

Strategic Nonviolence Effectiveness of Nonviolent Resistance in Palestine

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A question often asked when looking at Palestinian nonviolent resistance movements is, "Where is the Palestinian Gandhi?"¹ Throughout the West, there is a popular mischaracterization of the Palestinian resistance movement as entirely violent and radical. Even when resisters use nonviolent direct action, Palestinians are consistently portrayed as terrorists and extremists who threaten life and property.² However, there is a great deal of literature that suggests the opposite: there is, in fact, a long and rich Palestinian history of nonviolent actions and campaigns.³ Nusseibeh, an activist working in Palestine today, maintains that "nonviolent resistance is much more the norm than the violent acts that grab headlines."⁴ Indeed, HaCohen contends that "there are thousands of Palestinian Gandhis out there: whole villages that demonstrate daily and peacefully against robbery of their land and livelihood. Alas their voices go unheard."⁵

¹ Ran HaCohen, "The Palestinian Gandhi," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 24, no. 5 (July 2005): 19–20. Also, Josh Walsh, "Bil'in Habibti Documents Nonviolence and Anti-Apartheid Struggle," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 27, no. 4 (May/June 2008): 70–71.

Dr. Joseph

² Bill Fletcher, Jr., "Don't Deny Peaceful Protests in West Bank," *CNN*, February 17, 2010, <http://www.cnn.com/2010/OPINION/02/16/fletcher.palestinians.protest/?hpt=C2> (accessed April 2010).

³ See Mary E. King, *A Quiet Revolution: The First Palestinian Intifada and Nonviolent Resistance* (New York: Nation Books, 2007). Jean Zaru, *Occupied with Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008). Palestine Monitor, *Palestine Monitor 2009 Factbook*, ed. Abu Yusef, January 2009, <http://www.palestinemonitor.org/spip/spip.php?article760> (accessed November 2009).

⁴ Lucy Nusseibeh, "Nonviolence: Ordinary Palestinians Fight for Their Freedom," in *Nonviolence in Theory and Practice*, ed. Robert L. Holmes and Barry L. Gan (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2005), 376.

⁵ HaCohen 2005

Journal of International Service

48 Spring 2010

Groves of American University agrees: "They [Palestinian Gandhis] are everywhere."⁶

It is important to begin by discussing the theoretical literature of nonviolent resistance that will be used as a frame of reference throughout the paper. Primarily, the paper analyzes Palestinian nonviolent movements from the understanding of Gene Sharp's concept of strategic nonviolent resistance. Sharp defines nonviolence as follows: "Nonviolent struggle means, of course, that one does not capitulate in the face of threats. One does not run away. One also chooses to fight with superior weapons, not the oppressors' violence, but psychological, moral, social-economic and political weapons with which one's people can be strong."

Recognizing that nonviolent resistance has been a staple of Palestinian life, this paper focuses on how effective various uses of nonviolent resistance have been over the past century and how to apply lessons learned to current and future nonviolent struggles. In its analysis, the paper will thus focus on four general time periods/events: the 1936 Arab

Revolt, the 1987 Intifada, the 2000 Intifada (Al-Aqsa Intifada), and current movements, specifically emphasizing the case of resistance in the Palestinian village of Bil'in. The analysis of these events helps track the evolution of nonviolent strategies in Palestinian history, and builds the argument that what made certain movements of nonviolence more successful than others was a comprehensive strategy that emphasized discipline, persistence, and methods of mass mobilization. Evaluating these cases using Gene Sharp's strategic nonviolent resistance framework, the paper focuses largely on the strategy used, organizational character, and tactics utilized by the nonviolent movements working within a given time period. Ultimately, an understanding of the specific strengths and weaknesses of past and present Palestinian nonviolent movements offers important insights in making future nonviolent efforts more effective.

Theories of Strategic Nonviolent Resistance

7

⁶ Walsh 2008, 70–71.

⁷ Gene Sharp and Afif Safieh, "Gene Sharp: Nonviolent Struggle," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 17, no. 1 (1987): 42.

Nonviolence is thus about

empowering the people, helping the people recognize self-reliance and self-determination.

Power is arguably one of the most important tenets of Sharp's theory, since it is through strategic nonviolence that oppressed people can attempt to counteract an asymmetry of power. The three main tactics that nonviolent movements can employ are: *symbolic weapons* such as protests, Strategic Nonviolent Resistance in Palestine Spring 2010 49

mass petitions, or public speeches; *noncooperative weapons* such as boycotts and civil disobedience; and *weapons of intervention* such as hunger strikes or establishing new institutions.⁸ Such weapons are only effective when they are used persistently, and such persistence is only attainable when people understand and are willing to accept and suffer the consequences of nonviolent resistance.⁹

One of the main benefits of nonviolence, as opposed to armed struggle, is that it allows for mass mobilization and thus, shared suffering. Nonviolence enables every person — old and young, male or female — to participate, whereas violence severely limits participation to a relatively smaller number of people: mostly young men.

Thus, nonviolent participants must understand the nature and requirements of effective nonviolence and be willing to make sacrifices to achieve the movement's goals.

¹⁰ Additionally, for Sharp, the

most important aspect of nonviolence is a wise strategy. For a movement to be successful, strategic and tactical planning is essential.¹¹ Thus, strategic nonviolence is a very pragmatic form of resistance that relies upon the concept of power, the method of mass mobilization, and the development of a coherent strategy. Sharp maintains that strategic nonviolent resistance mobilizes the power capacity of the oppressed to "bring greater self-respect, wider recognition of the justice of their cause, and finally, greater support ... [to serve as] the basis of a practical grand strategy for liberation."¹²

Sharp's theory of strategic nonviolence has had a great influence on other academics as well as Palestinian activists. Many have analyzed Sharp's theory of strategic nonviolence and have worked to expand and apply it to the Palestinian case. Most notably, Sharp's theory had a great effect on Mubarak Awad, discussed in a later section, who directly applied much of Sharp's writings to the 1987 Intifada. Additionally, many Palestinian activists have adopted the Arabic word *sumoud*, meaning steadfastness, as the slogan for strategic nonviolence. Emphasizing its importance in

Palestinian culture and self-identity, Zaru suggests that it is through the process of nonviolent *sumoud* that Palestinians can reconceptualize power by giving it to the ordinary person.

