

The Road to Nonviolent Coexistence in Palestine/Israel

By Michael N. Nagler, PhD., Tal Palter-Palman, and Matthew A. Taylor

United Press reporter: “What do you feel is the most acceptable solution to the Palestine problem?”

Mahatma Gandhi: “The abandonment wholly by the Jews of terrorism and other forms of violence.”¹

Gandhi’s insight is as resonant today as it was almost 60 years ago. He implored Jews who were committed to establishing a Jewish national home in then-mandate Palestine to offer *Satyagraha*, an organized campaign of pure soul force, to persuade the hearts of their Arab sisters and brothers (and the world) of the legitimacy of their aspirations.² Sadly, since he spoke those words, the conflict has only escalated and dragged on.³ At the time of this writing, certain political changes have created a new opportunity for Israeli Jews, Palestinians (whom Gandhi would now certainly include in his recommendation!), and third parties to utilize the nonviolence he advocated to bring about not merely coexistence, but also reconciliation, friendship, and transformation in the Holy Land.

The encouraging news for those hoping for such an outcome is that dedicated people are planting the seeds of nonviolence throughout this “land of milk and honey.” We shall examine a variety of different expressions of nonviolence. Our primary focus is on grassroots resistance against the separation wall, and we’ll also discuss civil society organizations that train youths in nonviolent direct action, an organization that both opposes home demolitions and reconstructs homes, and the Combatants for Peace movement. We believe that as the practitioners grow in their commitment to nonviolence, the opportunities for deep structural change will inevitably increase.

What is Nonviolent Coexistence?

First, let us address the question of what we do and do not mean by “nonviolent coexistence.” In our recent travels to the Holy Land, we met some who expressed faint hope in eventual “arm’s length coexistence” largely free from violence, i.e. “live and let live.” This sort of perpetual ceasefire, or negative peace, would certainly be a welcome improvement. However,

a state of non-war is *not* a nonviolent mode of coexistence in the philosophical or practical sense. Positive peace, to paraphrase Dr. Johan Galtung, could be described as the presence of equality, community reconciliation, and sustainable relationships. Only this kind of peace is stable — and only this kind ultimately fulfills the aspirations of all parties.⁴ One of Dr. Martin Luther King’s best-known observations bears on his — and our — definition of the “loving community” which is the highpoint of reconciliation work: “I can’t be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can’t be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.” Perhaps a useful definition of nonviolent coexistence work might be: a society in which human beings see each other as equally valuable and desire to meet each other’s needs as much as they would their own, irrespective of differences on the surface. This definition accords with Johan Galtung’s concept of violence as the unnecessary compromise of human well-being and Gandhi’s own important contribution of ‘heart unity’ — the harmony of deeper aspirations beneath all differences of status, power, religion, etc. which is the ultimate foundation of lasting security and peace.

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict is vastly asymmetrical, so much so that many on the left reject the “conflict” framing. They see the situation entirely as one of occupation and oppression. Israel commands one of the world’s most powerful militaries, possesses nuclear weapons, is allied with the world’s hegemonic superpower, discriminates against and denies equal rights to Arabs living in Israel, maintains (according to International law) an illegal occupation of Palestinian territory, and inflicts a wide spectrum of human rights violations against Palestinians in the occupied territories on an ongoing basis. To further complicate peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts, due to constant movement barrier closings (these are inaccurately referred to as “checkpoints”) and the construction of the separation wall, Israeli Jewish civilians and Palestinian civilians in the occupied territories have little or no personal contact. “The Israeli people don’t even know Palestinians – we live in a bubble,” stated Jeff Halper of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions.⁵ Indeed, many Israeli Jews with whom we spoke gave voice to a lack of personal connection even with Israeli Arabs. This alienation *must* be addressed before any meaningful progress toward nonviolent coexistence, as we define it, can be made.

According to many Arabs, peace work that aims merely at a façade of “coexistence” without addressing the asymmetry both between Jews and Arabs within Israel and the occupied territories runs the risk of producing superficial, and thus only temporary results, and even

“normalizing” the asymmetry. Some Israelis and Palestinians criticize the “peace industry” that sponsors “meetings for the sake of meetings” (dialogue groups, soccer games, eating hummus together) without addressing the asymmetry, and thus the reality, of the conflict.⁶

Clearly, any work that seeks an outcome of genuine nonviolent coexistence (as previously defined) must seek to change the structural and cultural violence that perpetuates the conflict’s asymmetry.⁷ It’s apparent that violent means would only rearrange the status quo (or make it worse). Furthermore, we believe that a partially nonviolent movement that is diluted by violence and co-opted by asymmetric negotiations can’t untie the Gordian knot. Only committed and thorough nonviolent resistance can secure that happy result.

The Power of Nonviolence

In *Speak Truth to Power*, a 1962 study of international conflict, the American Friends Service Committee identified a hallmark of nonviolent revolution: the power to liberate both oppressor and oppressed, opening the door to friendship and reconciliation. It is not impossible. At the moment of India’s independence in 1948, “The Indians were freed; yet there was neither victor nor vanquished. England and India were in conflict for thirty years; yet the English and the Indians remained friends. On the very day of triumph, with Britain relinquishing the richest prizes of its empire, and India finally rid of its master, the two leaders, Mountbatten and Nehru, stood arm in arm on the same platform.”⁸

Violent social change movements, by contrast, may accomplish short-term goals, but at the cost of generating bitterness, hostility, and the desire for revenge. In addition to its inability to fully address the evil of slavery, the US civil war produced decades of enmity between white northerners and white southerners. Nearly 40 years after its war for independence, Algeria’s relations with France remain strained, and Algerians have suffered through violent political upheaval.⁹ There is growing evidence to support Gandhi’s warning that violent revolution inevitably brings violent *swaraj* [freedom, or regime].¹⁰

Gandhi’s acceptance of his oppressors as people alongside his rejection of their oppression, a kind of relationship he termed *heart unity*, is perhaps even more relevant to Israeli and Palestinian neighbors, who *have* to live with each other, than in the case of the Indians’ relations with the British. Given the track record of nonviolent social movements to advance

human relations toward a more genuine state of coexistence, we will examine the past, present, and potential of Palestinian nonviolent movements.

