



**Israeli attitudes towards Palestinian nonviolent struggle – A preliminary Report prepared for participants in MEND's workshops by the Truman Institute (Edy Kaufman and Yana Neumann)**

Dear friends:

Let us start by expressing our appreciation and support for the work done by MEND (Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy) and yourself in furthering nonviolent action. We know it is an uphill battle but are confident that a sustained, united and creative strategy can affect change and eventually lead to a just peace. A preliminary generalization is in order, as psychology teaches us, a crisis situation blurs the vision of people involved; our vision impaired, we become more shortsighted, and the misperception of reality makes it difficult to read the true adversary intention. Violent conflict brings us to be more prone to believe in "bad news" than to recognize "good news". Hence change of perception into peace and coexistence requires harder work for both Israelis and Palestinians

**The Impact of the First Intifada on the Israeli society**

Firstly we need to understand the context that shaped the Israeli perceptions of Palestinian nonviolence in the late 1980's.

- a) The Palestinian struggle was moving away from acts of extreme violence perpetuated mostly in Israel's territory (armed attacks to buses, schools) by PLO commandos from outside the Occupied Territories. These acts were conceived as a main element in the armed struggle.
- b) More than 90% of the Unified National Leadership of the Intifada commands were calling for nonviolent acts (parallel social and economic institutions, business strike closing down shops at mid-day, no service in Israel's police force, not paying taxes, boycott of Israeli products, hunger strikes, peaceful demonstrations, display of Palestinian flag, etc.)
- c) For Israelis, there was a relative small loss of life. Less than one hundred Jewish casualties during the entire period 1987-1991, overwhelmingly in the West Bank and not within Israel's pre-1967 border
- d) Although there was no awareness of any particular training in nonviolence, the grassroots mobilization, including women and children, gave the impression of a spontaneous movement of peaceful resistance and civil disobedience, fighting occupation with means that were bounded in the Arab and Muslim tradition
- e) The Palestinian rebellion was a mass participatory non-armed movement and not conducted by small armed groups.
- f) The Palestinian struggle under occupation was able to influence PLO in Diaspora leading to the 19th PNC resolution of 1988, recognizing the idea of a Palestinian state side by side to Israel.

Salim Tamari summarizes the achievements of the Intifada after thirty months: "Its main achievement seems to lie behind: a spectacular ability to mobilize whole sectors of a civilian population through networks of underground civilian resistance and communal self-help projects, challenging Israel's ability to continue ruling the West-Bank and Gaza.

The pattern of daily street confrontation has dealt a moral, if not logistic, blow to the might of the Israeli army. Above all, the Intifada placed relations with the Palestinians and the future of the occupied territories at the top of the agenda of all Israeli Political parties". We concur with this assessment.

When assessing its impact, it may be hard to isolate the dimension of the first Intifada in the change in Israel (other concurrent factors were the demise of the Soviet Union, the threats of the Gulf War, the decision of King Hussein to relinquish his control over the West Bank- in itself influenced by the Intifada). Overall, the positive impact on Israeli society and regime, influenced changing the government in 1992, Rabin's change of hearts from "breaking the bones" moved towards the acceptance of negotiating with the PLO, The moving from Sumud (Steadfastness ) to Intifada was seen as an empowerment of grass roots Palestinian fighting for their rights. Rabin's acknowledgment of awareness of the legal and moral constraints posed by the Israeli Supreme Court and the human rights organization B'tselem in the use of repressive means against civilians was at that time, a recognition of the limitations of a system with a self-image of adherence to democracy and the rule of law. Consequently, he and Israelis started moving away from the old Jordanian-option to the support of peace with an independent Palestinian state.

However, there was an element of violent struggle in the Intifada that jeopardized the long-term and overall positive impact. The category "popular violence", "limited violence" non-lethal power", "unarmed violence", "non-violent violence", "children of the stones" (all terms used by Palestinian media and leadership) did not maximize the effect of a nonviolent struggle. Stone throwing

by children mostly against soldiers and settlers was perceived as young adults endangering Israeli civilians by throwing rocks. While the Palestinian message may have been intimidation and defiance, the Israelis sensed a live threatening situation. Sporadic cases of petrol bombs/cocktail Molotovs (Israeli bus in Jericho) resulting in occasional deaths also affected in 1989 the electoral behavior tilting the balance to a slight majority in favour of Likud. The element of fear is personal and subjective and while Israelis could be causing enormous damage and suffering to the Palestinians, it still did not compensate for the sense of insecurity, which may have been accentuated by previous historical experiences, including the recent trauma of the Holocaust. All in all, the presence of a "limited violence" did not allow to fully capitalize profit, and escalated into a loss of unity and hundreds of lives by the Palestinian themselves (what was called "Intra-fada").

