

## 8. Conclusion

The basic aim of the Intifada has been to bring an end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a necessary precondition for the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Despite all the years of struggle the occupation continues. Judged from such a perspective, the Uprising has not succeeded in its political aim. However, to focus solely upon the single political goal of ending the occupation is to ignore all the other achievements of the Uprising, the various manifestations of the “shaking off” process that have been the main focus of this book. In a very real sense the Intifada has succeeded in transforming the relationship between Palestinians and the Israeli state and society.

One of the key features of the Intifada, like other examples of civilian resistance, has been the refusal of the Palestinians to cooperate with the occupier, the rejection of their position as subjects and the assertion of their status as active citizens. This spirit of revolt and self-assertion spread throughout all elements of Palestinian society, and it has been this process of self-transformation at the individual and collective level that has been the driving force for political transformation. As such, whilst the intensity of the confrontations might ebb and flow, so long as that spirit remains the Intifada cannot be said to have ended or to have failed.

Despite such observations, it must still be acknowledged that in terms of achieving substantive and measurable movement towards their political goal, the efforts of the Palestinians since the Uprising began in December 1987 have not produced the dramatic results achieved by other expressions of people power such as in Eastern and Central Europe. In trying to come to some understanding of this “relative failure” attention needs to be directed at three crucial factors: 1) The limitations of the Intifada as a movement of non-cooperation and disengagement, 2) the contradictions that lie at the heart of an *unarmed* civilian-based resistance movement and 3) the role of external third parties to the conflict.

### **The limitations of the Intifada as a movement of non-cooperation and disengagement**

Advocates of nonviolent forms of resistance typically place particular emphasis upon the power of mass non-cooperation. The argument focuses upon the social sources of power, the thesis being that, in the final analysis, tyranny rests upon the cooperation, forced or otherwise, of the oppressed. The withdrawal of such cooperation, it is claimed, removes the social sources of the oppressor’s power. All that is required is that sufficient numbers of people, including those in strategic institutional positions, summon the courage to say “No” and are prepared to suffer the consequences of their defiance. This is

the power of the powerless who, by their non-cooperation and defiance, can render a society ungovernable.

This approach to the problem of confronting an alien power influenced the strategic thinking behind the Intifada. However, in the lived history of the Intifada, as I have tried to show in this book, a number of factors have become apparent which reveal some of the limitations of nonviolent resistance in the case of the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation.

Any analysis of the relative failure of the Intifada has to start with the unusual degree of intransigence displayed by the Israeli government. It is so committed to holding on to the occupied territories that it has been prepared to pay an exceptionally high price to sustain its rule. The converse of this is that Palestinians have been unable to raise the costs of continued occupation to a level necessary to cause the Israeli authorities to withdraw. Why has this been the case?

An important element in the equation is the fact that Israel wants to rule over the *land* of Palestine, it does not want the *people*. Indeed, Israel would dearly love to see the back of the Palestinians. Therefore it has been prepared to live with non-cooperation and defiance, using the battle of the Intifada to tighten the screws of oppression and intensify the costs of resistance borne by the Palestinian community. The hope being that increasing numbers of Palestinians will lose confidence in their national struggle, and seek their personal destinies elsewhere, leaving more and more of the land free for Israeli settlement.

A further factor which must be considered is that since 1967 Israel's dependency upon the Palestinians of the occupied territories has been primarily as a source of labour and as a captive market for its products. Due to the influx of new immigrants from the Soviet Union, the dependency upon the Palestinian workforce has been radically reduced whilst over this same period the dependency of the Palestinians upon Israel as a source of employment has actually increased. The economic base of Palestinian society, seriously underdeveloped at the commencement of the Uprising after 20 years of occupation, has been further undermined by Israel since 1987 as part of the punitive response to the Uprising. Not only has this prevented the Palestinian economy from developing to a level where it could provide employment for Palestinians in need of work, but it has also seriously limited the impact of any efforts to boycott Israeli-produced goods within the occupied territories. The fact is that Israel has remained the only source of many of the basic necessities of life within the occupied territories.

This fragility of the economic base of Palestinian society, coupled with the generally weak infrastructure, particularly in the fields of education, health and welfare services, has meant that the Palestinians have had to bear an exceptionally heavy cost for their resistance. After nearly four years of active defiance, it would appear that a civilian-based resistance movement such as the Intifada can only succeed in dislodging the Israelis if it is backed up by a sufficiently strong infrastructure of institutional supports. These are necessary so that the basic needs of the people can be met in the process of

struggle. Only in this way can resistance itself become institutionalised, embedded as a dimension of "normal life", and as such become sustainable against an opponent as determined and intransigent as Israel.

