

Alternatives to Violence in Muslim History: Parallels to American Cases and Prospects for Future Applications

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Paper for the AMSS conference in Istanbul on Citizenship, Security and Democracy
Friday 1st September - Sunday 3rd September 2006

Abstract

We examine four examples of alternatives to violence in Muslim history: the unauthorized pilgrimage to Makkah that led to the treaty of Hudaibiyya, Abdul Ghaffar Khan's role in the Indian resistance against the British occupation, the Iranian Revolution, and the first Palestinian Intifadah.

We consider the parallels between the Muslim examples to the best-known Western cases: Thoreau's resistance to the taxes supporting slavery and the Mexican War, the American civil rights movement, and the Vietnam War protests. Issues of interest are the role that religion, the formation of alliances, provocation, publicity, and the ancillary violence.

We conclude by considering policy applications in the near future on issues such as responses to insults to Islam in the European press and final status negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinian Authority.

Introduction

Although Islam is not a religion of pacifism, by which I mean that warfare is not entirely prohibited, nonetheless it is a peaceful religion, in the sense that its objective is to achieve a state of peace and security for both the Muslims and for those non-Muslims under its protection. Further, warfare is governed by strict rules of what today would be considered "just war theory." Our objective in this paper is to demonstrate that the tactics and strategies of nonviolence are part of the Muslim tradition. In particular we wish to look at the examples of nonviolent activism in the Muslim tradition, and note along the way how they relate to the basic teachings and how they compare to nonviolent resistance in America.

Before beginning it is important to emphasize that nonviolence is an active tactic and strategy of resistance and is not a manifestation of pacifism. Practitioners of nonviolence may or may not be pacifists, and Muslims are not pacifists. Nonviolence may be resorted to because one feels that military force is immoral or because one feels it is less effective than nonviolence in a particular situation. Finally, it must be remembered that nonviolence is often accompanied by violence either because other factions in a coalition

reject nonviolence or because its practitioners engage in violent as well as nonviolent tactics. The most famous cases of nonviolent resistance were accompanied violence: violent resistance to the British in India coincided with Gandhi's nonviolent movement; the American civil rights movement was accompanied by violent urban riots; alongside the nonviolent protesters against American involvement in Vietnam was the "Weatherman" terrorist organization.

The modes of nonviolent action are many. They include flight, boycotts, strikes, and disobedience to civil authority.

The practice of flight goes back at least to the time of Moses, and the story of Moses is as much part of Muslim tradition as it is of the Jewish tradition. But flight is so central to Muslim history that the Muslim calendar is dated from the flight of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) from Mecca to Medina, the hijrah.

Boycotts are an ancient practice in the Arab tradition, even among the non-Muslims. Indeed, the polytheistic Quraish boycotted the Muslim community in Mecca for years although that boycott was ultimately unsuccessful.

Strikes are a modern phenomenon as the modern modes of production have enormously magnified their effectiveness while the asymmetry of power between the owners and management of big business on the one hand and the numerous employees on the other have given unique importance to the tactic in the area of labor relations.

Noncooperation is an ancient tactic, not always driven by socially conscious motives. It comes easily to the Arab people as an individual act given the decentralized, even individualistic, nature of desert life. Throughout the history of Islam there have been many examples of individual civil disobedience. Americans know the concept through the example and teachings of Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau most clearly articulated the moral imperative for noncooperation in his essay on civil disobedience.¹ The New England transcendentalist's arguments often echo Islamic fundamentals. Thoreau wants right and wrong to be determined not by the majority, but by conscience.

*"By the Soul and the proportion and order Given to it; And its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right; Truly he succeeds that purifies it And he fails that corrupts it!"*²

An inordinate respect for the laws of man he says leads to warfare and slavery:

I do not hesitate to say, that those who call themselves Abolitionists should at once effectually withdraw their support, both in person and property, from the government of Massachusetts, and not wait till they

¹ Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," (1849) <http://thoreau.eserver.org/civil.html> (accessed 8/29/06).

² Qur'an 7:10. Quoted from Yusuf Ali translation.

constitute a majority of one, before they suffer the right to prevail through them. I think that it is enough if they have God on their side, without waiting for that other one. Moreover, any man more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one already.³

The idea that the individual is directly responsible to the Almighty is inherent in the *Shahâda*, or declaration of the faith, "There is no god but God." The demands of leaders to do evil are of no weight in the Qur'an and the hadith.

And they would say: "Our Lord! we obeyed our chiefs and our great ones and they misled us as to the (right) path. Our Lord! give them Double Penalty and curse them with a very great Curse!"⁴ "...Saith the last about the first: 'Our Lord! it is these that misled us: so give them a double penalty in the fire.' He will say: 'doubled for all': but this Ye do not understand."⁵

Individual disobedience to commands to do evil is a natural consequence of the Muslim teaching of direct responsibility to God. Abu Bakr, in his inaugural address, told the assembled people that they had no duty to obey him if he gave a wrongful order, but rather had a duty to correct him. The founders of the Sunni schools who were imprisoned and/or tortured for their refusal to cooperate with the authorities, and the Shi'a, historically denied the legitimacy of wrongful rule.