In the first Intifada we find a major shift and a significant willingness to compromise in the final objectives (moving away from the "liberation of Palestine", a "secular democratic Palestine" to acceptance of Israel through "the two-state solution"). But when it comes to the means of achieving such realistic and pragmatic objective, the shift is not all the way from violent to nonviolent action. The concept "limited violence" remained in Israeli perceptions as closer to "violence" than "non-violence". Yet, in retrospect, we still could find within the Israeli society a growing understanding of the Palestinians as fighting for a right cause, Palestinians no longer fearing the Israelis, determined to seek self determination in their own state (side-by-side with Israel), and potential partners for a lasting peace.

What would have been the impact of a Palestinian leadership and people's nonviolent struggle? Evidence of its

effectiveness has been clear in other cases such as Gandhi's India, the Solidarity workers' movement in Poland, the "Velvet" revolution in Czechoslovakia, etc. While hard to predict at that time, if the described context and "limited violence" produced such positive outcomes, our expectation was that a long-term nonviolent struggle had the potential of an Israeli agreement to end occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state in better terms than the Oslo processes.

#### b) Public opinion

Sporadic polls of Israeli public opinion have focus on the issue of Palestinian nonviolence/violent struggle. A poll conducted by Edy and the Luis Guttman Israel institute of applied Social Research – in December 1990 showed that: 62% perceived Palestinian violence as unlimited 74%-78% categorized throwing stones at civilians and/or soldiers as unlimited violence. The most frequent recommendation made to the Palestinians (43%) was not to use any extent of force in order to achieve the wanted results. An absolute majority (80%) believed that the methods employed by the Palestinians in order to establish a state are mainly violent methods. Half of those questioned (51%) agreed that the Palestinians would probably or certainly not achieve a state without the use of force. These results show that while the level of violence used by Palestinians was limited, it was not perceived as such by Israelis.

#### c) Media

During the first Intifada Edy's research followed Media coverage of the Intifada in two major Israeli news papers "Yedioth Ahronot" and "Haaretz". Reports of violence and nonviolence acts were monitored over 1988-1990. Before turning to the results a general remark on media is

in order. The media is generally known to report more saliently on the exceptional rather than the normal. It may therefore not be surprising that the violent aspect of the Intifada was reflected and stressed more, at least in the beginning. The main findings were as follows: Percentages of non violence actions reported in Yedioth Ahronot went down from 50.6% (1988) to 34.9% (1989) and 32.2% (1990). In Ha'aretz the reports went down from 48% (1988) to 34.9% (1989) and 30.7% (1990). The report on violent activities went up in "Haaretz" and down in "Yedioth Ahronot", possibly reflecting the routinization of events wide circulating news. The results clearly show that the majority of events reported were violent events 60.1% versus 39.9% non violent (the subdivision and counting of violent and non violent events took into account different perceptions of what is and isn't violent by categorizing according to actual violence performed ie. Demonstration with violence = violent, demonstration = non violent).

### **The Impact of the second Intifada on Israeli Society**

#### a) Public Opinion Polls

In depth research on the topic of Israeli public opinion on non violence actions, during the second Intifada, has yet to be conducted. The only public opinion poll on Israelis reaction to non violent actions by Palestinians was performed by "search for common grounds" in August 2002. The data presented is therefore based on public opinion polls dealing with related topics, such as: a. attitudes towards Israeli non violent act regarding the disengagement plan national security ex. This report can only give a partial picture as to the attitudes in the Israeli public. A more detailed report will be available once the Truman institute conducts a poll on the topic towards the

end of 2005.

a. During 2002 Search for common grounds commissioned a poll to determine attitudes of the Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli public on the potential for nonviolent methods in the Palestinian Intifada. A Palestinian polling organization, the Jerusalem Media and Communications Center (JMCC), carried out the poll of 600 Palestinians through face-to-face interviews. An Israeli polling organization, the B.L. and Lucille Cohen Institute for Public Opinion Research of Tel Aviv University, carried out the poll of 504 Israeli Jews by telephone interviews. The key findings regarding Israeli public opinion are as follows:

- 78% of Israelis questioned believe that the Palestinians have a legitimate right to seek a Palestinian state provided that they use non violent means.
- If the Palestinians were to move from violent to non violent form of protest, A majority of Jew would favor making concessions to the Palestinians, including phasing out the checkpoints between Palestinian towns (61%) and being more flexible in negotiations about the future Palestinian state (60%).With the disengagement plan holding a central place in Israeli society discussions these days, a relevant question is the change in attitudes towards the disengagement program which could be promoted by non violent actions. This is assuming that part of the negative attitudes stem from fear from possible Palestinian violence following army retreat. The wide spread support for the disengagement plan and these results suggest that non violent action could promote the advancement in negotiations.

