

Resistance and Violence

Prepared by the
New England Committee to Defend Palestine
www.onepalestine.org



What is the Intifada?

The Palestinian people are struggling against a systematic program of Israeli violence designed to force them from their native land by whatever means the Israeli government deems necessary. The Arabic word for this struggle is *Intifada*, or “casting off.”

For the Palestinians, the Intifada means resistance to the bombing of their homes, the killing of their children with rubber bullets and live rounds, the bulldozing of houses with families inside, the uprooting of olive trees, the military seizure and illegal occupation of land, the building of walls around cities, and the deliberate destruction of civilian infrastructure and water reserves. The Intifada is the resistance of a native people to an occupying colonial power and to a 55-year program aimed at destroying everything that sustains the Palestinians as a people: schools, hospitals, businesses, cultural institutions, social existence, and even their own history.

The Intifada is a reaction to physical violence, but also to the broader and more subtle pattern of daily humiliation, economic dispossession, and social control imposed on the Palestinian people since 1948 by the Israeli state and by the British colonial government before that. The U.S. media portrays the Intifada as a stream of violence without source or purpose, deliberately ignoring the depth, breadth, and diversity of Palestinian resistance as well as the brutal context that has made this resistance necessary.

As people throughout the world realize that the Israeli government is no more legitimate than the white apartheid government of South Africa was, Israel's supporters – including those who believe in a separate Palestinian state – have been forced to argue that the only thing worth discussing is the current situation. But Palestine's future is inseparable from its history – and to believe otherwise is to accept a lie.

“Casting Off”: A History

The roots of the Intifada can be found in the Palestinian struggle against British colonialism in the 1920s and 1930s. Facing systematic violence, unfair and exclusionary labor practices, and ongoing colonial settlement by European Zionists, the Palestinian people responded with general strikes, civil disobedience, tax resistance, revolts, underground organizing, and – when necessary – armed struggle. In early 1948, Zionist paramilitary terrorists – the Haganah and the Irgun and Stern gangs – began to mount attacks not only against Palestinian villages but also against British troop transports and supply convoys. By the end of the 1948 war, the colony had changed hands: Israel had been founded, as Ilan Pappé wrote, “on the ruins of the indigenous people of Palestine, whose livelihood, houses, culture and land had been systematically destroyed.” It is a time in history known to Palestinians as *al Nakbah* – “the catastrophe.”

Thirty years later, in the 1967 war, Israel expanded its borders dramatically. Since then, deportation and home demolition have displaced 750,000 Palestinians, some for the second or third time, and left many homeless. By December 1987, twenty years of military occupation had pushed Palestinian society to the breaking point. Repeated appeals to the United Nations and the international community went unheeded. Palestinian youth began picking up stones and throwing them at Israeli tanks, believing that their plight was ignored by the world.



Under Yitzhak Rabin's “Iron Fist” policy, Israeli soldiers crushed the hands of these children with the butts of their rifles, and, as the First Intifada developed, every form of organized resistance was met with equal brutality. Palestinian life, from birth to death, was put under Zionist control: women were forced to bear children in ambulances stopped at checkpoints, and public funerals were frequently prohibited. People were confined to their homes for weeks at a time, and children were lucky if they were able to attend school for more than a few months in a given year. Still, people under curfew risked their lives to bring

groceries to their neighbors, underground schools formed, and town councils were called as a substitute for Israeli rule. All of this was part of the Intifada.

Conservative estimates suggest that between 1987 and 1993, 1,283 Palestinians were killed and 130,472 were injured. In the same period, Israel uprooted 184,257 olive trees, which many Palestinian farmers depended on for their livelihood. Although the heroic resistance of the Palestinians drew worldwide attention, the international community eventually abandoned them, and, as the Oslo process stripped away any material gains the First Intifada might have made, life in the Occupied Territories returned to what was considered normal – an unrestrained pattern of Israeli violence.

In the period leading up to the Second Intifada, the supposedly “liberal” Barak government systematically denied Palestinians employment and restricted their movement, while building illegal settlements at an unprecedented rate. (Israeli architectural documents clearly show that these settlements, most built on hilltops, are designed to fragment and control Palestinian territory as efficiently as possible.) Meanwhile, the United States, falsely claiming to be a neutral mediator, continued to provide the Israeli government with billions of dollars in military aid.

With Ariel Sharon's subsequent election as prime minister, the Israeli assault against the Palestinians shifted from a primarily economic to a primarily military mode. As international appeals, mass demonstrations, organized civil disobedience, and armed struggle against an occupying army began once more, Palestinians were met by widespread violence reminiscent both of the 1948 war, when more than 400 Palestinian villages and towns were leveled to make room for the expanding Israeli state, and of 1967, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced from their lands and homes.