In summary, then, it would appear that Palestinian efforts to impose intolerable costs on Israel through rendering the occupied territories ungovernable have been seriously hampered by the weakness of the indigenous support systems necessary to sustain such a struggle, and the relative immunity achieved by Israel in relation to the sanctions that the Palestinians have sought to impose in the process of their unarmed insurrection.

## The contradictions of unarmed civilian resistance

In addressing the limitations of the Palestinian attempts to disengage from Israel, attention has so far been focused on the relative weakness of the sanctions that were brought to bear in the effort to coerce the Israelis into bringing the occupation to an end. Non-cooperation with tyranny also seeks to inject another kind of transformative dimension into the arena of struggle in addition to that of coercion. This is the power of conversion and persuasion. By standing firm in the face of injustice, nonviolent activists seek to display their preparedness to undergo the utmost penalties for the sake of their ideals. They thereby seek to confront their opponents, the instruments of injustice, with the fundamental evils for which they are responsible. In Gandhian terms, by the firm holding onto Truth (*satyagraha*), and refraining from inflicting physical harm upon one's opponents, it is believed that they will be won over eventually to a new understanding of the conflict situation and an appreciation of the justice of the cause for which the activists are struggling and suffering.

These are the two hands of nonviolence. The one beckons towards a new vision of a cooperative future, seeking to engage the Israeli public and their political leaders in dialogue, using the moral vocabulary of *what ought to be*. The other condemns the intolerable present, and seeks to impose such a heavy cost upon the occupiers as to force them to withdraw. There is an inevitable tension between the two: the one involves an attempt to "embrace" the opponent, the other entails an absolute rejection of the evil for which they are responsible. What gives to that tension its dynamic and creative aspect, it is argued by advocates of nonviolence, is nonviolence itself: the refusal to inflict physical hurt upon the other in the process of struggle. Only through nonviolence, it is believed, can compassion for one's opponent be held in dynamic tension with the anger at the evil for which they are responsible.

However, the Intifada has not been a nonviolent Uprising, but rather a predominantly *unarmed* one. The result has been, I believe, that the twin dimensions of conversion and coercion have tended to work in opposition to each other. In other words, when efforts at coercion go beyond the admittedly hazy boundary of nonviolent action to include modes of resistance which are intended to inflict physical injury upon the opponent, then the counter-productivity of such activity, in relation to the efforts to sway the hearts and

minds of the other, becomes all the more acute. The Israeli who is moved by the image of Palestinians refusing to submit to the dictates of a brutally repressive regime, and whose sympathies for fellow human beings pursuing a patently just cause is thereby aroused, can also be moved to anger and resentment against the "other" who, directly or indirectly, can be adjudged responsible for the injury and death inflicted on his or her fellow-citizens.

When one takes account of the siege mentality of the bulk of the Israeli public, their paramount concern with security, their fear of the assumed threat to their existence posed by the Palestinians and the Arab nations as a whole, then the negative impact of trying to force them to withdraw from the occupied territories by means of physical coercion becomes all the more apparent, particularly if one recognises that the key determinant of such a withdrawal taking place must come from the Israeli people themselves. If one accepts that the dominant emotion in Israeli society is fear, then it is clear that this fear has to be confronted and transcended if the two peoples are ever to live in peace together. But it seems equally apparent that any attempt to coerce the Israelis into submission, by means that have the effect of reinforcing their over-riding concern with security, will only heighten that fear and intensify their determination not to give ground. It will only serve to convince them that any future imposed upon them under duress is bound to be worse, from a security point of view, than the present state of affairs, however unsatisfactory the status quo might be.

I am very aware that it is easy for me to make these observations as I sit at my desk at home in Bradford, far removed from the humiliations and the hardships that are an everyday part of life for Palestinians under occupation. On my visits I have been moved to tears and to blind anger at what I have witnessed -- but I have been able to leave it behind with a sigh of relief, having once again survived that last intimidatory experience of leaving Israel from Tel Aviv airport. I know something of what it is like to live under an "iron fist", however vicarious my experience might have been. I therefore have some idea of what it is like to be treated with contempt, to have one's very humanity denied, let alone one's basic rights as a citizen. In such situations it is all too easy to give way to the desire for revenge, to hit back with whatever weapons come to hand. If nothing else, it gives one a feeling of "doing something". This is completely understandable, and few would dispute that it is better to resist by violent means than to do nothing in the face of injustice. But, however beneficial the throwing of stones and fire-bombs might be from the point of view of the individual assailant's therapeutic needs, it has to be adjudged counter-productive from the wider political perspective of getting the Israelis out. In the context of the occasional life-threatening interventions of Palestinian guerrillas from outside, the increasingly frequent knifings of Israelis by deranged Palestinians, and the calls by extremists for the recovery of the whole of historic Palestine, such actions help to perpetuate the Israeli image of the Palestinians as fundamentally threatening. As such they militate against any effort to con-

vince them that the best road to true security lies in acknowledging the collective and individual rights of the Palestinians.

