local nonviolent activists.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Quoted in J. Norman, *The activist and the olive tree: Nonviolent resistance in the second intifada*, doctoral thesis, American University, Washington DC., 2009, p.129. (Subsequently published as *The Second Palestinian Intifada*, London: Routledge, 2010)

⁷⁵ It should be noted that the participation of internationals was no guarantee against Israeli violence. The deaths of two international volunteers, Rachel Corrie and Tom Hudnell, showed that on occasions Israeli forces made no distinction between Palestinians and other nationalities. The assault on the ‘Freedom Flotilla’ on 31st May 2010 and the resultant killing of nine Turkish activists served to remind us of this point.

⁷⁶ For an account of the work of the EAPPI, see A. Wright, ‘The work of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel’, in H. Clark (2009), pp. 135-138.

5. International Advocacy and the Appeal to Third Parties

Given the militarisation of the resistance during the second intifada and the consequent shrinkage of the space for nonviolent resistance on any significant scale, there was little or no possibility of exercising any influence over Israeli public opinion by means of 'shame power'. Due to the violence, the restrictions on movement, and the construction of the Wall, the separation between Israelis and Palestinians was almost total during this period. Indeed, there can be little doubt that even those Israeli Jews sympathetic to the Palestinian cause were happy about the construction of the separation barrier if it fulfilled its stated purpose of enhancing their physical security. In such a situation a key element in the Palestinian armoury was to target public opinion in significant third party countries. Here again a key role was played by international activists.

The International Solidarity Movement (ISM) had the highest profile of all the organisations responsible for channelling international volunteers to Palestine. It had a very active media section which ensured world-wide coverage of its demonstrations. But the organisers also placed considerable emphasis on the advocacy role played by volunteers once they returned to their own countries. Veronique Dudouet reported ISM claims that 'militant tourism in Palestine is only one facet of its activities and at least half of what they do takes place in the volunteers' own countries. Developing international support for Palestinians through lobbying, educational and public awareness campaigns in the USA and Europe is crucial.⁷⁷ In similar vein, EAPPI volunteers, although they tended to adopt a much lower profile role than ISM'ers in Palestine, were expected (and contracted in some cases) to address public meetings and private gatherings after their return home.

6. Coordinating the Struggle Against the Wall

Popular unarmed resistance during the second intifada was rooted at the village level, and was occasioned by the imperative need to act to halt, or re-route, the construction of the Wall. The local campaigns were coordi-

⁷⁷ Dudouet, p. 132.

nated by village committees composed of local political leaders, village elders, and younger activists. As the Wall was extended southwards, it affected more and more villages and efforts were begun to coordinate the different local campaigns. In October 2002 a coalition of civil society organisations concerned with the environment and sustainable development formed the Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign. One of the initiators of the movement explained its *modus operandi* to Julie Norman,

“The idea of Stop the Wall was to establish a network of popular committees and land defence committees. Each committee consists of ten to fifteen people who are the main contacts for Stop the Wall. They let us know what is going on locally, and we assist them by helping them get media coverage, sending internationals, and writing reports on our website.”⁷⁸

The leading role in coordinating the struggle against the separation barrier came from a civil society coalition. It was 2004 before the PA set up its own ‘National Committee for Popular Resistance’ – an indication of the ambivalent attitude held towards all manifestations of large-scale civilian resistance. Of course, for much of the period of the second intifada the power of the PA was completely emasculated with Israeli troops having re-occupied all the cities and population centre from which they had previously withdrawn. One consequence of this was the collapse of all municipal services, which created the need for constructive nonviolent action by Palestinians in the midst of the violence. I have a memory of sitting down with an old friend, the director of an NGO who was personally committed to nonviolence. I asked him, ‘What can you do in such circumstances?’ He replied, ‘Very little. But we can organise the local community to clear the garbage from the streets, to take a pride in their neighbourhood.’ This was one small example of the kind of steadfastness that has characterised Palestinian responses to occupation – the everyday forms of nonviolent resistance pursued by those who refuse to relinquish hope. The problem was that as the stranglehold of occupation tightened ever further, it became ever more difficult to hold on to hope. Throughout the period of

⁷⁸ Quoted in Norman (2009), p. 139. See also <http://stopthewall.org/news/thecampaign.shtml> (4th August 2010).

the second intifada the naked force of the occupation became ever more manifest as the Israelis used the acts and the rhetoric of Palestinian violence to justify intensified repression. Moreover, the Israeli 'peace camp' was severely weakened and marginalised throughout this period as the Israeli public reacted with fear to the perceived threats to their security posed by the Palestinian acts of violence. Outside of Palestine there was no significant movement at the international diplomatic level. Moreover, the civilian-based unarmed resistance that was taking place within the occupied territories remained essentially reactive in nature – people were reacting to the new threat to their well-being posed by the construction of the Separation Wall. However impressive and courageous these actions might have been, they were not informed by any strategic assessment of how civilian-based resistance might undermine the pillars of the occupation.