Organized civil disobedience is a tactic normally associated with the modern era, and most of its modern practitioners trace their influence back to Mahatma Gandhi. Yet the first act of organized mass civil disobedience in history of which I am aware was conceived and directed by the prophet Muhammad. He had a vision in which he led the people on the lesser pilgrimage to Mecca at a time when the city was still in the hands of his enemies. He told the people to put on the pilgrim garb and to come with him unarmed into the city in violation of the expressed will and intention of the authorities in power. The Muslims did not allow their disciplined nonviolence to be broken by the provocations of the Quraish. This demonstration of the power of active nonviolent resistance resulted in the Treaty of Hudaibiyya, referred to in the Qur'an as a "Manifest Victory."⁶

"It is He who sent down Tranquility into the hearts of the Believers that they may add Faith to their Faith; for to God belong the Forces of the heavens and the earth; and Allah is full of Knowledge and Wisdom."⁷

³ Thoreau, loc. cit.

⁴ Qur'an 33:68-69.

⁵ Qur'an 7:38.

⁶ Qur'an 48:1.

⁷ Qur'an 48:4.

Indian Independence

The modern world knows this style of mass resistance through the work of Mohandas Gandhi. While Gandhi's familiarity with Islam and his admiration for Muhammad are no secret,⁸ a direct influence of Muslim tradition on his techniques has yet to be demonstrated. Nonetheless, it is known that the Muslim Indian activist Abdul Ghaffar Khan began his own work at about the same time that Gandhi returned to India (1914). He had been arrested by the British in 1919 for his role in a political rally and in 1929 he founded the Khudai Khidmatgar (Servants of God) whose members "pledged to refrain from violence and [to] devote two hours a day to social work."⁹ On April 13 of the following year they performed the single most remarkable example of active nonviolent resistance to the British occupation.

In March of 1930 the mass disobedience campaign had begun with Gandhi's famous March to the sea. In April, when Khan's group followed up with an educational campaign in nonviolent resistance, the British arrested Khan and the other leaders. On April 23 a nonviolent protest of the arrests was about to disperse when the British cracked down on Khan's group with "a barbarity that they did not often inflict on other adherents of nonviolence in India."¹⁰ Gene Sharp, the prominent student of nonviolent resistance, describes the scene:

When those in front fell down wounded by the shots, those behind came forward with their breasts bared and exposed themselves to the fire, so much so that some people got as many as twenty-one bullet wounds in their bodies, and all the people stood their ground without getting into a panic. . . . The Anglo-Indian paper of Lahore, which represents the official view, itself wrote to the effect that the people came forward one after another to face the firing and when they fell wounded they were dragged back and others came forward to be shot at. This state of things continued from 11 till 5 o'clock in the evening. When the number of corpses became too many, the ambulance cars of the government took them away.

The carnage stopped only because a regiment of Indian soldiers finally refused to continue firing on the unarmed protesters, an impertinence for which they were severely punished.¹¹

⁸ See, e.g., Shall Sinha, "Books Which Influenced Gandhi's Life and Thought," (1/2/05) ssinha.com/bksmgrd.htm (accessed 8/27/06).

⁹ Brad Bennett, "Arab-Muslim Cases of Nonviolent struggle," et al., eds., *Arab Nonviolent Political Struggle in the Middle East*, Ralph E. Crow, Philip Grant, and Saad E. Ibrahim, eds. (Boulder: L. Rienner Publishers, 1990), p. 43.

¹⁰ Amitabh Pal, "A Pacifist Uncovered," *The Progressive* (Feb. 2002) <http://progressive.org/?q=node/1654> (accessed 8/27/06).

¹¹ Quoted in Pal, loc.cit.

Nonviolence scholar Joan V. Bondurant writes that the religious basis of the Khudai Khidmatgar was more obvious than that of the All-India Congress because the former “pledged themselves to nonviolence not only as a policy, but as a creed, a way of life.”¹² Khan insisted that his techniques were taken directly from Islam and the sunnah of the Prophet and claimed he had “left speechless” a Pashtun who had disputed his claim of a nonviolent core in Islam.

