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**AN ANALYSIS OF THE INTERACTION BETWEEN VIOLENT
AND NONVIOLENT MEANS IN THE PALESTINIAN UPRISING**

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Introduction

In the Intifadah -the Palestinian uprising that began in December 1987 in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel in 1967- nonviolent actions have represented thus far the 85 percent of the total acts of struggle (1). Most of the remaining 15 percent of actions has been characterized by the use of limited violence (such as stones and petrol bombs throwing), while in a very limited number of actions unlimited violence has been used (such as stabbing and terrorist bombings).

This outline approaches the analysis of the interaction between violence and nonviolence in the intifadah by comparing the basic theoretical principles set by Gene Sharp (2) for nonviolent action, with the concrete experience of the Palestinian uprising.

In particular, I will analyse the intifadah experience in relation to two main concepts in Sharp's theory:

- 1) the «requirements for success»: preparation, organization, leadership, strategy and tactics
- 2) the «mechanisms of change»: conversion, accommodation and nonviolent coercion (in this case: the impact of the Intifadah on Israel).

The struggle of the Palestinians against the Israeli occupation and for an independent Palestinian state is still going on. Any final assessment of the success of the strategy of the intifadah is therefore premature; nevertheless, there are signs that the balance between violent and nonviolent action in the uprising is being changed in favour of the former. Therefore, it is useful to try to understand from now what tilts the balance between violence and nonviolence and what can restore it.

At this stage of the research, I have not conducted in depth factual analysis of the aspects considered. What follows is therefore only a survey of the possible paths for the analysis envisaged.

1. «The requirements for success»

1.1 Preparation

1.1.1 The historical legacy.

Although characterized by a «lack of preparation for disciplined nonviolent struggle» (3), the Palestinians of «the inside» (as are called the inhabitants of the Occupied Territories to distinguish them from the Palestinian diaspora) had already accumulated a substantial experience in the use of nonviolent means of resistance to the Israeli occupation before the starting of the Intifadah.

The experience starts with the six months strike of 1936 during the 1936-39 uprising against the Jewish immigration allowed by the British mandate, surfaces again with an attempt to organize a campaign of civil disobedience during the six months revolt that followed the 1967 Israeli occupation, and then punctuates the years from the mid-1970s onwards, when nonviolent protests and episodes of noncollaboration accompany the guerrilla actions inside and outside the Occupied Territories.

By the end of the 1970s the Palestinians had already used, although sporadically, most forms of symbolic nonviolent protest (marches, flying flags, politization of social events, wearing of the national dress etc.), noncooperation (mainly labour and students strikes) and nonviolent intervention (sit-ins, road blockades, and, most important, the creation of self-reliant institutions) (4).

However important the nonviolent legacy may be for the present Palestinian resistance, it must be stressed that nonviolent resistance has always been mixed with violent action. Armed nationalist guerrillas fought the British during the 1936-39 uprising, confronted the Israelis during the 1967 insurrection and conducted a stream of military actions inside the Territories (an average of 300 a year) during the 1970s.

Nevertheless, the part of violence in the mix has probably been progressively declining from 1936 onwards, and especially in the 1980s.

It appears that the Palestinians have always seen violent and nonviolent forms of struggle as complementary means to confront the Israelis, not as antithetic strategies. Moreover, the armed struggle has been perceived as superior not only in terms of effectiveness but also culturally, at least until after 1982 (5).

1.1.2 The nonviolent activists.

The only organized center for the diffusion of nonviolent training existing in the Occupied Territories is, to my knowledge, the «Center of the Study of Nonviolence». Based in Jerusalem East the Center was created in 1984 (?) by Dr Mubarak Awad, a US trained Palestinian educator, and closed down in June 1988 when Awad was expelled.

From the little information I have at the time of writing, it appears that the Center has been active in spreading information about the nonviolent strategy and tactics. At the end of 1983 a document entitled «Al-la'anaf fi al-aradi al-muhtalla» («Nonviolence in the Occupied Territories», translated in Awad 1984) circulated among Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel.