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⁸ Gene Sharp, "Nonviolent Action: An Active Technique of Struggle," in Holmes and Gan, eds. 2005, 247–252.

⁹ Sharp and Safieh 1987.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹² *Ibid.*, 47.

¹³ Jean Zaru 2008, 73.

Likewise, current Palestinian Prime

Minister Salam Fayyad maintains that steadfastness should be used to

Journal of International Service

50 Spring 2010

generate a greater amount of nonviolent acts on the ground.¹⁴

In *Eyes Without Country* (1995), Dajani, who studied in the United States under Sharp, outlines a comprehensive nonviolent resistance strategy for the Palestinian case. Like Sharp, Dajani emphasizes the importance of overcoming the imbalance of power and the indispensability of discipline. To develop a coherent strategy the Palestinians must become aware of their own power to protest and should be very methodical and disciplined in their tactics, with a total abstention from violence.

Thus, the

concept of *sumoud* embodies the nature of Sharp's theory of strategic nonviolent resistance empowering the people and calling for perseverance.

¹⁵ Dajani ultimately concludes

that the goal of the Palestinian resistance movement should be to make the Occupied Territories impossible to rule through a two-phase nonviolent approach.¹⁶

Much of the literature on strategic nonviolence relies on overcoming an imbalance in power. It is interesting to note that as the theorists describe tactics for overcoming power, nonviolent resistance is very much presented as a "militant" approach and described in language that is usually associated with war. Militant implies aggressive, combative, and strategic behavior, which can be violent (as in war) or nonviolent (as in mass mobilized protests). For Sharp (2005), strategic nonviolence is a "technique of active combat" as it "involves the matching of forces and the waging of 'battles,' requires wise strategy and tactics, and demands of its soldiers courage, discipline, and sacrifice."

¹⁷ Similarly, Dajani describes nonviolent struggle as

"a war, albeit one that is waged without lethal weapons."¹⁸

Building from Sharp's theory of strategic nonviolent resistance, this paper will utilize two measures to determine the level of effectiveness of Palestinian acts of nonviolent resistance: the degree to which the resistance accomplishes its proclaimed goals and facilitates positive change, whether within Israel, the international community, and/or Palestinian society; and the discipline and persistence of the direct action under coherent leadership.

Thus, strategic

nonviolence is very much a means of direct action, a method much like war where an effective and assertive strategy determines the ultimate level of success, but where violence is rejected in exchange for the power of wellorganized collective action.

¹⁴ Ethan Bronner, "Palestinians Try a Less Violent Path to Resistance," *New York Times*, April 6, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/07/world/middleeast/07westbank.html?ref=world> (accessed April 2010).

¹⁵ Souad R. Dajani, *Eyes Without Country: Search for a Strategy of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 107–108.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁷ Sharp 2005, 249.

¹⁸ Dajani 1995, 95.

Strategic Nonviolent Resistance in Palestine Spring 2010 51

Sharp warns against viewing nonviolent resistance as the opposite of violence and instead, emphasizes that responses to nonviolence should be analyzed based on the level of action or inaction.¹⁹ Thus, success of nonviolence hinges on its ability to function, adapt, and maintain discipline despite repression.²⁰ Such an understanding does not discredit a nonviolent resistance movement in its entirety in cases where there is episodic violence or violence propagated by factions within the society. Instead, Sharp maintains that to be effective nonviolent movements must have a great deal of solidarity that maintains discipline and prevents people from turning to violence.²¹

Palestinian nonviolent resistance has been documented since the beginning of the twentieth century. The first case of Palestinian nonviolent resistance was in 1902 when three villages held protests against European Zionist settlers taking 70,000 dunums of land.

Such discipline and persistence is often directly attributed to effective leadership. Thus, within this framework, past and present Palestinian nonviolent resistance movements can be evaluated, which, in turn, can yield valuable insights into making current and future movements more effective.

1936 General Strike: First Use of Strategic Nonviolent Resistance

²² Protests were also conducted against the Balfour Declaration in 1917,²³ a British agreement made with the European Zionists where the British ambiguously promised the Jews a homeland in Palestine in return for their support during WWI.²⁴ However, following WWI, neither the Palestinians nor the Jews were granted their own state as Palestine came under the British Mandate. A major split among Palestinians occurred in 1922, between those who supported violence and those who favored nonviolence as a means to thwart British control.²⁵

¹⁹ King 2007, 321.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Sharp and Safieh 1987, 145.

²² Palestine Monitor 2009, 68.

²³ King 2007, 135.

²⁴ See William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004). Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents*, 6th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007).

²⁵ King 2007, 135.

Those

who favored nonviolence continued to carry out small and localized protests, but they were severely limited by the violent faction. By 1936, the Palestinians were growing weary of the repressive British rule and

Journal of International Service
52 Spring 2010

uncontrolled Jewish immigration,²⁶

The general strike began on April 20, 1936, as a protest against the British Mandate's refusal to grant self-determination to Arabs. The main goal of the strike was to make the Palestinians ungovernable by anyone (British or Zionists) but themselves.

and thus the nonviolent faction

organized the first mass demonstration of strategic nonviolent resistance.