The Roots of Palestinian Nonviolence

The roots of nonviolence were nurtured in Palestine over many years, especially during the 1970s and 1980s following Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip. Palestinian civil society provided the organizational backbone for the first *Intifada* (or "shaking off"), which was launched against the Israeli military occupation in 1987.¹¹ During the first Intifada, a variety of Palestinian communities, through different organizations and popular committees, adopted different nonviolent methods to express their opposition to the Israeli military occupation. For instance, the residents of Beit Sahour, a small city adjoining Bethlehem, were well known for their tax revolt, in which the city's inhabitants refused to pay taxes to the Israeli government, since their taxes indirectly financed the military occupation. Palestinians participated in other nonviolent campaigns, which included mass demonstrations, hanging Palestinian flags, closing shops, boycotting Israeli goods, and worker strikes. In 1988, the Intifada's leadership called for an escalation of such resistance to the level of "total civil disobedience."¹²

In addition to massive obstructive campaigns, Palestinians also engaged in constructive programs, self-reliant activities designed to strengthen their community from within and disengage from any dependence on Israelis. They formed political institutions, charitable groups, professional and cultural associations, student associations, women's associations, and an alternative system of justice. They taught students in underground schools, planted victory gardens, consumed as much as possible only their own products and goods, planted olive trees, and organized agricultural cooperatives.¹³ This was arguably more important for a potential long-term change, as the besetting sin of liberation struggles has been to shake off an oppressive regime without building a better one to take its place.

Stone throwing was one of the more controversial aspects of the Intifada, mainly practiced by Palestinian youths age 10-20 (called the *shabab*). Some Palestinians have argued that stone throwing is more an act of defiance than an intention to injure (the literal meaning of *himsa*, violence), saying that stones (in most cases) cannot hurt well-equipped helmeted soldiers. The shabab resort to stone throwing to protest the presence of the army on their lands. For Palestinian youngsters suffering from a deep feeling of humiliation and hopelessness, this simple

yet concrete act of resistance is often a way to survive psychologically, by reclaiming a feeling of empowerment in an otherwise forlorn and depressive environment. Accordingly, different scholars note that stone throwing falls into a gray area between violence and nonviolence. Dr. Abu-Nimer of American University refers to it as nonlethal force or unarmed resistance.¹⁴

However it is described, and whatever the motives of the youth who engage in the activity, unfortunately it does have a real potential to injure. For instance, during the time we visited the Holy Land in the summer of 2005, one Israeli soldier reportedly lost use of an eye due to a stone. Even if such incidents are rare, the media tends to focus on them, leading to misconstrual of the movement by the ‘reference publics.’

On the other hand, a well-known right-wing Israeli military spokesperson and veteran of the first Intifada recently stated at a public event that he had respect for the kids who threw stones at him, because he understood that they were not out to hurt him, but simply send a message: get off our lands. (He directly contrasted that with the violence of the second Intifada.) In assessing the effect of stone throwing, we can recognize that those who are the targets are likely to perceive the act in different ways: this is a difficulty with all symbolic acts.

As the first Intifada wore on, the commitment to nonviolence seemed to weaken and some elements of clear-cut violence entered the picture. The Intifada’s leadership called for lethal force on two occasions, such as in retaliation for each Palestinian killed by Israeli death squads in cases where the Israeli actions violated Israeli law. Although leadership calls did not always translate into action, at times serious incidents did occur, such as when a Palestinian grabbed control of a bus and drove it off the side of a mountain. Additionally, Palestinians threw Molotov cocktails, and injured or killed Palestinian collaborators to punish and deter further betrayal of their cause.¹⁵

While there were significant incidents of clear-cut violence, relative to the entire scale of the nonviolent activities, Abu-Nimer asserts that they were comparatively few and far between. Sari Nusseibeh noted in 1989, “The voice of violence on the Palestinian side is still peripheral.”¹⁶ However, even ‘peripheral’ or ‘minor’ intrusions seem to compromise the ‘purity’ of one’s nonviolence, and this needs to be taken into account in assessing the effectiveness of the first Intifada — that is, we cannot attribute any failings of that movement to failings in ‘nonviolence’ itself, since the movement was not able to implement that principle in its totality (which is difficult under the best of conditions).

To improve our understanding of the character of the first Intifada, we might note that the choice to utilize nonviolence as the dominant practice was in some ways born of necessity rather than faith or principle. As Dr. Mubarak Awad of the Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence noted in 1984, the Palestinians in the occupied territories were unarmed, “not trained militarily, [and did not have] the necessary lines of communication to receive military supplies in sufficient quantities to be able to carry on continuous military operations against the occupiers for any length of time.”¹⁷ The strategic nonviolence approach utilizes nonviolence as a practical method to achieve social change, yet often reserves the option to use violence in the future if the “nonviolence” hasn’t “succeeded.”

One key factor in a nonviolent movement’s success is positive media coverage and the resulting international support. Time and again, we’ve observed that if a nonviolent movement includes violence, the media will focus almost exclusively on the violence. Thus, from a strategic standpoint, disciplined movements tend to be more successful. The Philippines People Power movement that ousted Marcos and the Eastern European revolutions that brought down Communist regimes in the Czech Republic and Poland in the late 1980s are examples of relatively disciplined movements.

Although it was not as disciplined as other movements, the Intifada was quite successful in many ways. According to Abu-Nimer, the media phrase that “dominated the coverage of the uprising was ‘the violence of the Intifada.’” As is typical in such situations, the media rarely explained that the Israeli military perpetrated the overwhelming majority of the violence, and the media was far more apt to focus on Palestinian violence and stone throwing than Palestinian nonviolence.¹⁸ That said, given the rarity of outright violence, some of the media imagery was helpful to the Palestinian cause, painting a sort of “David versus Goliath” picture of the struggle. We wonder how much more the first Intifada might have achieved with a deeper commitment to nonviolence and the more positive media coverage such action would likely have generated.

As it was, the Palestinians established the legitimacy of their aspirations in the minds of people around the world, built internal commitment and solidarity, created social structures, inspired left-wing Israelis to work on behalf of a resolution to the conflict, and achieved recognition of their political leaders. Unfortunately, the ensuing political process that led to the Oslo Accords did not result in the end of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. This result did not reflect a weakness in the effectiveness of nonviolence, but in a failure of

nonviolent actors to follow through when it became clear that negotiations wouldn't succeed.¹⁹ This has, in fact, been a common failure in nonviolent insurrections post Gandhi.