The document puts forward the idea that «for the Palestinians who are living in the West Bank and Gaza during this particular time, the most effective method of struggling is the strategy of nonviolence» (6). The influence of the American nonviolence theory on Awad's document, already implicit in the stress on the effectiveness of nonviolence, is explicitated in the reference made to Sharp's list of methods for nonviolent resistance that

Awad translates into concrete examples and suggestions suitable to the Palestinian situation.

Nevertheless, it must be stressed that Awad's 1983 document does not reject armed struggle arguing that

[The use of nonviolent methods] «does not affect the methods open to Palestinians in the outside, neither does it constitute a rejection of the concept of the armed struggle. Nor does it negate the possibility that the struggle on the inside may turn into an armed struggle at a later stage.[...] These methods can be successfully utilised, at least in part, by individuals who may choose at a different stage to engage in armed struggle» (7). It is important to note that even the few individuals that, like Awad, actively undertook the spreading of information about the nonviolent option, did not clarify that the effectiveness of the strategy is badly affected by its coexistence with the use of even limited violence.

I am not able to judge the spread of information on organized nonviolence before the Intifadah, but it seems that in spite of the effort to reach out to the various social segments of Palestinians of the inside (8), Awad and his group remained little known before the start of the Intifadah (however, the fact that the Israelis menaced to expel Awad in November 1987, just prior to the uprising, and that he received widespread support in that occasion, indicates that he had had some impact).

Finally, the supporters of nonviolence participated actively- at least until Awad's expulsion- to the orientation of the tactics of the Intifadah. In January 1988 for instance, the «Popular committee for civil disobedience», created by Awad's group, circulated a leaflet suggesting practical examples of nonviolent actions that could be undertaken at that stage of the uprising (9) ; the same kind of actions were then adopted by the NUC (see below 1.4).

1.2 Organization

At the time of the beginning of the Intifadah the Palestinians had already developed a widespread network of political, social, and economic organizations inside and outside the Occupied Territories. It is the spread, rooting and diversity of this network that made possible the magnitude and duration of the Intifadah.

The Palestinians' mass organizations of the Occupied Territories, that began developing in the 1970s and reinforced their action in the 1980s, are basically of two kinds: nation-wide interest-based groups (such as labour unions, women's and student unions, professional unions), and locally-based popular committees (usually established to serve specific purposes, such as medical or agricultural assistance, and often formed in specific categories, such as women or students).

The role of the nation-wide unions during the Intifadah has chiefly been political, in so far as they have lent their political legitimacy to the calls of the National Unified Command (NUC) of the Intifadah, especially those addressing specific categories. But it was the grass-root local networks that have borne the most of the daily effort of the Intifadah, meeting local circumstances while responding to the NUC directives.

The local popular committees have taken up the organization of protest, boycotts and activities of self-reliance, assuming in many cases the functions previously performed by the local structure of power in connivance with the Israeli authorities. As reported by an analyst who visited the Occupied Territories in summer 1989

«Informal divisions of labour emerged in many areas: a merchants' committee would deal with commercial questions; youth committees would be responsible for engaging or diverting the military; the women of every neighborhood would act as watch committees or

organize the distribution of emergency rations: labour committees would supervise strike observance or help organize efforts in the "alternative economy"; "reconciliation committees" of trusted community members would replace the work of the boycotted court system..» (10).

Also the Palestinian organizations of the outside (the political groups and the PLO institutions) took part in the Intifadah effort by providing political guidance, as well as diplomatic and economic support. However, their direct contribution to the predominantly nonviolent strategy of the Intifadah has consisted above all in the much debated renouncement to terrorist actions announced by Arafat in Cairo in October 1988 and confirmed by the XIX Palestinian National Council in November (11). In compliance with this renouncement, the PLO organizations have refrained from undertaking guerrilla attacks, at least until the boat-raid attempted by a commando of the Popular Liberation Front on 31 May 1990.

1.3 The leadership

The Intifadah would have soon collapsed or fallen prey to internal division (as was the case during the 1936-39 Palestinian revolt), were it not for several features. The most important of these are the spread of mass organizations, the experience already accumulated in resisting the Israeli occupation, the unanimity of nationalist feelings and social consensus, and the existence of an effective leadership.