²⁷ The Palestinians employed nonviolent

methods such as boycotts and non-cooperation, and initially the strike was much disciplined. The British immediately responded by declaring the strike illegal, issuing fines, conducting mass arrests, and forcibly opening shops.²⁸

Ultimately, the strike collapsed as the Palestinian people were unprepared and unwilling to accept “the arduous demands of sustained action.”²⁹ The economic hardships sustained and the oppression imposed by the British were too great for the resisters at the time. Furthermore, the strike was never total and thus, the suffering was not as equally spread out among the Palestinians as it could have been.³⁰ As a result, the strike was officially called off on October 10, 1936, and the resistance resorted to armed struggle from October 1936 to 1939. This event became known as the Arab Revolt, and the death toll was extremely high: in 1938 alone the number of people killed reached 1,700 Arabs, 292 Jews, and 69 British soldiers.³¹ Yet, the violent and bloody Arab Revolt did yield the White Paper of 1939, in which the British promised to restrict Jewish immigration and establish an independent Palestinian state in ten years.³²

The General Strike of 1936 lasted for 174 days; it was the longest general strike in human history up until that point.

However, since this concession

came as a response to the prolonged armed struggle, the nonviolence of the first few months had little effect on the creation of the White Paper. Indeed, the British decision to promise statehood after three years of armed revolt served only to reinforce the idea that the use of violence is a more effective method to achieve goals than nonviolence.

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²⁶ Smith 2007, 137.

²⁷ Palestine Monitor 2009, 68.

²⁸ King 2007, 52.

²⁹ King 2007, 53.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Smith 2007, 145.

³² Ibid., 150.

³³ Sharp and Safieh 1987, 41.

Ultimately, however,

the strike was altogether ineffective. The main objective was to end British domination and Jewish immigration, and neither of these goals was accomplished through nonviolent resistance. It produced no tangible results, thus curtailing the will of the people to continue the resistance in a disciplined manner when faced with British oppression. As King maintains, Strategic Nonviolent Resistance in Palestine Spring 2010 53

“success of nonviolence hinges on the ability to continue functioning and remain flexible despite repression.”³⁴

Nevertheless, this case is important in that it was the first time the Palestinians had organized themselves in a movement of mass nonviolent resistance. It demonstrated that there were those willing to fight for freedom through the use of nonviolent methods and work together for a long period of time.

The British worked aggressively to destroy the movement, and eventually the Palestinians lost the willpower to persist.

³⁵

Between WWII and the 1987 Intifada, the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is dense and complex. The brief overview here describes only the very basics of the conflict. On May 15, 1948, Israel declared itself an independent state: an event that marked the beginning of a war between Israel and the surrounding Arab states, in which Israel easily defeated the poorly equipped and loosely organized Arab armies.

Thus, it introduced new ideas to the Palestinian civil society. Local Palestinian leaders began researching alternative methods to violence and developing ideas about how to create effective nonviolent movements.

Therefore, although the movement proved to be mostly ineffective in achieving tangible results, it did provide hope that more strategically organized and disciplined movements, with a greater potential for success, could emerge in the future.

³⁶ May 15 thus became

Independence Day for Israelis and Al-Nakba (the catastrophe) for Palestinians. Some 700,000 Palestinians became refugees as Israel occupied 77.94 percent of Palestine.³⁷ Tensions mounted over the next 20 years, and on June 5, 1967, the Six Day War began in which Israel quickly defeated the surrounding Arab states once again. The major outcome of the war was that Israel gained control of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem as well as the Syrian Golan Heights and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.³⁸

The West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem became known as the Occupied Territories of Palestine as the Israeli government and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) administered these Territories. According to the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), between 1967 and 1987, the IDF arrested more than half a million Palestinians, over 2,000 Palestinians were deported, more than 1,560 houses were demolished, and 135 Israeli

³⁴ King 2007, 321.

³⁵ Sharp and Safieh 1987, 41.

³⁶ Smith 2007, 204.

³⁷ King 2007, 161.

³⁸ Cleveland 2004, 339; Smith 2007, 289.

Journal of International Service

54 Spring 2010

settlements were built in these territories, with a total of 175,000 settlers.³⁹ In 1964, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was established, to lead the Palestinian resistance to occupation. However, over time it lost its direct link to Palestine and Palestinian life, after being expelled from Jordan in 1970 and Lebanon in 1982, and eventually set up its headquarters in Tunis.⁴⁰ With the absence of centralized leadership throughout the 1970s and '80s, the Palestinians developed alternative institutions and leadership in the form of local committees. Women's committees, relief committees, youth and student movements, and prisoner organizations all developed during this time.

1987 Intifada: Successful Nonviolent Resistance

⁴¹ These committees helped strengthen Palestinian civil society, prepared the Palestinians for nonviolent resistance by distributing literature on theories of nonviolence, and eventually served as the main organizers of the 1987 Intifada.⁴²

No discussion on the topic of the 1987 Intifada would be complete without an analysis of Mubarak Awad, a man many Israelis came to believe was the "main brains of the intifada."

⁴³ Awad, who was born in Jerusalem, earned his Ph.D. in the U.S. and developed a fascination with nonviolence after reading the writings of Sharp. Upon returning to the West Bank in 1983, he began writing and holding training workshops on nonviolence.⁴⁴ He distributed his work and translations of Sharp's writings on nonviolence during the four years leading up to the Intifada. In 1985, he founded the Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence (PCSN) and began a campaign of village outreach, calling for Palestinians to recover their land through methods of nonviolence.⁴⁵ Finally, in early 1986, he led the first successful march to the village of Tqu and was able to recover land that had been appropriated by the Israelis.⁴⁶

³⁹ American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), "Palestinian Nonviolence to Occupation Since 1967," May 2005,

Following the success of the Tqu episode,

the PCSN began receiving numerous requests from other villages asking for training sessions on how to fight through nonviolent means.

www.afsc.org/israel-palestine/ht/a/GetDocumentAction/i/44976 (accessed November 2009), 2.

⁴⁰ Cleveland 2004, 363, 387.

⁴¹ AFSC 2005, 2–4.

⁴² King 2007.

⁴³ Ibid., 158.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 133.

⁴⁵ King 2007, 140.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 148.