Given that for many members of the Palestinian society, the first Intifada was an endeavor of strategic nonviolence, it was almost predictable that many in the community threw up their hands in frustration when the Oslo process failed to deliver them a state and some began a full-fledged armed struggle far more marred by the use of arms (the second Intifada, 2000-2005). Indeed, some members of Palestinian society, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, saw armed struggle as a natural outgrowth of the nonviolent civil disobedience practiced in the first Intifada.²⁰ Be that as it may, the results of that armed struggle and Israel's overwhelming response have been devastating to Palestinian society, especially in the occupied territories.

Formaldehyde or Opportunity?

In August 2005, the government of Israel, lead by Ariel Sharon, evacuated Jewish settlers, many of whom had lived in the Gaza Strip for decades. Some Palestinians believe the disengagement was a result of the armed struggle. However, Ariel Sharon presented the Gaza Disengagement Plan as a redeployment of military troops rather than as a first step towards a peace plan or the creation of a Palestinian independent state.

Disengagement architect Dov Weisglass said the point of the Gaza plan was to put the political process with the Palestinians in "formaldehyde" and indefinitely remove a Palestinian state from the Israeli agenda.²¹ Weisglass elaborated, "What I effectively agreed to with the Americans was that part of the settlements would not be dealt with at all, and the rest would not be dealt with until the Palestinians turned into Finns. This is the significance of what we did.... All with a Presidential blessing and ratification of both houses of Congress.... What more could have been given to the settlers?"²²

Additionally, Sharon's maneuver seems designed to insulate Israel from growing charges of Apartheid, given that the high birth rate in Gaza means that Arabs will soon outnumber Jews in the land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan. And to top it off, while the mainstream media congratulated Sharon, the government of Israel strengthened its matrix of control over the West Bank, built an illegal separation barrier, expanded settlements, and confiscated more Palestinian land.

It is not all bad news. While many Israeli and Palestinian activists acknowledge the reality on the ground is much worse than it was before the start of the second Intifada, some say that the Gaza withdrawal may nonetheless present a unique opportunity. A taboo was broken when the settlers left, and did so with much less ado than had been predicted. Prime Minister Sharon may have uncorked a genie here that future Prime Ministers cannot control. Furthermore, the intense rhetoric of the settlers was belied by a brief six-day conclusion to the disengagement process. This means we have reason to hope that extremists on *both* sides are not as committed to their extremism as they would have us believe they are.

Respected members of Palestinian civil society believe that a third revolt may be inevitable. Even after the withdrawal from Gaza, the government of Israel still controls the Palestinians' borders, economy, and lives. Additionally, Israel's wall combined with recent accelerated moves to confiscate the Jordan Valley will result in illegal annexation of as much as 46% of the West Bank, turning the area into a "Swiss cheese" map of disconnected, isolated ghettos within ghettos or "Bantustans."²³ Numerous West Bank roads are only accessible to Israeli colonizers, different laws are applied to Palestinians and Israelis, and Israeli colonizers enjoy full swimming pools and access to five times as much water as Palestinians who sometimes do not have enough to shower, fueling charges (correct, in our view) of Apartheid.²⁴ Even though there are many dedicated Israeli peace activists, the Israeli peace movement is not yet ready to launch a successful nonviolent campaign to end the occupation. Therefore, the only ambiguity about the near future is to what extent violence, nonviolence, or some combination will be utilized in the Palestinian resistance.

Nonviolent Resistance Today in Palestine

Despite the more prominent violent components of the second *Intifada*, different organizations and communities have chosen to practice strategic nonviolence to resist military occupation in recent years. For example, the residents of Budrus village successfully utilized strategic nonviolence methods to oppose the separation wall slated for construction on their lands. The wall not only threatened to confiscate most of the village's agricultural lands, but also cut the villagers' access to water resources, schools, universities, employment locations, and family. The residents of Budrus combined nonviolent political activism with a legal strategy that included daily and weekly demonstrations against the wall, and litigation against the Israeli

government. The demonstrations brought together a coalition of supporters, including Israeli groups such as Ta'ayush and the Anarchists Against the Wall, and international activists from the International Solidarity Movement. The political pressure from activists forced the Israeli Supreme Court to rule in favor of the Village of Budrus, and ordered the government to change the path of the wall to minimize the confiscation of Palestinian lands.²⁵ Another campaign was successful in the village of Deir Ballut, enabling the villagers to reclaim lost water sources, vineyards, and fields.²⁶

Recently, a similar coalition has converged on the village of Bil'in to oppose the land confiscation that is a result of the separation wall's current path. Bil'in's farmland is being turned into housing that will expand one of the largest illegal West Bank settlements, Modi'in Illit, from a population of 35,000 to at least 150,000 by 2020.²⁷ (Notably, Modi'in Illit was formally founded in 1996 *after* the signing of the Oslo agreement.²⁸)

Bil'in's demonstrations have taken place every Friday for the past two years and represent a complex mix of principled (Gandhian) nonviolence, strategic nonviolence *a la* Gene Sharpe, and at times stone throwing. The *shabab* at times throws stones while standing behind the peaceful demonstrators -- usually of the older generation, who tend to disapprove of the stoning. This debate takes place during rallies and everyday life. After one of the weekly demonstrations in July of 2005, for example, a long, meaningful and very-much-needed discussion took place between Israelis, Palestinians, and international activists about stone throwing in particular and nonviolence in general. Some of the activists argued — correctly, in our view — that stone throwing provokes the army to use tear gas, rubber-coated bullets, and live ammunition. Additionally, they stated that the violent conclusion of each demonstration is the only part that gets media coverage, and draws public attention away from any meaningful discussion about the issue of the wall. In conclusion, although the village council affirmed a desire to stop stone throwing, they simultaneously justified and understood the youths' need to release their anger through throwing stones.

The history of nonviolent movements suggests that the adults, who already model more deeply committed nonviolent action, could challenge the youths to do something useful, powerful, and consistent with the resistance — something that could divert their rage and defiance into more constructive, less ambivalent channels. For instance, the youths could be asked to join the adults at the front of a march and carry out their defiance with courage and

dignity — hopefully even offering a measure of respect to Israeli soldiers as they do so. Nonviolence begins with the internal conversion of a negative to a positive drive, and engaged mentorship could help youngsters to make this journey.