1.3.1 Composition.

The leadership of the Intifadah consists of different layers, a feature that gives it flexibility and penetration in the whole of the Palestinian society: the first layer is the PLO, the visible political leadership residing in the outside; the second layer resides in the Occupied Territories and is composed of two parts, one visible -the group of intellectuals living in East Jerusalem and headed by Feisal Hussein- and one invisible, known as the National Unified Command of the Intifadah (NUC).

The division of labour and the dialectics between these different components are important to explain the mechanisms of the direction of the Intifadah and the shifts between violent and nonviolent action tactics.

The PLO is the ultimate political leadership and the only legitimate representative recognized by the Palestinians. It is remarkable that this remains true, in spite of the shift in the distribution of power that occurred between the Palestinians of the outside and those of the inside during the 1980s, and in spite of the recurring Israeli efforts to suscite a leadership of the inside isolated from that of the outside.

As a matter of fact, the crushing of the PLO's military capability in Lebanon in 1982 engendered a reassessment of the strategies of the organization. Of the three main ways of putting pressure on Israel -the military way, the diplomatic way, and the mobilization from the inside- only the second and the third remained fully open. As a consequence, the effort devoted by the PLO to mass political work in the Occupied Territories multiplied, generating the growth of the mass organizations described above, and finally succeeded in creating that mobilization of the majority of the people of the West Bank and Gaza which originated the Intifadah (12).

Therefore, the allegiance of the leadership of the inside to the PLO had not to be created after the beginning of the Intifadah since, in spite of all Israeli efforts to the contrary,

they had developed together (13).

Nevertheless, there are definite differences between the internal and external branches of the leadership. The fundamental difference is, in my opinion, one of outlook: while the outside Palestinian community depends on others (the Arab countries, the international community, the Palestinians of the inside) to achieve its goals, the Palestinians of the inside have discovered in the 1980s that they should count on themselves in first place.

This different outlook in the Occupied Territories grew during the 1980s with the coming to age of a new generation that, passing through the process of accrued confrontation and accrued repression generated, among other things, by the mentioned shift in the PLO strategy, acquired that «loss of fear» vis-a-vis the occupier which is probably the most important prerequisite for the launching of an enduring struggle, and especially a nonviolent one.

With the launching and continuation of the Intifadah, the Palestinians of the inside acquired a preeminence within the Palestinian community that reversed the traditional flow of power between them and the PLO. As a matter of fact, the historical decision taken at the XIX Palestinian National Council (November 1988) were the ratification by the PLO of the strategies of the Intifadah, and in the first place of the shelving of the violent option.

However, the process is far from being concluded. If in 1988 the effect of the empowerment of the Palestinians of the inside has been to push the PLO leadership towards moderation, in 1989 and in the first part of 1990 its effect was to slow down the consequences of this moderation (exploring the possibilities of the Shamir election plan, continuing the dialogue with the US). A shift in the perspective of the inside leadership can now undo the choices made by the PLO in 1988 and even topple Arafat's leadership of the organization if his strategy of exploiting the momentum created by the Intifadah to diplomatic ends should fail.

In particular, since the preference accorded in the Intifadah to nonviolent means is tactical, not exclusive and may seem now to have harvested all the the political fruits it could bear, this choice risks to be reversed.

1.3.2 The National Unified Command of the Intifadah.

Since mid-January 1988 the inside leadership of the Intifadah has been exercised by the National Unified Command, a clandestine formation of officially unknown composition. Socially, the NUC is characterized by a membership of relatively youthful, educated people drawn from lower and middle social strata; politically, its membership represents the four PLO member-groups with a mass following in the Occupied Territories- al-Fatah, the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), DFLP (Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine), and the Palestine Communist Party- plus a number of «independents».

The commitment to nonviolence of the four political groups represented in the NUC varies. Al-Fatah, the mainstream most powerful group of PLO de facto renounced to guerrilla attacks on civilian targets well before the Intifadah, preferring the nonviolent option over the violent one: in the whole, its position is representative of the limited use of violence that characterizes the uprising.