Chapter Thirteen: The Growth of the BDS Campaign, 2005-2010

Perhaps the most significant feature of the second intifada period when viewed through the lens of nonviolent civilian-based resistance was the increased involvement of 'internationals' as companions, co-participants in actions, and as 'activist-tourists' expressing their solidarity through their presence. The significance of these overseas activists was three-fold.

- 1) By their presence they could create a kind of protective shield that allowed more space for nonviolent resistance by Palestinians;
- 2) They established linkages between Palestinians and wider activist networks around the world; and
- 3) On their return home they could act as powerful advocates of the Palestinian cause amongst networks and groupings in their own countries. One outcome of this trend has been an expansion of the international grassroots movement of solidarity with the Palestinian struggle. This loose 'movement of movements' has been one of the prime vehicles for implementing a Palestinian initiative that emerged out of a meeting of Palestinian civil society organisations in July 2005 – the call for a worldwide boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel.

Based on the simple premise that Israel must be made to realise that continued occupation and disregard for international humanitarian law carries with it a price, the campaign has gone from strength to strength in the five years since its launch.⁷⁹ In December 2009 the campaign received the endorsement of leading Palestinian Christians with the publication of the 'Kairos Palestine Document' entitled *A Moment of Truth*.⁸⁰ The authors condemned the occupation as 'a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God. It distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just

⁷⁹ See 'Palestinian BDS national committee marks five years of boycotts, divestment and sanctions', <http://bdsmovement.net> (accessed 5th August 2010)

⁸⁰ The document is accessible at <http://www.kairopalestine.ps/> (6th August 2010)

as it distorts the image in the Palestinian living under occupation.’ (2.5) They then went on to urge support for the BDS campaign with an appeal that draws on the logic of nonviolent struggle that sees the goal as not only the liberation of the oppressed but the emancipation of the oppressor:

“Palestinian civil organisations, as well as international organisations, NGOs and certain religious institutions call on individuals, companies and states to engage in divestment and in an economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation. We understand this to integrate the logic of peaceful resistance. These advocacy campaigns must be carried out with courage, openly sincerely proclaiming that their object is not revenge but rather to put an end to the existing evil, liberating both the perpetrators and the victims of injustice. The aim is to free both peoples from extremist positions of the different Israeli governments, bringing both to justice and reconciliation. In this spirit and with this dedication we will eventually reach the longed-for resolution to our problems ... (4.2.6)”

But even the authors of such resounding words and such a wonderfully inclusive vision acknowledge ‘the lack of even a glimmer of positive expectation.’ (3.1)

However, in January 2010 a new initiative was launched that seemed to indicate that at last the Palestinian Authority itself was beginning to take seriously the possibilities of large-scale civilian resistance – at least of a constructive nature.

The National Dignity and Empowerment Fund (Al Karama Fund) was established as a joint initiative by representatives from the Palestinian business community and the PA early in 2010. The aim was to encourage Palestinians to boycott all settlement products, and lead an international campaign to raise public awareness about the political implications associated with accepting Israeli settlement products in international markets. Over 500 products were identified, ranging from foodstuffs to construction materials. Two thousand volunteers were then recruited to visit Palestinian households in

the West Bank to explain the project and to get them to sign the 'Karama (Dignity) Pledge'. Yellow flyers were distributed so people could display the fact that their premises were free from settler products. Then, in April, a law was passed outlawing trade with the settlements. Plans are now afoot to move the campaign on to the international level with three strands:

- 1) Approach governments at the diplomatic level, to point out that as settlements are considered illegal under international law, their products should not be allowed into the market-place;
- 2) Identify financial institutions with investments in companies based in settlements, to persuade them to disinvest, and
- 3) Nurture grassroots movements in different countries that will help maintain pressure on their governments whilst continuing to raise public awareness about the issue.⁸¹

The Karama initiative is a strange hybrid – initiated and funded by a coalition between business and political elites in the West Bank, but at the same time trying to engage and empower people at the grassroots level. There is evidence that the boycott is having an impact, with settlement enterprises beginning to feel the effect.⁸² Another indicator of the effectiveness of the boycott campaigns has been the reaction of Israel. It has begun to introduce legislation that would penalise Israeli civil society groups that express support for the boycott. In addition it is threatening retaliatory measures against the Palestinian Authority if it persists in promoting the ban on settlement products.

The real concern amongst certain Israelis is that Israel faces increasing international isolation in the aftermath of the slaughter inflicted on the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip during the Israeli invasion of January 2009, which resulted in the deaths of over a thousand Palestinians, and the subsequent blockade imposed on the collective prison that is the Gaza Strip. Israel has come under increasing international criticism, particularly in the

⁸¹ Interview with Hitham Kayali, the national coordinator of the Karama Fund, 20th July 2010.