Since we visited Bil'in in 2005, we have learned that Palestinian leaders have made efforts to control the tendency. In a recent visit to UC Berkeley, popular resistance committee leader Mohammed Khatib showed us video footage of a demonstration in which no Palestinians threw stones, yet undercover Israeli *mistarvim* (*agents provocateurs*) posing as Palestinian protestors threw stones in an effort to discredit Bil'in's campaign (and provide the Israeli military a pretext to open fire).²⁹ According to Khatib, "We use nonviolence not because we don't have the right to resist military occupation [with violence], but because...we are trying to open [the Israelis'] minds... We are more powerful than them, we have arrived." Khatib believes nonviolence will reveal unmistakably "who is the victim and who is the victimizer," and says that Bil'in's campaign "must succeed" to provide a "complete model" for how to "shorten the time of the occupation."³⁰

For the Bil'in villagers, creativity, ingenuity, and even a wry sense of humor has been crucial in keeping the resistance strong, diverse, and effective during a two-year struggle. In addition to the standard weekly march to the route of the wall (a form of civil disobedience, because Israel declares it a "closed military zone"), the Bil'in villagers have chained themselves to their olive trees, conducted prayer sessions near the route of the wall, and even held a volleyball match that deterred soldiers from entering the village.³¹ They placed themselves inside empty water barrels in honor of Palestinian refugees who died of heat stroke while hiding inside water barrels, attempting to flee to other Arab countries. The Israeli army's use of teargas, beatings, rubber-coated steel bullets, and normal bullets have injured over 200 Palestinian protestors, including numerous children (and at least seven Palestinians have been killed in events near the wall in other locations).³² To illustrate the huge disparity in violence and force after an Israeli soldier was injured by a stone, Bil'in villagers in wheelchairs organized a "march of the disabled" and wheeled toward the route of the wall (and were shot at despite their obvious physical incapacity).³³ In September 2005, famous Dutch pianist and Holocaust survivor Jacob Allegro performed a concert at one of the demonstrations. Allegro said his mission was to oppose injustice and bring together people from all sides.³⁴

One of the movement's most creative and thus far successful initiatives was when villagers and Israelis built a Palestinian housing "outpost" (to parody the illegal outposts settlers frequently build on Palestinian lands) on Bil'in lands that lie on the other side of the wall's planned construction path. Khatib put it simply: "Just as they build on our land without permission, we will build on our land without permission."³⁵ According to Khatib, this simple yet concrete constructive action resulted in a freeze on settlement expansion in the immediate surrounding neighborhood.³⁶ On January 1st, 2006 (the final day of Hannukah), the Bil'in villagers and Israelis held a candle-lighting ceremony at the outpost. As they lit the candles, they proclaimed, "I light this candle against injustice and discrimination, in the spirit of the best spiritual leaders of Judaism throughout the ages!" "I light this candle against the settlers who take by force possession of the land that belongs to others, contrary to the Jewish values they profess to honor!" "I light this candle for the love of human beings, wherever they are!"³⁷

While it has yet to achieve its stated objective of rerouting the wall to save land, the Bil'in resistance movement has chalked up some important successes, including moments of favorable media coverage, active support from mainstream Israeli peace activist groups, and a partially favorable court ruling. While some of the media stories have indeed focused on the stone throwing with generic descriptions of "violence," others have described in detail the creative acts of nonviolent resistance.

News reports have revealed Israeli military abuses, including the aforementioned undercover Israeli *agents provocateurs*. Independent media has captured Israeli soldiers severely beating and abusing activists, and then provided videotapes to refute Israeli military lies in court, including false accusations of protestor violence.⁴¹ The Bil'in resistance has made its way into the pages of *Ha'aretz* in Israel and *The New York Times*, providing a venue to expose the realities of the separation wall and Israeli military abuses of Palestinian human rights to the people who most need to learn about them: Israelis, US Jews, and international civil society.

Oppression is an inherently unstable condition. In the face of determined nonviolent resistance, the oppressor often finds himself drawn into using ever-escalating levels of violence until inevitably something "snaps," the resistor gains in strength, and eventually the whole system falls apart. This paradox of repression played out on September 9th, 2005, when the Israeli military placed a blanket curfew on the entire village of Bil'in and attempted to block the weekly protest from occurring at all. According to Gush Shalom, the soldiers tried to arrest

activists and used sound grenades, tear gas, and rubber-coated steel bullets (which can and have killed protestors) to intimidate Palestinians, Israelis, and internationals. Yonathan Pollack of Anarchists Against the Wall, a central organizer of Israeli participation in the weekly Bil'in protests, had this to say: "The army tried to break the people of Bil'in and prevent by brutal force their right to protest. They especially wanted to prevent the arrival of Israeli supporters whose presence denies the army the freedom of rampage. The result was the total opposite. Today there came to Bil'in many more Israelis than on other Fridays. Not only did [the army] not prevent the march, but it got further [closer to the route of the wall] than before."⁴² The Israeli military must have realized it made a massive strategic blunder by overreacting, as the *New York Times* reported that new commanders who arrived within the next month "decided it was foolish to try to shut down Bil'in or even to confront villagers and protesters near the village - instead, it would try to isolate Israeli and foreign protesters from Palestinians and insist only that the barrier not be damaged."⁴³

In early January 2006, *Ha'aretz* published a story that explained the villagers' plight in clear terms. The newspaper reported that the Modi'in Illit settlement was expanding "on land belonging to the Palestinian village of Bil'in.... An eyewitness reported that the illicit construction is proceeding, despite recent instructions from the settlement's planning and construction committee to stop the work."⁴⁴ Days after this report was published, the mainstream, center-left Israeli organization Peace Now petitioned the Israeli Supreme Court to stop the settlement expansion.⁴⁵ *Ha'aretz* followed up with an editorial page condemnation of the *policy* of land confiscation in the context of occupation: "It appears that the High Court will again be called upon to save the country from itself and from the intentional and despicable policies of its leaders."⁴⁶

As we go to press in March 2007, it appears that Bil'in's legal challenge is running into serious roadblocks within Israel's bureaucracy. In Fall 2006 and January 2007 rulings the Israeli High Court ordered that the construction company that was building the illegal Israeli colony must "restore part of the land to its pre-colonial state." The court froze construction of the settlement and is hearing additional arguments from attorneys representing both Peace Now and the construction company, which is trying to overturn the stop-work order.⁴⁷ However, in February 2007 the Israeli Supreme Planning Council for the occupied territories retroactively legalized the 42 high-rise apartments.⁴⁸ While the legal struggle continues (and Bil'in leaders

acknowledge it's a low odds proposition at best), the campaign's inspiration and strength is grounded in the ongoing grassroots movement. Khatib is determined that ultimately Bil'in will win, and he hopes that the international community finds a sense of moral outrage and helps. He implores, "You do not have to be with us, just on the side of justice.... Because of your humanity, you will not refuse to take a stand to stop this."⁴⁹ Bil'in is planning to host a Conference on Nonviolent Popular Joint Struggle, April 18th – 20th, 2007.