Strategic Nonviolent Resistance in Palestine Spring 2010 55

Through his writings, which were directly inspired by Sharp, Awad was able to “present nonviolence as a practical and empowering technique.”⁴⁷ Like Sharp, Awad described nonviolence in a very militant way: “nonviolent struggle is a total and serious struggle, nothing short of a real war ... [it] is a form of mobile warfare.”⁴⁸ However, Awad’s conceptualization of nonviolence was distinct from Sharp in that he argued that nonviolence should not rule out the possibility of people turning to violence at a later stage of the resistance.⁴⁹ Where Sharp describes nonviolence in very aggressive terms but never sanctions the use of violence at any stage of the resistance, Awad maintains that Palestinians engaged in nonviolent resistance could use violence as a method of last resort.

Additionally, Awad warned Palestinians that there could be no guarantee that Israel would not respond with violence; thus, he maintained that their suffering and pain could be useful in fighting oppression.⁵⁰

Unfortunately, Awad was deported from Israel in June 1988, only six months after the Intifada began. Israel claimed that he was “not a man of peace,”

Such suffering

could be a source of motivation, to empower the Palestinians to accept their pain in solidarity and with defiance as they resist. Hence, by distributing his writings — mostly in the form of leaflets — and through his example, Awad helped mobilize the Palestinians for the 1987 Intifada. During this time, he was arguably the Gandhi of the West Bank.

⁵¹

With Awad deported, a group of East Jerusalem intellectual activists took up leadership of the movement and adopted the cause for nonviolent resistance notably well. Publishing a variety of leaflets to call for different non-cooperative movements or organized methods of civil disobedience, the intellectuals in East Jerusalem provided effective leadership for the first two years of the Intifada. On February 8, 1988, they issued the Jerusalem Paper, which “became the backbone of the strategy of the Intifada.”

and thus deported him as a security threat. Ultimately, however, his deportation only served to enhance his credibility and spread the prominence of his ideas further among Palestinians.

⁵² In it, the

activists called for a massive civil disobedience campaign that would, eventually, lead to a declaration of independence.⁵³

⁴⁷ Ibid., 155.

⁴⁸ Mubarak E. Awad, “Nonviolent Resistance: A Strategy for the Occupied Territories,” in Holmes and Gan, eds. 2005, 363.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ King 2007, 158.

⁵² Ibid., 199.

⁵³ Ibid.

Sari Nusseibeh, the main author of the paper, maintains that from then on the Palestinians had a

Journal of International Service

56 Spring 2010

“coherent, purposeful, holistic strategy reaching out to the day of independence.”⁵⁴

The Intifada, or “shaking off,” officially began on December 9, 1987 after four laborers were killed in a car crash at an Israeli roadblock. However, it was not until the publication of the Jerusalem Paper that the Intifada began employing effective, creative, and organized tactics of nonviolence to achieve Palestinian objectives. As articulated by Sharp, the Palestinians had six main goals during the Intifada: 1) develop parallel institutions; 2) persist in nonviolence until territories became ungovernable by the occupiers; 3) split Israeli public opinion; 4) undermine the reliability of the Israeli army to conduct repression; 5) help split U.S. government support from Israel; and 6) encourage positive world opinion.

⁵⁵ The AFSC

notes that Palestinians employed tactics such as tax strikes, home schooling, boycotts of Israeli products, shortened workdays for shop owners, victory gardens and other self-sustaining projects, work stoppages, slowdowns, and general strikes.⁵⁶ King illustrates several other creative techniques that Palestinians utilized including graffiti, games, poetry, sparklers, theater, dance, puppetry, and even setting their watches to a different time zone than Israel.⁵⁷ According to Sharp, the 1987 Intifada largely excluded armed violence, with 85 percent of the resistance being nonviolent.⁵⁸ The other 15 percent of resistance consisted of violent tactics such as stone throwing and petrol bombs.⁵⁹

Ultimately, however, the cohesion of the movement came to an end when its leadership fell apart. By March 1990, Israel had arrested and imprisoned all of the East Jerusalem intellectual activists and thus, command of the Intifada fell to the PLO, which, at that point, was based in Tunis. Unfortunately for the movement, the PLO was completely “unfamiliar with nonviolent struggle ... [and] calls for preparations for civil disobedience disappeared.”

The issue of stone throwing served as one of the more problematic aspects of the Intifada. Israel used the stone throwing incidents to portray the Intifada as largely violent to the outside world and to justify the violent responses by the IDF.

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⁵⁴ Ibid., 200.

⁵⁵ Gene Sharp, “The Intifada and Nonviolent Struggle,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 19, no. 1 (1989): 3–13.

⁵⁶ AFSC 2005, 5.

⁵⁷ King 2007, 225–227.

⁵⁸ Sharp 1989, 3.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁰ King 2007, 239.

A fragmentation soon occurred as Islamic groups such as Hamas called for the end of the nonviolent strategy, and soon, the movement devolved into representing different things for different groups, losing its Strategic Nonviolent Resistance in Palestine

Spring 2010 57

comprehensive strategy.⁶¹

Though the Intifada devolved into an armed struggle, the first two years of the movement (December 1987 to March 1990) are notable for the achievements and effective strategies employed. With reference to the six goals of the resistance, the Palestinians achieved a level of success on four of their six goals. The Palestinians succeeded in achieving greater empowerment to build their own economic infrastructure, while becoming more self-reliant, developing an understanding of the methods of

nonviolence, and learning to work together. Armed force was now employed freely by various Palestinian factions. However, the extent of violence was not sufficient to categorize this latter part of the Intifada as an armed rebellion.

⁶² The Intifada also transformed the Palestinian image in the international community, exposed Israeli brutality, and increased the price of occupation, making it less attractive and sustainable.⁶³ Of particular significance is the goal that focused on challenging the sustainability of the occupation. The fact that Israel was willing to recognize the PLO and finally negotiate during the Oslo process proves that the resistance did force Israel to look for alternatives to occupation.⁶⁴

Furthermore, the Intifada was “an eye-opening event for many Israelis ... [as] it deeply affected [the] public.”