## **The failure of third parties**

In observing that Palestinian efforts to obtain the withdrawal of the Israeli occupation by means of physical, albeit non-lethal, force have militated against efforts to persuade them to withdraw, I am not suggesting that force and coercion have no part to play in the dynamic. Not for a single moment can one imagine some kind of mass Israeli conversion process whereby they come to love their Palestinian cousins. Appeals to the heart might work with some people, but for the mass of folk it is their perceived individual and collective self-interest that tends to rule the day. The fact is that most Israelis would be a lot happier if there were no such people as the Palestinians (and vice versa). Even amongst the doves in the peace camp one gets the feeling that they are stricken by the fear that behind the human being that they acknowledge when in dialogue with Palestinians, they cannot dismiss the suspicion that there remains another level, a darker and perhaps more powerful "other" behind the facade, that is fundamentally threatening. What is clear to most observers is that the Israelis, public and politicians alike, will only be persuaded to sit down and talk peace with the Palestinians if they can be convinced that this is the least hurtful and threatening of the available options.

It is by influencing the range and the nature of the options open to Israel that the Palestinians have exercised their power in the struggle for peace. Thus the status quo is no longer quite so attractive to Israelis, insofar as the Intifada and its associated costs cannot be separated from the occupation itself. At the same time the Palestinians have sought to make the prospect of negotiation more appealing by unequivocally recognising Israel's right to exist and limiting their own demands to the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

However, in this struggle to influence options the Palestinians and the Israelis are not the only players. There are a host of third parties with an interest in the outcome of the conflict who have played a determining role in effecting the range of possible choices open to both parties. Thus, when King Hussein relinquished his claim to the West Bank he eliminated one option. By conceding responsibility for the West Bank to the PLO, not only did he appear to be putting an end to the so-called "Jordanian option", he was also endorsing the claims of the PLO as the legitimate representatives of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. In the process he was also announcing, in effect, that "Jordan is not Palestine", as part of his effort to forestall any Israeli plans to transfer the population of the West Bank to the East Bank of the River Jordan.

Washington, of course, has been a key target of Palestinian attention. The United States has the leverage necessary to vitally affect the available options open to Israel, the capacity to create the conditions whereby accommodation with the Palestinians becomes the "least unattractive choice" facing the

Israelis. Its failure to do so remains a key factor in enabling Israel to persist in its intransigent stance.

Third parties to any conflict are rarely moved by appeals to their sympathies. Expressions of sympathy, after all, cost rather little. Particularly when the third parties are nation states, they are influenced far more by considerations of self-interest than by feelings of moral outrage, despite the rhetoric that politicians are so adept at mouthing. The plain fact of the matter is that the Palestinians lack the resources to vitally affect the self-interest of the United States. Never has this been brought into such sharp relief as it was in August 1990. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait appeared to threaten the stability of the Gulf and the continued supply of oil to the industrialised world in general, and to the United States in particular. Within days, the build-up of American troops in Saudi Arabia was under way, to be followed by contingents from her Western allies and from elsewhere. Iraq's contravention of all the rules of international behaviour could not be tolerated. At the very minimum Saddam Hussein must be forced to withdraw from the territory he had occupied by force. If the UN sanctions proved ineffective, then force of arms would have to be used. And so it was.

Few can be so naive as to believe that such a stance came about as a result of international sympathy for the plight of the Kuwaitis. It was clearly to defend the supply of oil, upon which depends not only the profits of companies but a whole way of life built around cheap oil and petroleum-based products. Is it any wonder that the Palestinians were so outraged by the blatant hypocrisy of the international response to Iraq's occupation of Kuwait? The world has seemed perfectly able to live with the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip for over 20 years. Must the Palestinians now discover oil before they can hope to arouse the active intervention of the external powers?

The United States is not the only "third party" which has failed to exercise its influence in the interests of peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Over the last few years the various domestic crises within the Soviet Union have undermined her influence in the Middle Eastern arena. As for the European Community, it has yet to show itself willing to use its undoubted economic power to its full potential in relation to the conflict, although there is a growing recognition that Israel's choice of options could be seriously affected by the move to full economic union within the community. There is mounting concern within Israel that her access to this market might be restricted in the light of her rejectionist stance with regard to the peace process. When one turns the spotlight towards the Middle East itself, it is hard to dispel the belief that for the majority of Arab regimes the prospect of the Palestinians achieving their statehood through the exercise of people power represents a nightmare scenario. Who knows what lessons their own subject peoples might absorb from such an outcome?