Today, the remaining Palestinian population faces forced expulsion into surrounding countries such as Jordan as part of what Israeli politicians such as Benny Elon euphemistically refer to as “population transfer.” As Zionist thinker Vladimir Jabotinsky wrote in 1923, “Every indigenous people will resist alien settlers as long as they see any hope of ridding themselves of the danger of foreign settlement.” Ethnically cleansing Israel of all Arabs – be they Muslims, Christians, or Jews – would finally accomplish a 55-year-goal of the Zionist movement, which, from the colonial perspective, is the only way to guarantee Israel's continued ability to exist as a racist state.

Resistance, Violence, and the United States

Since its beginning, the Palestinian resistance has been as diverse as the oppression faced by the Palestinian people. But whether this resistance has taken the form of strikes, mass demonstrations, stone throwing, curfew violations, or armed struggle, the pattern of Israeli violence has remained the same. Life in Palestine is not caught in the “endless cycle of violence and retribution” portrayed by the mainstream media – rather, Israeli aggression has always been dictated by the needs of Zionist expansion. This military, economic and social assault has continued unabated for more than half a century. It is part of a long-term plan.

U.S. support for Israel and Israeli violence also stems from a plan, this one involving client states, “regional stability,” and control over the world’s oil supply. The United States gives Israel billions of dollars in military and economic aid each year – in fact, Israel receives more foreign aid from the U.S. government than does any other state. The bulldozers that demolish Palestinian homes – and which have killed dozens of Palestinians in towns such as Jenin – are made by Caterpillar, which is a U.S. company. U.S. tax dollars buy the bullets with which Palestinian children are shot, the planes that bomb Palestinian homes, and the so-called “bypass roads” – first proposed by Bill Clinton – on which Israelis can travel but Palestinians cannot.

In addition to the aid provided by U.S. taxpayers, there is massive private and institutional U.S. investment in Israel, at a level reminiscent of apartheid South Africa. U.S. support for Israel helps sustain relatively low prices at the gas pump and a steady flow of cheap imported goods – but at a human cost deliberately hidden from U.S. consumers by the media and the government it serves.



Whose Violence? Whose Peace?

Many in the United States claim to support the Palestinians in their struggle against Zionist oppression, and then call upon the Palestinian people to “act responsibly,” to “renounce violence,” and to “negotiate reasonably.” That is not support.

Our responsibility here in the United States is to stop the U.S. government’s support for the violence Israel unleashes each and every day. It is not our place to dictate the forms that the resistance to violence should take among the Palestinians, who are justifiably angry and admirably defiant after decades of humiliation and oppression. The Intifada is a legitimate uprising against the Zionist policies of segregation, blockades, home destruction, land confiscation, daily humiliation, massive unemployment, assassination of political activists, starvation, imprisonment, and ethnic cleansing. Oppressed people have an internationally recognized right to resist, especially if all legal and conventional means have failed to earn them their freedom. Those who deny the Palestinians this right are in the company of every oppressive government in the history of the world.



Who is responsible for the violence in Palestine? The Israeli state and its policies of expansion and aggression, and the U.S. government, which funds Israel according to its own interests. This violence unfolds through daily violations of international law. It is reflected in the widespread employment by Israel of collective punishment. It is the violence of deliberately targeting ambulances and medical personnel, of forcing Palestinian civilians to be “human shields” for the Israeli occupation army, of building illegal settlements designed to extend Israeli control over even those areas nominally “recognized” by Israel as Palestinian. It is the violence of Zionist settlers – under Israeli military protection – shooting Palestinian civilians as they harvest their olives. The violence even takes the form of “peace negotiations” used as a weapon by the United States and Israel to exact through the pen what has proven difficult to exact through the sword.

That is not the peace Palestinian resistance seeks. Peace will come only with justice, and justice will come only when the oppressor’s mechanism for oppression has been completely dismantled. That mechanism is the Israeli state itself.



The Palestinian resistance springs from the same basic principles as the struggle of the South African people against the apartheid government, the Jewish uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto, the armed resistance of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, and the struggle of the Vietnamese against the French and American armies. As the Second Intifada continues in the face of relentless Israeli aggression, more and more people worldwide are being forced to confront the full brutality of Zionist occupation and to recognize the legitimacy of Palestinian resistance.

The New England Committee to Defend Palestine is an independent organization unaffiliated with any political party. We are founded on three basic principles of unity:

- We are for a unified, democratic Palestine that encompasses the whole territory of historic Palestine, and we oppose the existence of the colonial-settler state of Israel.
- We are for human rights for all Palestinians – including the right to resist and the right to return.
- We are for an end to all U.S. aid to Israel – military, economic, and political.

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