One of the most significant outcomes of the village-based campaign against the wall is the community that is born in the fires of resistance. Khatib relates that one of his best friends now is an Israeli who "refused the occupation and the army. He came to participate [in the campaign against the wall], and because of that I believe in him." Khatib reports that it is not only villagers, but also *leaders* of Hamas and Islamic Jihad who are "walking hand in hand" with Israelis.⁵⁰ For example, *Ha'aretz* spotted Sheikh Hassan Yusuf, considered the leader of Hamas in the West Bank, walking with Laser Peles, an Israeli spokesperson for the Meretz party's gay/lesbian caucus.⁵¹ Perhaps this is the true beginning of nonviolent coexistence in the holy land.

The chain reaction we've described, in which Palestinian nonviolent resistance leads to Israeli media reports, in turn galvanizing increased Israeli citizen support and action, is the momentum needed to unravel the occupation. A key organizer of Peace Now told us that the first Intifada mobilized tens of thousands of Israelis due to its primarily nonviolent nature, but the second Intifada sent everyone home because it left no "psychological room" for average Israelis to see the Palestinians' humanity. Changing hearts and minds can happen through media coverage of nonviolent resistance, and also on a one-to-one basis, as we'll see below.

Principled Nonviolence and the Palestinian Resistance

As powerful as media coverage can be in influencing Israeli and international opinion in favor of the Bil'in struggle, perhaps we should not overlook the direct, individual moments of "conversion" that occur when a resistor's courage reaches an oppressor's heart. This is arguably the core energy of principled nonviolence. A famous historical example of such a conversion occurred during the Philippines People Power movement, when an air force pilot who had been ordered to bomb a crowd of unarmed Filipinos turned away, finding himself unable to carry out the orders. Almost every major nonviolent movement contains numerous examples of such

conversions. We have heard reports of at least two off-duty Israeli soldiers or military employees who have come over to the village to join the people's struggle, and we suspect that as the Bil'in demonstrators and those they inspire grow in their dedication to nonviolence, their creative experiments will yield more and more goodwill and sympathy from the soldiers they face.

As Palestinians seek ways to reach and convert the hearts of the Israelis, they enter the realm of principled nonviolence, which, we are beginning to learn, has a distinguished and successful history beyond the relatively well-known accomplishments of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Aung San Suu Kyi of the Burmese resistance, and Badshah Khan, the "Nonviolent Soldier of Islam" who organized a "nonviolent army" of 100,000 Muslim Pathans in now-Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province during India's freedom struggle.⁵² The nonviolent actor draws much of her/his power from the ability to resist the act, not the person in opposition. Stories abound of Palestinians, both leaders and common folk, who embrace this deeper level of nonviolence. For instance, Dr. Mohammed Abu-Nimer relates the tragic yet beautiful story of a Palestinian woman who saved an Israeli soldier from being stoned to death by an angry group of Palestinian youths. Only later, after offering the soldier coffee and providing sanctuary in her home, did the woman find out that moments before she saved the soldier, he had shot her son to death. In further research, Abu-Nimer discovered that this deep sense of heart unity that the mother shared with the soldier was far from isolated. A Palestinian named Ahmad told Abu-Nimer, "Religion and custom enable us to preserve our humanity.... This is why nonviolence is important to us. We will never become like the Israelis and hate our enemy; we will offer him hospitality. The soldier could come back again, and the woman would offer him coffee again."⁵³ It is in the homes, mosques, and churches that Palestinians embrace nonviolence through that acts of kindness and deep faith in God and humanity.

Obviously, not all Palestinians share Ahmad's views about respecting the humanity of Jews. The documentary "Arna's Children" tells the more typical story of Yussef, a boy whose Jenin, West Bank home was demolished during the first Intifada. Years later, Yussef suffers the experience of a Palestinian schoolgirl dying in his arms following an Israeli military attack. He loses his will to live, becomes consumed with hatred, and launches a suicide attack in Israel.⁵⁴ It can be excruciatingly hard for Palestinians to find a path to nonviolence — yet the growing history of nonviolence does show that it is sometimes in these extreme cases that extreme courage and humanity arise.

Faced with the same kind of personal tragedy as Yussef, Khatib of Bil'in chose a different path. He reported that one of his friends "passed through a *machsom* (movement barrier) without bowing his head, and they shot him in his leg. For two hours, he was bleeding, they refused to give him treatment, and he died in front of our eyes." And still, Khatib chose nonviolence. He said, "We are looking for a way to make change, to block the cycle of violence. Nonviolent resistance is stronger and more pure."