⁶⁵ The nonviolent nature of the uprising and the high level of Israeli oppression convinced many Israelis to work against the occupation, while others in the society, like the settlers, remained militant and were pushed farther right, effectively dividing Israeli public opinion on the Palestinian issue.⁶⁶

The Intifada was also an effective example of the power of persistence and discipline. For two years the East Jerusalem intellectual activists led the Palestinians in creative acts of nonviolence. The people were mobilized en masse, working in solidarity and accepting the consequences of their actions. The negative turn came when the PLO assumed the leadership role in 1990. With no understanding of the essence of nonviolence, the PLO crippled the movement with their poor leadership and allowed the discipline of the movement to falter. Nevertheless, in its first two years, the 1987 Intifada did yield moderate successes.

⁶¹ Ibid., 293.

⁶² King 2007, 295, 310.

⁶³ Ibid., 296.

⁶⁴ Ghassan Andoni, “A Comparative Study of Intifada 1987 and Intifada 2000,” in *The New Intifada: Resisting Israel's Apartheid*, ed. Roane Carey (New York: Verso, 2001), 210.

⁶⁵ Andoni 2001, 217.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Journal of International Service
58 Spring 2010

Intifada is a successful example of effective leadership orchestrating the power of persistence and discipline.

However, where the movement failed the greatest was in neutralizing Israeli fear. To be effective and truly facilitate change, King suggests that the Palestinians needed to remove the Israeli fear of Arab violence.⁶⁷ Kurlansky maintains that “people motivated by fear do not act well.”⁶⁸

The time period between the first and second Intifada is generally referred to as the Oslo Peace Process, in which the Israelis and the PLO signed a series of accords and interim agreements that were supposed to allow for mutual recognition and the eventual establishment of a Palestinian state. However, when little in the agreements was actually implemented, the Palestinians became disillusioned. Oslo came to be seen as a colossal failure by both the Palestinians and the Israelis. In July 2000, in a last-ditch effort to save the peace process, U.S. President Bill Clinton attempted to mediate negotiations between the PLO and Israel at Camp David. However, when no The Israeli army most notably epitomized this argument during the 1987 Intifada: because the Palestinian movement could not stifle stone

throwing and eventually devolved into an armed struggle, Israeli fears were heightened and the IDF responded with overly harsh and oppressive measures. For this reason, the Palestinians failed to accomplish their goal of undermining the reliability of the Israeli army to conduct repression. Of course, fear does not justify actions, but understanding how fear causes specific reactions is important when developing strategies for future movements. Finally, with regard to their goal of ending U.S. government support for Israel, there is no evidence to suggest that Palestinians achieved any success. The U.S. continued its special relationship with Israel throughout the Intifada years, providing billions of dollars in aid and military development.

2000 Intifada (Al-Aqsa Intifada): Resort to Armed Struggle

When analyzing the Al-Aqsa Intifada two important questions arise: What were the differences in motivations, demands, and circumstances that led to two divergent strategies of resistance, one violent (during the Al-Aqsa Intifada) and one nonviolent (during the 1987 Intifada)? Was the Al-Aqsa Intifada, which was primarily an armed struggle, more or less effective than the 1987 Intifada?

⁶⁷ King 2007, 313.

⁶⁸ Mark Kurlansky, *Nonviolence: Twenty-Five Lessons from the History of a Dangerous Idea* (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 184.

Strategic Nonviolent Resistance in Palestine Spring 2010 59

progress was made between the two parties, Palestinians began to view the peace process as futile. This, then, is a noticeable difference between the two Intifadas: “perceptions with circumstances.”⁶⁹ Of course, in both 1987 and 2000, people were being unjustly oppressed and wanted to take action against it. However, in 2000, the Palestinians had to witness the destruction of the so-called “peace process” and now came to believe that the Israelis were untrustworthy and would never be capable of making peace. The Palestinians felt insulted for sticking their necks out for peace, while getting nothing in return, and as Allen maintains, “it isn’t possible to make peace with a people who feel insulted.”⁷⁰

The second Intifada began in September 2000, after Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon visited the al-Haram al-Sharif (the third most holy place in Islam) in East Jerusalem accompanied by 1,000 Israeli police officers.

Thus, several factions of the Palestinian society, particularly factions under the PLO, turned to violence, seeing it as the only means to bring about Israeli capitulation.

⁷¹ With tensions simmering after the failed peace negotiations at Camp David, the Palestinians felt as though their holy places were under attack and Sharon’s visit was the catalyst for the Al-Aqsa Intifada. Interestingly, the AFSC notes that most of the Palestinian resistance in the first few months was “overwhelmingly” nonviolent.⁷² And yet, even when violence was more prevalent, there were still moments of nonviolence that served to emphasize the power of nonviolent resistance. A very powerful example occurred in June 2001. After the death of Faisal Hussein, a leading proponent of nonviolent resistance, Palestinians organized to attend his funeral and protest the occupation. On the day of his burial, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians flooded into occupied East Jerusalem, past checkpoints and roadblocks, and Israel was powerless to stop them. It was during these brief few hours that the people “made Jerusalem free and whole.”⁷³

Palestinian perception of the peace process being futile was one difference between the Intifadas, but there were several other factors that

Such an instance of mass solidarity, however, was not the norm, as many of the nonviolent demonstrations organized during the Al-Aqsa Intifada were debilitated by a severe lack of mass mobilization.

⁶⁹ Lori A. Allen, "Palestinians Debate "Polite" Resistance to Occupation," *Middle East Report* 255 (2002): 41.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Smith 2007, 512.

⁷² AFSC 2005, 8.

⁷³ Ali Abunimah, "Overstating the Benefits of Palestinian Nonviolence," *The Daily Star*, September 8, 2004, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_ID=10&article_ID=8158&categ_id=5 (accessed November 2009).