b. The peace index is a public opinion poll conducted monthly amongst Israeli public. Through a set questionnaire it tries to determine the level of support towards peace. In addition to

the usual questions, the September poll dealt also with the issue of disengagement and attitudes toward different methods of protest which may be used by Israelis opposing to the plan. Attitudes towards means of protest, conceived as legitimate in the Israeli side, could reflect attitudes in general including towards Palestinians legitimate ways of protest. The questionnaire distinguished between three possible protest methods:

Within the law (for example, petitions, legal demonstrations), non violent civil disobedience (unlicensed demonstrations, refusal of army service, refusal to pay taxes and so forth), finally they were asked as to violent civil disobedience (the use of force against evacuating settlements). The results of the poll show that, as in the past, there is support for protest as long as it is legal. 86.3% support legal means of protest while only 13.5% support illegal methods, such as non violent civil disobedience, and an even smaller number 6.5% support violent protest. In another series of questions the initiators of the poll tried to find the levels of support for negotiations and whether support was conditional or not on the end of terror. 50.3% agreed with the opinion that negotiations should not be renewed as long as terror persists. 43.1% adopted the opinion that negotiations should start without any prerequisites. Widespread non violent activities replacing stereotypical perception of Palestinians as terrorists could fulfill the preliminary demand of most of the public and act as a catalyst for renewed negotiations.

c. Research on the reaction to terrorism may not seem relevant at first glance, but as it is the other end of the scale compared with non violent action, it could suggest why non violent action has a high chance of promoting attitude change in the Israeli public. A recent research " The Impact of Terrorism on Political Attitudes: A Two-Edged Sword" , based on 2000

questionnaires, dealing with the impact of terrorism on Israelis political attitudes concludes with the following: Terrorist acts promote fear in Individuals and society in general. Fearful individuals show the following behaviors:

- Impatience towards 'others', and the tendency to ignore basic civil rights
- A decrease in the efficiency of cognitive processes > irrational thinking and reliance on stereotypes

- Greater willingness to take risks
- Aggressive and militant reactions

These conclusions suggest that terrorism doesn't not help change attitudes in the wanted direction (does not enhance concession and so forth) but pushes individuals to the other extreme. Although this research deals with the use of an extreme form of violence and does not deal with non violent action, it could suggest that affecting the psych of individuals through non violent actions has a better chance of succeeding since then individuals are not in the extreme state of fear which promotes aggression and militant attitudes.

d. The National Security and Public Opinion Project monitors' Israeli public opinion on issues related to national security. Certain trends in attitudes of the Israeli public are relevant to the topic. The survey presented here "Israel Public opinion on national security 2003" was conducted between April 27 and May 23, 2003. Below are the main relevant findings: 49% believe that the Israeli Arab conflict cannot be solved by military means. 34% thought it could and 17% took the middle position. The parallel numbers for 2002 show a conceptual change that occurred in the public over the later prior to the second Intifada. The numbers respectively are 36%, 45% and 19%. These results suggest that most people may be more attentive

to non violent actions made on both the Palestinian and the Israeli side as they search for other forms, beside military force, to bring the conflict to an end. Important themes rising in the 2003 survey are those of moderation and conciliation, replacing threats of violence and appearing in the 2002 survey. 34% estimated the likelihood of war with Arab states as medium or high compared with 79% in 2002 70% in 2001 39% in 2000. Estimations of peace also rebounded: 43% thought that peace with Arab states would be strengthened during the next three years compared with 21% in 2002, 35% in 2001 and 70% in 2000. The conclusion of this research is that there has been a change in attitude in the last few years. Israeli public perceived the aspirations of the Arabs in a less pessimistic manner than in 2002. This optimism may be an opening for strengthening the trust of the Israelis in their Palestinian partners, a process which non violent actions can promote.

Media coverage: The topic of non violence is poorly reported on in Israeli media, this may in itself point to lack of awareness in the Israeli public to what is being done. Besides the major events bellow, there were only a few reports on demonstrations against the wall. All the reports on the demonstrations stated the presence of foreign and Israelis at these demonstrations.

One of the most recent events gaining wide media coverage in Israeli was the visit of Aron Gandi. Aron Gandi following in his grandfathers' footsteps is a central figure in the field of non violent resistance. Gandi was invited by Palestinians who want to advance the idea of a popular struggle against Israelis. He met with Palestinian authority chairman Yasser Arafat, met with the Geneva convention initiators, lectured in the west bank

and other places. His visit was reported on national television. The connection of such a world known figure with the Palestinian struggle surely raised awareness amongst Israelis to other forms of action taken by Palestinians and by that may contribute to enhancing trust toward some of the Palestinian public.