Khatib played a film clip about Bil'in's struggle, in which one of the villagers highlights a similar kind of empathy for the adversary. He read aloud a letter that was distributed to all of the Israeli soldiers the day of a demonstration: "Soldier, please wait before you cock your rifle. Had you come as a guest we'd show you the trees our forefathers planted here. But you have been sent to uproot our trees and that's why we're demonstrating here, unarmed, with our pain and the knowledge that no one will be safe here unless the Israeli people respect our rights, unless we obtain our freedom."⁵⁵

According to Gandhi it is those who are most capable of extreme violence who are most capable of extreme *nonviolence*. A recent film about suicide bombing, "Paradise Now," hints at this dynamic when the protagonists, searching for a path other than violence or submission, rhetorically ask in anguish, "Is there no other way?"⁵⁶ Not coincidentally, this was the first title of Nagler's book (now entitled *The Search for a Nonviolent Future*.) Nonviolence is the "third way out of no way" that such warriors could use to channel their courage and capacity for self-sacrifice in a dignified and potentially healing manner. It's not a stretch to imagine that if the Muslim Pathans, saddled with one of the world's worst revenge cultures, were able to embrace thoroughgoing nonviolence in their resistance to the British occupation (and they did!), such a model could be adapted and utilized by appropriate Palestinian Muslim leaders.⁵⁷

In his research, Abu-Nimer found that Palestinians frequently disclaimed hatred of the Israelis. Some of the comments he heard included, "We refuse to hate them; it robs us of our humanity; we will not become like them," and "at the funeral of my nephew [killed by soldiers], there was one soldier weeping; that is why we do not hate them." Many expressed respect for the Israelis as "worthy opponents" and not "dehumanized others."⁵⁸ It is these attitudes of respect and rehumanization of the adversary that provide a path to convert feelings of anger and bitterness into a positive desire to reconcile. Abu-Nimer notes, "If the oppressor recognizes these attitudes in the oppressed, the sense of threat is reduced and the willingness to resolve the

conflict is increased.”⁵⁹ While it may be the case that Israeli soldiers are “dominant” given their superior firepower and authority, many of them are frightened to the core during live confrontations with the Palestinians, and it is the positive attitude Abu-Nimer identifies that provides the soldiers a dignified climb-down to engage with the Palestinians as fellow human beings.

According to Gandhi, when an oppressor cannot be reached by logic alone, one must appeal to the oppressor’s humanity by acceptance of self-suffering in order to reveal the true nature of the oppression in a clear, unmistakable way to the oppressor and to the world. Abu-Nimer notes that the above positive attitudes of the Palestinians during the first Intifada contributed to a willingness to “bear more suffering than the opponent without retaliating in kind.” This willingness seems apparent to us among many of Bil’in activists, who maintain their dignity without retaliating when the Israeli soldiers use excessive force to arrest them.

When we asked a well-known Israeli politician who supports a negotiated settlement to the conflict, “What is it going to take for real change to occur?” he responded, “A whole bunch of people are going to have to be slaughtered.” Slaughter by itself, of course, will accomplish no such thing (think of the massacre of Palestinian refugees by Lebanese Christian militiamen in 1982 — an act for which Ariel Sharon was judged “personally responsible” yet he still eventually became Prime Minister).⁶⁰ But there is all the difference in the world between the passive victimization many Palestinians have already endured and the voluntary *acceptance* of suffering, if necessary unto death, as part of a moral “dialogue” with those who are otherwise unprepared to recognize one’s humanity — as Dr. King put it, “unearned suffering is redemptive.”⁶¹

It may well be that what Mirsky calls a “nonviolent moment” will be required to create a sufficient change in the consciousness of Israelis, Palestinians, and the world. A nonviolent moment is the climax of a nonviolent struggle where the people meet the oppressors in a highly visible, out-in-the-open confrontation, resulting in a clear-cut demonstration of the nature of the oppression and the willingness of the oppressed people to use the power of their hearts to attempt to win over the oppressors and their sympathizers, even up to giving their own lives.⁶² Historical examples of nonviolent moments include the famous Dharasana salt raid in 1930 when hundreds of Indian *Satyagrahis* were severely beaten (and several killed) by British-controlled native police, and the 1965 Selma demonstration when civil rights marchers endured fire hoses, police

dogs, and police brutality in the US civil rights movement. Both cases are considered to be key events that led to success of their respective movements: the British leaving India, and the US government granting the 1965 voting rights act.

A nonviolent moment, like any nonviolent action, might not seem initially to “succeed,” yet works on a deeper level to spread ripples through humanity’s consciousness that inevitably lead to healing and reconciliation. The Dharasana salt raid did not “succeed” in persuading the British to repeal the unjust salt laws that the raid initially targeted. Yet, by exposing the brutality of the British colonial system, it began a shift in British and international awareness that ultimately worked to pave the way for Indian independence.

For a nonviolent moment to be successful in Israel/Palestine, it may require the participation of Israelis and parts of the international community.⁶³ According to Johan Galtung’s “Great Chain of Nonviolence,” the psychologically closer in space one is to the oppressor, the more possible it is to reach their heart. Israeli and Diaspora Jews may be able to play the same role in reaching the hearts of Israelis that white northerners played in reaching the hearts of white southerners in the civil rights movement.⁶⁴ This is why the presence of the Israeli “Anarchists Against the Wall” is so helpful at Bil’in: as Yonathan Pollack observed, it helps reduce the military’s willingness to use excessive violence. (Although as Khatib wryly notes, once the shooting starts, the bullets do not discriminate between Israelis and Palestinians.)⁶⁵

Nonviolent moments cannot be created out of thin air but require building groundwork ahead of time. Organization, training, commitment, and working for a series of smaller goals have traditionally been necessary. Seen in this context, the grassroots resistance in Budrus and Bil’in could become a small but essential component of a large, but not yet fully articulated nonviolent movement that is starting to take shape in Israel/Palestine. We will now examine some representative organizations that would be other components of such a movement.

Building the Movement

Numerous Palestinian and Israeli civil society organizations work both to oppose the occupation and strengthen the grassroots for a potential mass movement. Holy Land Trust, based in Bethlehem, Palestine, conducts nonviolence training for villages in the West Bank as well as for Palestinian and international college students. Sabeel, a Palestinian ecumenical liberation theology foundation, provides principled nonviolence training for women. The Israeli Committee

Against Home Demolitions (ICAHD) sends activists to impede the Israeli military's demolitions of Palestinian homes, and organizes work parties to rebuild them. By bringing together Israelis, Palestinians, and internationals, ICAHD facilitates a tangible, hands-on, meaningful act of nonviolent coexistence in the form of shared projects.⁶⁶ A variety of organizations support the growing Israeli *refusnik* (conscientious objector) movement, including the *Shministim* (high school seniors), *Israeli Youth Refusal Movement*, *Courage to Refuse*, *Refusers Parents' Forum*, and *Refusers Solidarity Network*. In 2003, a key moment in this movement arrived when an elite group of pilots shocked the nation with their pledge "to refuse to take part in Air Force attacks on civilian population centers." While war refusal in general, especially selective refusal, is not in itself representative of a principled nonviolent position, it is nonetheless significant and could be the first step on a path of positive action. As former pilot Yonatan Shapira stated, "Now we need to take the next step and join the Palestinian, Israeli, and international nonviolent campaign to end the occupation." In April of 2006, Shapira and his compatriots did just that when they launched Combatants for Peace, a group of former Israeli and Palestinian combatants who have renounced violence and are working together for an end to the occupation, an end to violence, and a two-state solution to the conflict. Their primary focus is touring the world and speaking out about their life experiences and the hard reality of the conflict. While Shapira and fellow Palestinian Souliman al-Khatib call their group an "alternative" to the military forces, they have a long way to go to build the organization into an entity that provides a nonviolent form of security to the region's citizens – but they have made a significant start.⁶⁷