To the contrary, the PFLP and DFLP support not just the concept, but the continuation of the armed struggle and have reluctantly subscribed to the nonviolent option of the Intifadah for tactical reasons. Finally, the Palestinian Communist has always claimed the superiority of the political struggle over the armed one.

The tactical approach of the NUC to the question of nonviolence is explicit in the numerous appeals that, circulated as leaflets, constitute the main instrument of the NUC for leading the Intifadah. The dosage between nonviolent and limitedly violent action is chosen according to the contingent situation; for instance the NUC's Appeal n.6 (February 5, 1988) read:

Let all suitable organizations such as committees and units be formed in every area...in order to pave the road toward general civil disobedience...Let us climb another rung of the ladder by declaring this disobedience...following the war of molotov cocktails, stones and the raising of flags...(14).

But the Appeal n.38 (March 1989) called for attacks on the Israeli soldiers with knives, axes and molotovs [but not with firearms (15)].

1.3.3 The intellectuals.

The group of Palestinians intellectuals living in East Jerusalem have had, especially in the first period of the Intifadah, the role of speakers between the clandestine NUC, the masses that sustained the uprising and the outside world, thanks to their relative major freedom of expression and contacts.

What is more important for our analysis, is that this group of intellectuals seems to have channelled to the NUC its experience in organized nonviolent action. The action timetable put forward by many of the NUC appeals resembles in fact the combination of nonviolent action first used by the intellectuals in April 1987 to support the hunger strike undertaken by some Palestinian political prisoners.

If this relationship is true, the intellectuals would have had a leading role in transforming the use of nonviolence in the Palestinian resistance from just one of the tactics to the central piece of the Intifadah strategy.

The group of intellectuals, of which Awad was part before his expulsion, seem to be the segment of the leadership of the Intifadah most clearly committed to nonviolence. For instance, after the massacre of Rishon Letzion (20 May 1990) where seven Palestinians were killed in cold blood by a deranged Israeli provoking a new flaring up of the Intifadah, Husseini and his group began a hunger strike in a climate when the violent option seemed to gain terrain on both sides.

1.3.4 Alternative leadership.

For years analysts of the Palestinian question thought that, along with the PLO, it existed in the Occupied Territories another structure of power, whose notables, deriving from the traditional organization of society, and differently supported by Jordan and Israel. The Intifadah has wiped away these traditional loci of power and their ties to both Jordan and Israel.

Also, the Israeli attempts of creating an alternative Palestinian leadership have been thwarted and the role of Palestinian collaborators has been neutralized during the Intifadah.

What has grown instead is the influence of the Islamic movements -the Islamic Jihad and Hamas- both creatures of the Muslim Brotherhood (the former a split off of the mid-60s, the latter created in 1988 to channel a more active role in the Intifadah). What is important here is that neither of the two organisations has renounced violence. In fact, they have claimed responsibility for most of the terrorist attacks occurred during the Intifadah and declared that «the Islamic movement views the Intifadah as...an introduction to armed jihad

[holy struggle]» (16).

Although they have cooperated in the Intifadah effort and supported the NUC positions for the sake of unity (while organizing their own actions and distributing independent appeals), the political outlook of the Islamic movements is markedly different from that of the PLO mainstream; the weakening of the latter can therefore translate in an empowerment of the Islamic voice in the Intifadah, which in turn would mean a strengthening of propensity to revert to the violent option (17).

1.4. Strategy and tactics

The ultimate strategic goal of the Intifadah is the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, to be arrived at through negotiation in the context of an international peace conference attended by Israel and the PLO on equal footing. The pursuing of this ultimate goal remains upon the outside PLO leadership.

The intermediate strategic goals that the inside leadership has set for itself are: Israeli military withdrawal from Palestinian population centres in the Occupied Territories and the interposition of UN peace-keepers; the lifting of marshall law and the erasure of its effects (releasing of prisoners, readmission of deportees etc.); the permission of free local elections and permission for the local members of the Palestine National Council to attend its sessions abroad; the cancellation of economic constraints on Palestinian development (e.g. diversion of waters); the cessation of settlements (18).