⁸² See, for example, H. Sherwood, 'Palestinian boycott of Israeli settlement goods starts to bite', *The Guardian*, 29th June 2010.

context of the change in regime in Washington and the widespread perception that the Netanyahu-led coalition is not interested in anything the rest of the world would recognise as a peace process. The assault on the 'freedom flotilla' and the killing of nine Turkish activists on 31st May 2010 only intensified the level of criticism expressed and toughened the stance of many of Israel's erstwhile allies. Gidi Grinstein, the founder of the Israeli think-tank the Reut Institute, has warned that Israel faces a sustained assault on its legitimacy by those seeking to turn it into a pariah state. In his words,

"Israel is a geopolitical island. Its survival and prosperity depend on its relations with the world in trade, science, arts and culture – all of which rely on its legitimacy. When the latter is compromised, the former may be severed, with harsh political, social and economic consequences."⁸³

He continued,

"... our politicians and military personnel are threatened with lawsuits and arrest when they travel abroad, campaigns to boycott our products gain traction, and our very existence is challenged in academic institutions and intellectual circles. The country is increasingly isolated.

To date Israel has failed to recognise these trends for the strategically significant, potentially existential, threat they constitute. It has mustered neither resources nor personnel to fight them, and lacks a comprehensive approach to the challenge."

Advocates of nonviolent resistance have argued over the years that it makes no strategic sense to challenge states 'on their own terms', ie. by violent means. When they are challenged by unfamiliar (ie. nonviolent) means they can be caught unprepared. And it would seem that the Israeli security establishment is unprepared to deal with the challenge posed by the BDS and related international campaigns.

⁸³ G. Grinstein, 'Israel delegitimizers threaten its existence', *Haaretz*, 15th January 2010.

Epilogue: Grounds for Hope?

A friend of mine, a close and long-term observer of the Palestinians, once likened them to the moles in the fair-ground game that keep popping up their heads, and no matter how often or how hard the player hammers at their heads with the mallet, they keep popping up – you just cannot keep them down however hard you hit them. Perhaps after the disaster that was the second intifada, the subsequent criminality of the political elites who put factional interest above the national interest, and the continuing arrogant expansionism of the Israelis – perhaps after all this there are still some grounds for hope.

The initiative for BDS that was launched by Palestinian civil society organisations in 2005 has taken root around the world. And what we are witnessing is a new phase of Palestinian resistance, where the struggle is taking place at the ideological level. It is one in which Israeli military might, its capacity to wield the weapons of violence with apparent impunity, only serves to weaken its claim to legitimacy and strengthens the case of those who liken Israel's continuing occupation of Palestinian territories to the apartheid system of South Africa. Moreover, in this struggle not only Palestinians but concerned people around the world can feel that they have a role to play – as consumers, workers and citizens. Under pressure from such people supermarkets in the UK are dropping products produced in Israeli settlements, Scandinavian pension funds have divested from Israeli defence companies, and French enterprises have withdrawn from contracts with Israeli partners. Academics have continued to debate the pros and cons of an academic boycott whilst cultural icons and world stars have cancelled concerts in Israel.

In the life-history of any successful social movement for change there comes a time when it seems as if the politico-cultural climate is right, a time when more and more people are ready to listen to the message and act upon it. I have the distinct sense that such a moment has arrived in the struggle for Palestinian human rights. As one senior Israeli official confessed,

“There is a sense, a fear here, that the more extreme anti-Israeli ideologies are seeping into more accepted mainstream discourse. It’s no longer some abstract intellectual debate. It’s people pushing the debate into mobilising others into thinking this is a totemic issue of human rights and right-versus-wrong – and it’s not.”⁸⁴

Despite such protestations, there would appear to be increasing numbers of people around the world who do think that the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and the imprisonment of the citizens of the Gaza Strip constitutes a gross and unacceptable violation of basic human rights about which ‘something must be done’. And in this there are grounds for hope. As we have seen, on their own the Palestinians lack the leverage power to cause the Israelis to change their stance and seek a substantive and self-sustaining peace. But we have now moved into an age where transnational social movements do exercise an influence on publics around the world and hence upon political leaders and decision-makers. There is no reason why the BDS campaign should not grow into such a force. What will undermine its potential will be a resurgence of the Palestinian culture, rhetoric and practice of violence that has been a feature of Palestinian resistance in recent decades. This will serve only to alienate potential supporters and activists, many of whom are moved not only by the crimes committed against the Palestinians but also by the hurt and damage the Israelis inflict upon themselves through their continued oppression of their neighbours. And of course, for Palestinian opinion-leaders to move beyond the rhetoric of violence requires the political elites to transcend their party rivalries and factional machinations, to take seriously their responsibilities as trustees of the well-being of their people. This is a ‘big ask’, particularly as the evidence to be drawn from this review illustrates that a recurring weakness of the Palestinians has been the failures of leadership throughout the different phases of resistance.

⁸⁴ Quoted in C. Levinson & J. Solomon, ‘Israel’s isolation deepens’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 3rd June 2010.

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