The Light and the Tunnel

Many among the peace activist community wonder, "Where is this going?" What is the optimistic future vision? The debate usually falls between the internationally well-known two-state solution and a more radical one-state solution, where the land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan would become a single, secular state with equal rights for all its citizens. It's important to realize that there are more than just "two options" for the future. For example, Dr. Johan Galtung of Transcend, an international conflict transformation organization, contemplates the potential of a "six-state solution" where Israel and its immediate neighbors – Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Syria – would form a regional Middle East Community at least somewhat analogous to the European Union.⁶⁸ If anything, there is an embarrassment of riches

when it comes to policy alternatives, and positive visions are necessary to keep activists motivated in the face of bulldozers.⁶⁹

While nonviolent coexistence may be far off, there are a few beacons that illuminate what such a future could look like in a tangible form. Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam (“oasis of peace”) is a village where Arabs and Jews live together within the borders of pre-1967 Israel and run a bilingual village school and a school for peace. The village seeks to “challenge the existing structure of relations between Arabs and Jews and to seek more egalitarian models that can break down the inbuilt asymmetry in Israeli society as it is now.”⁷⁰ The community is run on a democratic basis and often plays host to visiting peace organizations and summer camps for teenagers.

What could possibly change the conflict to the point where villages like Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam become the rule, not the exception? What could lead to a scene like the one where the former Viceroy Mountbatten of Britain and Prime Minister Nehru stood together as friends on the day of India’s independence?

John Marks of Search for Common Ground told us “there is a light, but no tunnel.”⁷¹ We interpret this statement to mean that while possible resolutions to the conflict are seeping into the public discourse, what’s missing for Israelis and Palestinians who want positive peace is an articulated way to get there. Based on the way nonviolence works, we can expect that the methods used to bring about the future will determine the shape of the future. What will need to be done to foster the kind of structural and cultural changes that would lead to nonviolent coexistence, or at the least, a negotiated settlement to the conflict?

All parties have a role to play. The Palestinian people are currently building a nonviolent movement. The Israeli peace movement is supporting the Palestinians, and can begin a civil disobedience and non-cooperation campaign in order to persuade the Israeli government to end the occupation and withdraw military troops to the 1967 borders. International civil society can support both of these struggles through third party nonviolent intervention. Members of the international community can pressure their own governments (especially the US) to both change policies that support the occupation, and to support a return to the negotiating table, with support for the Palestinians due to the power imbalance. Through acting in one’s sphere of influence, everyone can effect and promote peace and coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East. It won’t be easy. Personal sacrifices will be required to reach hardened hearts.

At the darkest moments, some may despair, believing that it is impossible to reach the hearts of the Israelis. Yet, history has shown that even in the case of an extremely ruthless oppressor, nonviolence has the power to dramatically change the equation.⁷² In the case of Iran in 1978-1979, the highly autocratic Shah's regime was overthrown by a mostly nonviolent revolution in which the people refused to accept his authority. "No degree of brutality, assassination and torture carried out by the Savak, or secret police, could blunt the people's revolutionary fervour.... It was as if the Shah and his underlings were continually striking their swords upon a body of water. Their arms became exhausted and their strength was rendered powerless."⁷³ In an example of nonviolent resistance against history's most infamous "ruthless opponent," in February of 1943, German women whose Jewish husbands had been abducted by the Nazis nonviolently protested at the Rosenstrasse detention center for their spouses' release.⁷⁴ Hundreds if not thousands of Jewish lives were saved as a result of the determination of these German women. One can only wonder how an organized nonviolent movement with serious training and expertise, such as Hildegard and Jean Goss-Mayer's contributions to the Philippines People Power Movement, might have changed the course of history in the 1930s and 40s.

Gandhi believed that all human beings can be reached by nonviolence, and we believe it is as much the world's responsibility to help Israelis regain their dignity and their respect for the Palestinians as it was in the case of white South Africans and black south Africans. We hope that the same spirit of comradeship that Mandella and DeKlerk exhibited will someday sweep over the holy land.

Even if a nonviolent movement begins to effect a shift in consciousness, what can heal the decades of enmity and bitterness? We can look at other effective peacebuilding initiatives for direction. A coalition of 11 civil society organizations is working to heal the wounds in Burundi following 30 years of ethnic strife and civil war. The projects include peace monitoring, a human rights observatory, good governance initiatives, reinforcement of democratic participation of Burundian women in post-conflict reconstruction, and community-based reconciliation and development.⁷⁵ The Israel/Palestine landscape is already saturated with organizations that can help with such a process.

Conclusion

Based on historical precedents, we believe that a thoroughly nonviolent Intifada combined with Israeli and international support could not only end the occupation but transform the current violent discourse into one of social, economic, and political justice leading, in course of time, to the stable peace desired by all parties. As we have seen above, all the ingredients are present, from the will for such a peace that is at least dormant in the hearts and minds of many on both sides of the conflict through civil society organizations working on both constructive and obstructive modalities of nonviolence on up to the availability of viable policy frameworks at the highest structural level of organization. Two things are needed, in our view, if these ingredients are to become a dominant reality. One is that many of them will have to be strengthened, especially the grass-roots projects aiming at forgiveness and reconciliation.⁷⁶ The second is that all these efforts must be recognized as a conscious common purpose by all the parties, Israeli, Palestinian and international. For this conflict affects not only Israel/Palestine but the world, and it cannot be solved only within the confines of the Holy Land. In the long run, as Nagler has written elsewhere, “Nonviolence is not meant to be a tidy compartment, the habit of an occasional activist, a musing on the margins of ‘the real world.’ Nonviolence is and must become a science, a way of life, a worldview, finally, a culture.”⁷⁷

Where should all this begin? At all points on the scale. But it seems clear that in nonviolence even more than other forms of social change the initiative is not going to come from the political leadership of any state involved (although Abu Mazen, uniquely, is at least verbally supportive, and we hope he will go on to promote engagement and organization). As common wisdom has it, “When the people lead, the leaders will follow.” That is especially true when the Israeli leadership has shown its incompetence – and the futility of military force – in Lebanon and even M. Abbas (Abu Mazen) finds himself seriously impeded by the electoral victory of Hamas.