In order to achieve these intermediate goals the NUC has designed three main tactics: 1) express the Palestinian rejection of the occupation by means of violent and nonviolent protests and demonstrations (as repeatedly pointed out, the nonviolent actions have been far more numerous of the violent one, the most common of which is stone throwing); 2) dismantling the structure of occupation by means of political and economic noncollaboration; 3) creating alternative political and economic institutions. Through their different ways, all these tactics should converge into making the continuation of the occupation too costly to the Israelis in economic, political and moral terms.

To evaluate the overall impact of the different tactics would require an in depth, often case by case analysis (a partial assessment is attempted to in the second part of this study, through the analysis of the Israeli political reaction).

As regarding the implementation of these tactics, two features can be underlined in the first place. One is the coincidence with the theory of nonviolent action: as matter of fact, all the three classes of methods -nonviolent protest, noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention- are exploited by the NUC tactics. The second feature is the flexibility of implementation sought by the NUC to augment the impact and the sustainability of the struggle.

Gradualism is one of the form taken by the flexibility of NUC's tactics: calls for the economic boycott of Israeli goods, employment and taxes were initially selective and even when blanket embargoes were called some categories were exempted in accordance to their special significance for the uprising (for instance, major entrepreneurs were exempted from the tax boycott because the closure of their businesses would have inflicted too great a damage to economic self-sufficiency). Another form of flexibility is to demand the full the engagement of only some section of the mobilized population at any given time, so as to spread the burden and leave sometime for recovering and organizing.

However noticeable given the pervasiveness of Israeli repression, it must be said

clearly that the Palestinian nonviolent action in the Intifadah has never escalated to a full scale civil disobedience. As one Palestinian analyst noted in 1989

Although this choice is discussed in leaflets and among Palestinian activists, Palestinians are not ready to yet to burn their ID cards, give up their cars, and completely break all relations with the Israelis (19).

The effectiveness of the Intifadah nonviolent component is therefore undermined by two main factors: the non complete renouncement of violent action (20), and the incomplete implementation of the nonviolent strategy «escalation ladder».

2.The «Mechanisms of change»

Although it is undisputable that the Intifadah has had a definite impact on Israel, it is difficult to evaluate its magnitude and therefore the progress of the mechanism of change that can eventually lead to the achievement of the Palestinians goals.

One way to assess the impact of the Intifadah is to evaluate the costs it has imposed on Israel. Given the predominance of nonviolent tactics, the cost in terms of casualties has been relatively minor: at the end of the second year of the Intifadah the figure was of 44 Israelis dead (5-6 percent of Palestinian casualties), mostly soldiers and mostly caused by stones (21).

As for the economic dislocation, direct and indirect costs of the first year of the uprising has been evaluated at about \$2 billion, aloss the has seriously aggravated Israel's faltering economy (22).

The most telling indicator of the Intifadah impact is, however, the change introduced in the Israeli political debate about the final status of the West Bank and Gaza.

2.1 The Political Discourse in Israel

The Israelis are unanimous in desiring to bring to an end the Intifadah, regardless to the final solution to be given to the Palestinian problem. This is in many senses a success for the Palestinians, since the conviction the present situation is unbearable makes urgent to find a final solution for the status of Occupied Territories, a very marginal problem for the Israeli polity before the beginning of the Intifadah.

The debate on how to quell the Intifadah is however a debate on short term policies, revolving around the question of how much force is needed to stop the revolt. From the different polls taken at different times during the Intifadah it appears that, although Israeli public opinion is in constant flux, a majority of it requires a greater use of force (23).

What is more important from the point of view of the eventual success of the Intifadah is, however, the evolution of the Israeli debate over the final status of the Occupied Territories.

It is arguable whether the Intifadah has done more to strengthen the right or the the left of the Israeli political spectrum, even if the right has gained ground in all elections held after the beginning of the uprising. In any case, it seems that the Palestinian uprising has reinforced and deepened the political divisions in Israel, since each of the main ideological orientations -the right devoted to territorial maximalism and the left preferring some kind of territorial compromise- has adopted positions that were considered extreme before the Intifadah, and is convinced that the uprising confirms its thesis (24).