Most major news papers in Israel (Maariv, Jerusalem Post, Haaretz) reported the visit. However, a few reporters (mainly in Haaretz) criticized the awareness of Israeli public to the topic of non violence. Quoting Yoel Esteron in Haaretz following Aron Gandis Visit: There are Palestinians who now believe in Gandis ideas.....They assembled in El-Bireh on Thursday and participated in a Rally on Friday at Abu Dis together with Israeli peace activists. .. In the mean time their voice is not echoing here. The minute they were given in the news broadcast was swallowed up by reports of the near lynch of truck drivers at Qalandiyah. Esteron continues and says that non violent struggle could win the Palestinian lost affection of the left and practical support from the very broad Israeli center including a considerable part of the Likud party.

There were two more non violent events which received wide coverage: the killing of activist Rachel Corey in March 2003 while she was demonstrating in non violent ways against the destruction of a house in Rafiach and Gil Naamati, an Israeli citizen, being shot and seriously wounded by an Israeli soldier. These two widely reviewed events (in Israel and in the case of Corey worldwide), have two factors in common: (a) they were both cases of non Palestinians performing non violent acts of resistance (b) they were both cases in which the Israeli army retaliated with severe force to the non violent act. The wide coverage of these two events, while non violent acts

are being performed every day by Palestinians, raises the question of the necessity for "outsiders" (non Palestinian) support in order to raise awareness in Israeli public. The second question is how Palestinians can gain more coverage for the everyday non violent resistance acts performed by them. As in the first Intifada, there is more exposure through the media to violent events rather than non violent acts.

## Final remarks & conclusions

Even if we did not study systematically as yet the impact of the Post-Oslo Intifada Al Aqsa we can observe much more difficult context that is determining a much more negative Israeli attitude, based on the perception of a militarized Palestinian struggle. We want to study the current picture in a systematic manner and hopefully report back to you and to other interested Palestinian friends in about a year from now. As we have done in the short analysis above, we are not planning to describe the cause and effect sequence and the major responsibility of the Israelis in the current warlike situation. Before reaching some conclusions allow us to give you some realistic appraisal about the context in which the majority of Israeli perception is being shaped:

- a) The failure of Camp David II is showing that there was that the Palestinians were not a reliable partner for negotiation, then and even now corruption affecting credibility of bona fide negotiators.
- b) High level and prolonged Palestinian violence as symbolized by suicide bombers, worse than previous historical experiences since the 1948 war, including the isolated acts of terror in the 1970's and early 1980's.
- c) Most acts of violence have taken place within the pre-1967 borders (and not

against settlements and IDF forces in the Occupied Territories). The shelling with "Kassam" rockets may have replaced to a large extent the acts of suicide bombers, now allegedly reduced because of the Wall (called by most Israelis the "fence"). Hence, Intifada al Aqsa is different from the first Intifada that focused on liberating the territories of West Bank and Gaza not the liberation of all historic Palestine (including Israel)

d) Most acts of violence against innocent civilians and not military personnel (before the current Intifada more than 90% of Israeli casualties were military).

e) The PLO Tunis leadership and Chairman Arafat in particular are seen as supporting or at least condoning martyr's (Shay'id) violent acts.

f) The Palestinians do not believe in nonviolence

g) No peace with Palestinians and regional instability for more than "100"years (quote). The popular view is that separation is the "only way".

As you can see, the overall context for Israeli attitudes is very negative and does not take into account the Palestinian suffering and the mistakes of the Israeli leadership. As some people say: "The right was right", "no left is left" !!! And yet, we are witnessing the disintegration of Likud, the Jewish settlers are at the defensive facing majority support to unilateral withdrawal from Gaza. Are we facing a recovery of the moderates? Can Palestinians contribute to such process of change? The findings in public opinion polls and media show that there is room for some optimism. The following are our main conclusions and suggestions:

a) Public opinion polls show that the Israeli public in general is ready to end the violence and is tending towards

conciliation. Non violent actions reported to the Israeli public, we believe, will strengthen these positive trends in Israeli society and may promote further support and activism.

b) The small number of reports on non violent actions and the wide coverage of figures and activities conducted by non Palestinian may point to the necessity of connecting with Israeli and other figures. In his lecture on the subject of non violence Johan Galtung repeated the importance of the chain, or connection both within all strata's of the resisting society and the connection to people in the other society. He mentioned the chain factor as a main contributor to the success of Gandhi's struggle to free India of the British. This connection between societies and within the Palestinian society may need strengthening.

c) The low coverage of non violence events in Israeli media may also suggest that Israeli publics' reaction have been blunted and an extra ordinary, wide spanning breakthrough activity is necessary to gain attention (for example the settlers idea to create a human chain to Jerusalem).

d) Research conducted regarding the first Intifada and the more recent studies presented here suggest the importance of clear goal to be presented to Israelis while conducting nonviolent acts. The interpretation given to acts may not always be what they were intended to be and therefore could be perceived as severe violence aimed at destructing the state of Israel or endangering Israeli's rather than a legitimate action against occupation.