Recommended Reading:

Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam by Mohammed Abu-Nimer (Gainesville, FL: 2003.)

When the Rain Returns: Toward Justice and Reconciliation in Palestine and Israel, by American Friends Service Committee (USA: 2004)

Searching for Peace: The Road to Transcend by Johan Galtung (Sterling, VA: 2002)

Obstacles to Peace: a Re-Framing of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict by Jeff Halper (Jerusalem: 2005)

The Search for a Nonviolent Future by Michael Nagler (Maui: 2004)

Refusenik! Israel's Soldiers of Conscience by Peretz Kidron (New York: 2004)

Shanti-Sena in India by Narayan Desai (V.N. Bhargava: 1962)

“The political morality of pacifism and nonviolence,” by Yehudah Mirsky, in J. Patout Burns, Ed. War and its Discontents: Pacifism and Quietism in the Abrahamic Traditions (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Press, 1996)

Films about Bil'in:

Bil'in My Love: <http://claudiusfilms.com/bilin.html>

Closed Military Zone: www.closedmilitaryzone.org

Online Resources:

Bil'in Village: www.bilin-village.org

Holy Land Trust: www.holylandtrust.org

Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions: www.icahd.org

Sabeel: www.sabeel.org

Ta' Ayush: www.taayush.org

Anarchists Against the Wall: www.af-north.org/wall.htm

Transcend: www.transcend.org

B'Tselem: www.btselem.org

Neve Shalom/Wahat Al'Salam: www.nswas.com

Combatants for Peace: www.combatantsforpeace.org

Webcast videos: <http://webcast.berkeley.edu/events/>, search for “Combatants for Peace” and “Grassroots Nonviolent Resistance in Palestine”

Courage to Refuse: www.seruv.org.il/defaulteng.asp

Refusers Solidarity Network: www.refusersolidarity.net

Shministim: www.shministim.org/indexenglish.html

Christian Peacemaker Teams: www.cpt.org

Search for Common Ground: www.sfcg.org

The Shape of the Future Documentary: www.theshapeofthefuture.tv

Peace Now: www.peacenow.org.il

Metta Center for Nonviolence Education: www.mettacenter.org

PeacePower magazine: www.calpeacepower.org

An abridged version of this paper was published at:

http://calpeacepower.org/0201/no_confiscation_israel_palestine.htm

Michael Nagler is Professor emeritus of Classics and Comparative Literature at UC, Berkeley, where he has taught since 1966, and where he founded the Peace and Conflict Studies Program in which he still teaches the upper-division nonviolence course as well as meditation and other courses. Prof. Nagler has spoken and written widely for campus, religious, public and special interest groups on the subject of peace and nonviolence for many years, especially since 9/11. In addition to his many articles on peace and spirituality, he is the author of *America Without Violence* (Island Press, 1982), *The Upanishads* (with Sri Eknath Easwaran, Nilgiri Press, 1987) and most recently *The Search for a Nonviolent Future* (Inner Ocean Publishing) which won the 2002 American Book Award and is being used in many courses as well as reading groups around the country (Italian translation appeared in 2005; pending in Korean and Arabic).

Tal Palter-Palman graduated in May 2005 from the University of California, Berkeley, with a B.A. in History and Peace and Conflict Studies. Tal is currently working on her Masters in the History Department of San Francisco State University, focusing on Nonviolent Social Movements. Additionally, Tal is the author of "The Israeli Refusnik Movement: From Conscientious Objection to a Nonviolent Peace Force," which was published in *PeacePower: Berkeley's Journal of Principled Nonviolence and Conflict Transformation*.

Tal has participated in a seminar in Neve Shalom/Wahat Al'Salam, Israel, and completed a nonviolence training summer camp provided by Holy Land Trust in Bethlehem, Palestine. In addition, Tal participated in different activities of Gush Shalom, Ta' Ayush and Anarchists against the Wall.

Matthew A. Taylor, a student at UC Berkeley's Peace and Conflict Studies program, also co-authored with Prof. Nagler "The Joint Protectorate of Jammu & Kashmir: Using Principled Nonviolence to Transform the Conflict" (*Greater Kashmir* newspaper, December 6-13, 2004). He is co-editor of *PeacePower* magazine (www.calpeacepower.org), a certified mediator, and a co-founder of UC Berkeley's Conflict Resolution and Transformation Center (<http://conflict.berkeley.edu>). He is currently writing a book about Berkeley's "Save the Oaks" campaign. You can reach him via his web site: www.matthewtaylor.net

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² Mahatma Gandhi. 'The Jews,' *The Harijan*, November 26, 1938.

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- ⁸ American Friends Service Committee. Speak Truth to Power: A Quaker Search for an Alternative to Violence, Chapter IV (available at www.quaker.org).
- ⁹ PBS Frontline World, "Algeria and France: a Mixed History."
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- ⁶³ See Dajani, page 68 for a discussion of the international community’s insufficient role following the first Intifada.
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- ⁶⁵ Khatib, Feb 28, 2007.
- ⁶⁶ Halper, p. ix.
- ⁶⁷ Taylor, Matthew. “Combatants for Peace: A New Path to Peace and Justice in Israel/Palestine,” *PeacePower*, Volume 3, Issue 1, Spring 2007.
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- ⁶⁹ For other possible approaches, see the “Arab Peace Initiative” (http://www.jordanembassyus.org/arab_initiative.htm), “Israel in a Middle East Union: A ‘Two-stage’ approach to the Conflict” by Jeff Halper (*Tikkun* magazine, Jan/Feb 2005, page 15), and the Geneva Initiative (www.geneva-accord.org). These are only a few of many proposals.
- ⁷⁰ http://www.sfpeace.org/index.php?_lang=en&page=about
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