The majority of the right supporters seem now convinced that the only solution to

the problem posed by the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories is to expell them and then annex the territories to Israel. The majority of the leftists are now persuaded that a territorial compromise can be achieved only entering direct negotiations with the PLO.

Within the general polarization of the Israeli political debate, the Intifadah has also caused a radicalization of the extreme fringes of each of the main positions. Settlers, religious extremists, and some of the military that serve in the Occupied Territories have rediscovered the Palestinians only to dehumanize them again and justify the worst of violence. Activists of the pacifist movements, that were dispersing after the anti-war in Lebanon period, have found new energies and strategies (including nonviolent noncooperation with the occupation).

On the whole, however, the shift to the right emerged in the 1988 elections and confirmed in the composition of the present Israeli government, coupled with a further polarization of the Israeli polity does not encourage hopes for any Israeli accomodation in the near future. The only option open for the Palestinians seem therefore a successful cohercion. In the absence of any credible military ability to coherce by force, the Palestinian can only eliminate the occupation by nonviolent cohercion of the Israelis, and especially by making the Occupied Territories ungovernable through full civil disobedience.

Notes

- (1) For the evaluation of these percentage: Sharp 1989, p. 3.
- (2) Gene Sharp is an American political scientist who argues in favour of nonviolence as a rational choice in strategic not just moral terms ; his theory was first presented in the three volumes of *The Politics of Non violent Action* (Sharp 1985).
- (3) Sharp 1989, p.7.
- (4) At this stage, I have made no attempt to catalogue the frequency of use of the different techniques, nor the Palestinian elaborations of the established nonviolent tecniques.
- (5) This statement is based on the evolution of the PLO political debate and on the Palestinian literature, where the figure of the nonviolent resistant becomes a central character only in the eighties (e.g. Rajah Shehadeh Tenir bon, Emile Habibi Sa'id Abu al- Nahs al-Mutasha'il).
- (6) Awad 1984, p. 73.
- (7) idem, p. 73 and 83.
- (8) For instance, it has been reported to me that voulunteers of Awad's group organized initiatives of medical care and alphabetization in the countryside, during which they also informed people on nonviolence methods.
- (9) The text was published in a special issue of *al-Qadaya al filastiniya fi shahr* ('The Palestinian question this month' -a monthly of the Arab League), March 1988.
- (10) Cobban 1990, p.216-17.
- (11) In various declarations released in fall 1988 Arafat announced the rejection of terrorism defined as «any military action which targets civilians», but claimed the right to the armed struggle against the occupiers, a principle sanctioned by the UN Charter.
- (12) The mind of the PLO mobilization effort in the Occupied Territories in the 1980s was Khalid al-Wazir of Fath (also known as Abu Jihad); a fact well known to the Israelis that killed him in Tunis in 1988.

- (13) The relationship between the internal and external leadership of the Intifadah is analyzed in detail in Cobban 1990.
- (14) FBIS-NES, February 5, 1988, p.3.
- (15) Earlier, Israeli Prime Minister Shamir had warned that if Palestinians used firearms «there will be neither survivors nor refugees among them» (quoted in Sayigh 1989, note 38).
- (16) Declaration of an HAMAS leader, as quoted by Cobban 1990, p.211.
- (17) On 28 June a prominent member of NUC denounced this danger in a clandestine interview with the international press; however, he reiterated the Intifadah commitment to nonviolence.
- (18) This is a summary of the goals set for in the so called «Fourteen points manifesto» issued by Palestinian intellectuals at a press conference in East Jerusalem on 14 January 1988 (the original text, reprinted in many places, can be found in the official magazine of the OLP Filastin al-Thawra, 21 January 1988). (19) Kuttab 1989.
- (20) The negative effects of this fact are discussed in Sharp 1989.
- (21) According to Palestinian sources there had been 745 Palestinian dead at the same date (Middle East International, n. 365, dec. 1989).
- (22) All the figures given are taken from Sayegh 1989, p.41.
- (23) Bar-On 1989, pp. 52-53.
- (24) I adopt here the convincing analysis presented in Tessler 1990.

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