Journal of International Service

60 Spring 2010

contributed to the violence of the Al-Aqsa Intifada. First, there was a change in how the Palestinians viewed international opinion.⁷⁴ With reference to the six goals of the 1987 Intifada presented by Sharp,⁷⁵ the final two goals referred to a desire to affect international opinion. Thus, in 1987, the Palestinians believed that through their nonviolent strategies and sacrifices, they could cultivate a sympathetic stance from the international community.⁷⁶ In contrast, during the Al-Aqsa Intifada, the Palestinians lost faith in their power to affect world opinion due to the lack of international response to Israeli brutality. Palestinians came to believe that nonviolent methods of resistance were pointless as harsh Israeli repression would continue and international opinion would ignore it. Such a change in belief greatly hindered their motivation to employ methods of nonviolence. Abunimah founder of the Electronic Intifada articulated this position best when he asked, "Why would Palestinians forego violence when Israel's violent occupation is allowed to continue unchallenged by the international community?"⁷⁷

Likewise, the Al-Aqsa Intifada was unable to affect Israeli opinion in any positive way. Because the movement was oriented around such contentious demands as East Jerusalem and the Right of Return, many Israelis did not have much sympathy for the movement's ideological underpinnings.

⁷⁸ Furthermore, the split in Israeli society caused by the 1987 Intifada no longer held true because the Palestinians employed methods of violence. Consequently, Israeli peace groups, already extremely marginalized, were less inclined to participate in anti-occupation efforts.⁷⁹ Lastly, the PLO's leadership during the Al-Aqsa Intifada was grossly inefficient. Activist Nancy Murray deplored this lack of leadership, noting that the PLO failed to engage all sectors of the society and never fully articulated the goals of the movement.

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⁷⁴ Allen 2002, 42.

⁷⁵ Sharp 1989.

⁷⁶ Allen 2002, 42.

⁷⁷ Ali Abunimah, "On Violence and the Intifada," in *Live from Palestine: International and Palestinian Direct Action Against Israeli Occupation*, ed. Nancy Stohlman and Laurieann Aladin (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2003), 61.

⁷⁸ Andoni 2001, 217.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Nancy Murray, "Rebuilding Our Activism: What We Can Learn from the Example of South Africa and the Civil Rights Movement," in Carey, ed. 2001, 335.

One of the characteristics that made the first two years of the 1987 Intifada successful was that the resistance was a genuine mass movement, as most Palestinians were directly involved in it. However, during the Al-Aqsa Intifada, the inclusion of armed groups in the movement severely limited the level of participation from the public at large. Strategic Nonviolent Resistance in Palestine

Spring 2010 61

And without effective leadership to limit violence, mass mobilization proved impossible.

According to Abunimah, the Al-Aqsa Intifada did not result in any gains on the ground (2004).⁸¹ Edward Said agreed, lamenting that after 16 months of armed struggle the Intifada had “little to show for itself.”⁸²

Neither the nonviolent movements in the beginning, nor the armed struggle that ensued, led to any benefits for the Palestinian situation. The Palestinians remained “locked up in 220 ghettos controlled by the army.”⁸³

Following the Al-Aqsa Intifada, the Israeli government voted to erect a barrier, or a separation wall, to run the length of the West Bank. As Smith explains, the construction of the wall cuts into West Bank territory to incorporate Israeli settlements and confiscate Palestinian land, thus separating 50,000 Palestinians from their land. The stated objective of the wall is to protect the security of the Israeli people.

Most

devastatingly, no goals were accomplished since there were no goals articulated by the leadership in the first place. Furthermore, attempts at nonviolent resistance lacked discipline and persistence. Independent nonviolent resistance movements during this period were decidedly ineffective as the Palestinians lost their will to affect change and were disinclined to participate in an armed struggle. Thus, the violence of the Al-Aqsa Intifada yielded no benefits for the Palestinian people. No goals were accomplished and no progress was made in lessening the plight of the Palestinians, making the violence of the Al-Aqsa Intifada much less effective than the nonviolent methods employed during the 1987 Intifada.

Bil'in and the Present: Hope for the Future of Nonviolent Resistance

⁸⁴ It was in protest to the

separation wall that nonviolent resistance movements in Palestine found their relevance once again. In October 2002, the Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign began, which consisted of 54 committees throughout the West Bank that were affected by the wall.⁸⁵

Bil'in is a small village in the West Bank. According to a 2005 report by Schaefer-Duffy, the Israeli government decided to build their separation wall. Such

organization by committees is reminiscent of the organizational structure of the first Intifada. Soon, the success of Bil'in would serve as a catalyst for more nonviolent participation in the organization.

⁸¹ Abunimah 2004.

⁸² Edward W. Said, “A New Current in Palestine,” in Stohlman and Aladin, eds. 2003, 53.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Smith 2007, 516.

⁸⁵ AFSC 2005, 9.

Journal of International Service

62 Spring 2010

wall, or apartheid wall, in the middle of the villagers' lands to accommodate the expansion of the Mattiyahu East settlement. The building of the wall, still under construction, will eventually separate Palestinian villagers from 55 percent of their land and is to lie 2–5 miles east of the “Green Line.”⁸⁶ In response, the villagers in Bil'in, aided by Israeli and international activists, quickly organized and formed the Bil'in Popular Committee Against the Wall, which implements strategic grassroots resistance and holds peaceful protests against the wall's construction every Friday.⁸⁷ The resistance uses a variety of tactics of civil disobedience: attempting to dismantle the illegal barrier, chaining themselves to trees, the erection of their own fence to tear down,⁸⁸ marriage vows said before the wall, and silent marches where resisters tape their mouths shut.⁸⁹ In one of their most creative

demonstrations, conducted on February 12, 2010, five Palestinian activists dressed themselves as Navi and reenacted James Cameron's new film *Avatar* in front of the wall. Painted blue, with pointy ears and tails, the Palestinian Avatars represented the fight against imperialism.⁹⁰

Israel's response to the nonviolent protests has been largely repressive. Mohammad Khatib, a leading figure in Bil'in, estimates that by 2007, some 800 demonstrators had been injured.