For as long as these third parties fail to exercise their ability to affect the options available to Israel by increasing the relative cost of her intransigence, then there seems little prospect of any way out of the current impasse. For

Israel the Intifada has become something akin to a chronic disease, it is debilitating in all kinds of ways but it is not "life-threatening". So long as she can keep on drawing sustenance from her various external support-systems, and so long as she is not torn asunder by internal social and political divisions, there seems to be little reason why she should be swayed from her present stance.

## From civilian resistance to social defence

All this reflects a scepticism of the intellect, and it needs to be balanced by an optimism of the will. As an academic who spends some of his time teaching about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, one of the points I try to get across to my students is that if they are ever to get to grips with the complexities of the conflict, then it is important to appreciate something of the emotions and the psychoses that both parties bring to the fight : the fear of the Israelis, their fatalism about the prospects for a true and lasting peace, their paranoia about their neighbours (which, like most forms of paranoia, has a basis in reality); the unreal dreams of the Palestinians, their sense of time and history which gives substance to the dream, however far off in the distant future it might be located -- after all, how many centuries did it take before Saladin came along and drove the Crusaders from the land?

When one thinks about this conflict, it is always possible to come up with nightmare futures, but it is also possible to envisage a scenario of hope if one's faith in the future is sufficiently strong -- and what else have the Palestinians had to sustain them except their hope for the future?

The question of "linkage" between the question of Palestine and the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait came to the fore in the aftermath of the Israeli slaying of unarmed Palestinians on Temple Mount in early October 1990. It served to remind the world that so long as the issue of Palestine is left unresolved there can be no peace in the Middle East. In this sense, the Gulf crisis could not be separated from the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Indeed, the linkage between the disputes goes back to the early decades of this century when the colonial powers of Britain and France divided up the region into respective spheres of influence and penned in the artificial boundaries upon which the present day state structure of the Middle East is based, with Britain promising a homeland for the Jews in Palestine and separating Kuwait off from Iraq, whilst France carved out the state of Lebanon from Greater Syria in response to the pleas of the Christian Maronites.

The linkage has been cemented over the years by the conflict between Israel and the Arab world. It has been this core dispute that has led to the militarisation of the whole region, with over 25 per cent of government expenditure throughout the area devoted to military purposes. It has been this conflict, and the accompanying militarisation, that has allowed authoritarian tyrants such as Saddam Hussein in Iraq and President Assad in Syria to rise to power and hold on to it by the most brutal of means. Furthermore,

it has been the security fears that haunt the Israeli public that has led to the political ascendancy of the extremists that currently hold the balance of power within Israel.

It is clear that any long-term hopes for peace in the Middle East depend upon a comprehensive settlement that addresses the aspirations of the Palestinians. A fundamental component of any such process must involve the demilitarisation of the region. Only then will the space be created that can encompass the yearnings of the Israelis for security, the demands of the Palestinians for justice, and the dreams of the Arab people as a whole for a new democratic order in the Middle East.

Of course, for such a dream to become a reality, it requires the principle protagonists to give up their own maximalist dreams for the sake of peace. Palestinians, of course, have had more than three years experience of resisting occupation by means that have been primarily unarmed. As such it is possible to identify a direct linkage between the means adopted to resist Israel's occupation of Palestinian land during the Intifada and the future defence policy of a Palestinian state. But, beyond the experience gained in the methods of unarmed struggle and resistance, the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip have undergone a far deeper educational process during the course of the Uprising -- an education in active citizenry.

It has already been remarked that one of the most vital aspects of the whole Uprising has been the involvement of virtually the entire society in some aspect or other of the resistance. This involvement in the fight for political change has reflected a deeper transformation, a process of self-regeneration whereby a people traditionally cast as subjects have transformed themselves into active citizens, a people who have begun to grow accustomed to direct action. Direct action refers to far more than the demonstrations and street confrontations with the occupier which have been the surface events of the Intifada. The practice of direct action involves the exercise of the capacity for self-management and mutual care in all spheres of life, unprompted by any external state-like coercive agency. As such, Palestinians have initiated in the Uprising a process of self-change every bit as significant as the project to restructure the political domain. It is upon such a bedrock of active citizenry that social defence can be constructed: people who are prepared to take upon themselves the responsibility for defending their own communities and institutions against any external or internal aggressor. The means of defence? Non-cooperation and civil disobedience, the dogged determination not to submit and the refusal to accede to oppression.