The IDF met the *Avatar*

demonstration with sound bombs and tear gas that left four people injured.

⁹¹ Twenty-three protestors in

total have been killed over the past five years.⁹² Yet even against such harsh measures, the people of Bil'in continue their protests every Friday. On February 19, 2010, Palestinian, Israeli, and international protestors celebrated the five-year anniversary of the anti-Wall protests in Bil'in. More than 1,000 protestors attended the nonviolent demonstration that Friday, dismantling a section of the wall, overrunning a military post, and crossing over to the village's lands. Demonstrators included the Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, prominent Palestinian activist Mustafa Barghouti, and the mayor of Geneva.⁹³

⁸⁶ Claire Schaeffer-Duffy, "West Bank Village Scored Partial Victory Against Wall," *National Catholic Reporter*, October 5, 2007, World Section, 16.

⁸⁷ Walsh 2008.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Robert Hirschfield, "Gandhi of the West Bank," *Progressive* 72, no. 3 (March 2008): 24.

⁹⁰ International Solidarity Movement, "Bil'in Weekly Demonstration Reenacts the *Avatar* Film," February 12, 2010, <http://palsolidarity.org/2010/02/11363> (accessed April 2010).

⁹¹ Schaeffer-Duffy 2007.

⁹² "IDF vs. Democracy and Freedom of Speech," *Haaretz*, March 18, 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1157287.html> (accessed April 2010).

⁹³ The Alternative Information Center, "1,000 Demonstrators Marked Five Years of Protest in Bil'in by Dismantling Portions of the Wall," February 19, 2010, http://www.alternativenews.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2458:1000-demonstrators-marked-fi (accessed April 2010).

Strategic Nonviolent Resistance in Palestine

Spring 2010 63

Schaeffer-Duffy reports that on September 4, 2007, Israel's High Court of Justice ruled that the government must reroute the wall.⁹⁴ Roughly 680 of the 2,000 *dunams* of land currently confiscated by Israel for Wall construction were ordered to be returned to the village. However, the court rejected the petition to dismantle the Mattiyahu East settlement. The villagers in effect received a partial victory as they got half of their lands back. As Frykberg reports, partial victory or not, the Palestinians were so overjoyed at their success that they marched to the wall that Friday, confronted the Israeli soldiers and this time threw sweets and chocolates at them.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, Khatib maintained that the court's decision demonstrated both the power of nonviolent resistance but also its limits, referring to the Mattiyahu East settlement. Though they were granted some of their land back, the decision reaffirmed Israel's determination to carve the West Bank into "Bantustans" (a series of unconnected enclaves).⁹⁶

The Bil'in movement has been largely successful thanks to the strength of discipline and persistence in action. The will of the people has not broken. Not only did the resisters secure a partial victory when the Israeli Court ordered the wall to be built one kilometer to the west, but the Palestinians also garnered attention from the international media.

One week

before the five-year anniversary of the struggle, Israel finally began construction on rerouting the path of the Wall.

⁹⁷ And as a

testament to the resisters' true strength of discipline and persistence, the

villagers of Bil'in maintain they will continue to campaign for the removal of the wall from all Palestinian lands every Friday.⁹⁸

Although a small victory, the resistance movement in Bil'in has proved to be one of the few moments of triumph for Palestinians who have gone up against the wall. Bil'in epitomizes Kurlansky's argument that "it is often not the largest but the best organized and most articulate group that prevails."

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⁹⁴ Schaeffer-Duffy 2007.

⁹⁵ Mel Frykberg, "A Victory Against the Wall," *The Middle East* 383 (2007): 58.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁹⁷ Walsh 2008.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Kurlansky 2006, 183.

Bil'in is a relatively small movement, but thanks to the movement's discipline and mobilization efforts, it has achieved success, which has ensured the persistence of the movement, while also inspiring other nonviolent movements around the West Bank. Thus, nonviolent resistance movements against the wall have spread to communities in

Journal of International Service

64 Spring 2010

Jayyous, Budrus, Nil'in, and Umm Salamona.¹⁰⁰ Nil'in, in particular, has followed the model of Bil'in and holds weekly demonstrations.¹⁰¹

Recently, however, Israel has stepped up its actions to curb the protests. In December 2009, a leader of the Bil'in movement, Abu Rahma, was arrested and charged with "illegal weapons possession" for creating a protest sign that included a spent tear gas canister previously fired at Palestinian protesters.

¹⁰² Then, on March 15, 2010, IDF soldiers posted decrees designating the vicinity surrounding the separation fence of Bil'in and Nil'in to be closed military zones on Fridays for a period of six months. The order bars Israeli citizens and international passport holders from coming into the area for the duration of the order, and prohibits Palestinian demonstrations.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, the nonviolent resistance movement has vowed to continue the protests. As of April 2, 2010, three weeks after both Bil'in and Nil'in were declared closed military zones, protests have continued at the usual time after Friday prayer with international and Israeli activists still very much a part of them.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, as early as 2005, 106 different Palestinian political parties, unions, associations, coalitions, and organizations from integral parts of society gathered together and signed a petition of solidarity, calling for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) against Israel until it complies with international law.

The continued nonviolent struggle truly shows the discipline and persistence of the nonviolent resistance.

¹⁰⁵

However, although the BDS plan is a method of collective action and the nonviolent demonstrations in West Bank villages have yielded some success, current Palestinian nonviolent resistance still lacks effective methods of mass mobilization, which is an indispensable factor for achieving substantial and permanent success. Bil'in, Nil'in, Budrus, and many other

The petition was inspired by a similar method used by South Africans in their struggle against Apartheid. Such movements, whether local, national, or international, give hope to the prospect that methods of nonviolent resistance will prove beneficial to the Palestinian goal of ending the occupation and gaining an independent state.

¹⁰⁰ *Palestine Monitor* 2009, 68.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Fletcher Jr. 2010.

¹⁰³ Ali Waked, "IDF Steps Up Fight Against Weekly Separation Fence Protests," *Ynetnews.com*, March 15, 2010, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3862812,00.html> (accessed April 2010).

¹⁰⁴ Bil'in Popular Committee, "The Villagers of Bil'in Break the Military Closure for the Third Week," April 2, 2010, <http://www.bilin-village.org/english/articles/testimonies/The-Villagers-of-Bilin-Break-The-Military-Closure-For-The-Third-Week> (accessed April 2010).

¹⁰⁵ Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, "Palestinian Call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction," July 9, 2005, <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=66> (accessed November 2009).

Strategic Nonviolent Resistance in Palestine Spring 2010 65

villages employ disciplined nonviolent protests, yet they do so separately and with little coordination among each other. Although the Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign brought 54 committees together and is meant to serve as the coordinating body of the resistance, no effective leader has appeared and no overarching strategy has been developed to unite the various movements across the West Bank into one cohesive movement. And while the villagers of Bil'in are inspiringly persistent, there are at most, 1,000 participants in the weekly demonstrations: a large number to be sure, but insufficient to effect large-scale change.

Therefore, a stronger strategy must be developed to facilitate greater participation of the population. If the village movements were to unite into one mass mobilized movement of nonviolent resistance, the potential to affect Israeli policies and international opinion would grow exponentially. In a *New York Times* article published on April 6, 2010, Bronner reports that the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority (the governing body of the West Bank) is trying to serve as such a leader to arouse passions and greater participation in nonviolent resistance. Fatah hopes to "build a virtual state and body politic through acts of popular resistance."¹⁰⁶

HaCohen maintains that the first Intifada was one of stones, and the second Intifada one of weapons. He argues that the Palestinians are entering a third Intifada, one of true unarmed, nonviolent struggle.

Yet, given the history

of governmental leadership in past attempts of nonviolent resistance, it will be interesting to see if Fatah can effectively serve as a leading force to current nonviolent resistance movements. To be able to do so, Fatah leaders will need to facilitate greater mass mobilization through a cohesive and inclusive strategy rooted in the principles of nonviolence.

¹⁰⁷ An August 2002

opinion poll released by the U.S.-based NGO Search for Common Ground found that the majority of Palestinians would support a nonviolent Intifada.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the motivation for nonviolence has returned once again, after the failed and violent attempts of the Al-Aqsa Intifada. And as the Palestine Monitor asserts, now is the time to learn from past experiences and "begin coordinating a national nonviolent strategy."¹⁰⁹

As demonstrated through this analysis, to create an effective nonviolent movement it is indispensable to have a precise strategy of organization and

Conclusion

¹⁰⁶ Bronner 2010.

¹⁰⁷ HaCohen 2005.

¹⁰⁸ Allen 2002, 38.

¹⁰⁹ Palestine Monitor 2009, 89.

Journal of International Service 66 Spring 2010

leadership to ensure persistence and discipline. To achieve success, a movement needs leadership that understands the intricacies of nonviolence. As the 1987 Intifada demonstrated, it was when the ineffective and inexperienced leadership of the PLO took control that the movement

spiraled into violence. Effective leadership and organization provides a movement with two very important qualities: discipline and persistence. A movement that lacks such essentials is bound to fail. Likewise, the power of mass mobilization is crucial. Strategic nonviolent resistance relies upon the mobilization of the masses and without it, as seen in the Al-Aqsa Intifada, which relied on armed struggle and thus limited mass participation, the movement will be ineffective. Ultimately, as Abunimah concludes, "what is needed is a strong, popular campaign of resistance, based on nonviolence and civil disobedience, involving the entire population."¹¹⁰

In the early twentieth century, French novelist Anatole France wrote that "war will disappear only when men shall take no part whatever in violence and shall be ready to suffer every persecution that their abstention will bring them. It is the only way to abolish war."

Written so

succinctly, the concept seems almost simple. Yet, experiences of Palestinian nonviolent resistance over the past century suggest that it is anything but simplistic. The past has shown the strengths and weaknesses of nonviolent resistance; it is now up to the present and future movements to learn from past mistakes and develop more effective modes of action, driven by the principles of true strategic nonviolent resistance.

¹¹¹ Certainly, such a

suggestion can be deemed idealistic, since it would be extremely difficult to begin such a movement; however, based on the analysis of this paper, it would be appropriate to quote Kurlansky in saying that "one of the greatest lessons of history is that somebody already has."¹¹²

Yet the movements currently developing in the towns of Bil'in, Ni'lin, and Budrus, among numerous others, provide hope that a

The Palestinians have

demonstrated a willingness to engage in nonviolence for over a century, and although their movements have been and continue to be met with fierce repression, the process has led to slow and steady progress. From the first Intifada that simply opened the eyes of the Israeli oppressors, to a portion of the Separation Wall being moved a kilometer down the field in Bil'in, nonviolence has facilitated gains for the Palestinians. The failures of the past can be attributed to the lack of an effective strategy for mass mobilization, poor discipline and persistence, and a gradual turn to violence.

¹¹⁰ Cited in AFSC 2005, p. 9.

¹¹¹ Kurlansky 2006, 182.

¹¹² Ibid.

Strategic Nonviolent Resistance in Palestine

Spring 2010 67

comprehensive strategy based on Sharp's conception of strategic nonviolence is both plausible and attainable. And though acts of Palestinian nonviolent resistance may not grab the headlines like acts of violence, and although the popular media often portrays all forms of Palestinian resistance as extremism, it is important to understand that there are legitimate nonviolent forces working within Palestine today that provide the possibility for a long-term solution to the conflict. As HaCohen and Groves maintain,¹¹³

¹¹³ HaCohen 2005; Walsh 2008.

Palestinian Gandhis are everywhere and their persistence provides hope and courage to all oppressed people. It is in their movements that the future of Palestinian statehood now resides, and it is through nonviolent resistance that freedom from occupation can be achieved.

Journal of International Service

68 Spring 2010