The Iranian Revolution

On June 5, 1963 Iranian authorities repressed nonviolent demonstrations opposing an American military loan and the Shah’s reform program by arresting the Ayatullah Khomeini and throwing some students to their death from a roof of Madrasa Faydiyya.¹³ Thousands died in the ensuing mass demonstrations.¹⁴ On the twelfth anniversary of the event on the Iranian calendar, students gathered for prayers at the Madrasa Faydiyya “to recite 20,000 blessings (*salawat*) upon the defenders of Islam (Khomeyni) and *la`nat* (curses) upon the enemies of Islam (the shah), keeping count on their prayer beads.”¹⁵ Like the American civil rights demonstrators, they were met with tear gas and water canon.¹⁶

Employing the symbolism of Shi`a theology, the Iranian Revolution transformed the “Kabala paradigm, shifting from a passive witnessing of weeping for Husayn and waiting for the twelfth Imam to an active witnessing of fighting and working for the overthrow of tyranny.... Shi`ite preaching had been honed into a highly effective technique for maintaining a high level of consciousness about the injustice of the Pahlavi regime and for coordinating demonstrations.¹⁷ The revolution of 1977-79 was a successful mainly nonviolent resistance ‘fought entirely in the Islamic idiom.’”¹⁸ (There were some violent acts by the resistance, but the most of the violence was perpetrated by the regime against the demonstrators.)

¹² Quoted in Pal, loc.cit. This was also Gandhi’s view, see, e.g., Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom: An Autobiographical Narrative*, with Introduction and Explanatory Notes by Louis Fischer (New York: Longmans, Green, 1960).

¹³ Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1980) p. 123-4.

¹⁴ Ibid. 124.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 183.

¹⁸ Ibid., 185.

The wave of resistance began with illegal poetry readings at Arymeh University.¹⁹ Later, when women who chose to wear the chador attempting to register for class at the University of Tehran were turned away, other women who normally wore Western dress engaged in active disobedience by showing up in chadors.²⁰ In July 1977 the newly formed “Group for Free Books and Free Thought” had published in journals in exile “detailed cases of writers who had been tortured and whose works had been censored.”²¹ By autumn they openly condemned the shah’s liberalization program as a sham.²²

In August 1977 essentially spontaneous demonstrations by students and rural immigrants erupted in response to rising prices, food shortages, and the government’s destruction of unauthorized housing construction.²³ In November 1977, after protestors embarrassingly outnumbered paid supporters of the shah during his visit to the White House, SAVAAK began a severe crackdown on the dissenters in Iran, denouncing them, as “supporters of international terrorism.”²⁴ Instead of being intimidated, the religious leadership, in the person of Ayatullah Shariatmadari, “declared the shah’s government non-Islamic, called for a moratorium on communal prayers, and threatened a funeral march to carry the corpses” to the shah’s palace.²⁵ At this point virtually every sector of Iranian society had aligned itself against the shah.

Organized demonstrations began to proliferate in December.²⁶ In January 1978 a “peaceful demonstration organized by religious students came under attack by the police, killing between forty and two hundred people; martial law was declared in the city.”²⁷ An organizational infrastructure began to emerge centered on the “bazaar guilds, *heyats* (religious sessions), mosques and coffee houses.” Mass demonstrations were scheduled on the Shi’a traditional 40-day mourning patterns and employing the rituals of religious processions.²⁸

Both the moderate and radical leaders of the revolution called for peaceful demonstrations, but they did not always remain nonviolent. An initially peaceful

¹⁹ Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton, 1982), p. 506.

²⁰ Fischer, 186.

²¹ Ervand Abrahamian, 503.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Hossein Bashiriyeh, *The State and Revolution in Iran* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1984), p. 112.

²⁴ Fischer, 193.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 194.

²⁶ Bashiriyeh, *loc cit.*

²⁷ *Ibid.* 113.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

demonstration on February 18 “turned violent after an irate police officer shot a teenage student protester.” In May Khomeini backed off from his March call for the assassination of the shah to urge caution. In June Shariatmadari counseled strikers to stay home to avoid death at the hands of the authorities. A burning of a movie theatre in August was blamed on religious fanatics by the shah, obtaining confessions from five of the ten people arrested, but popular sentiment blame the SAVAK, noting that the film was an Iranian film with social commentary, not one the foreign films with sexual content that had been targeted by the religious extremists.

At the end of Ramadan demonstrators returned to the streets peacefully handing out flowers to the soldiers,²⁹ but on Sept. 6 demonstrations were banned. On Sept. 7 hundreds of thousands defied the ban in a peaceful march to Parliament. The next day entered into history as “Black Friday,” as thousands of people gathered spontaneously but found themselves marching into a massacre. One soldier refused to fire at the crowd, shooting his commanding officer and then himself, but at least hundreds, perhaps thousands, of demonstrators were killed and the survivors went on a rampage.³⁰ In the weeks that followed there would be more cases of soldiers siding with the dissidents and rumors of mutinies in the garrisons.³¹ Repeatedly in this key period, Ayatullah Khomeini’s calls for resistance reflect his appreciation of both the religious basis and the power of nonviolent tactics. For example on Nov. 22 he declared:

...our Imam Hossein ... showed us how the clenched fists of freedom fighters can crush the tanks and the guns of the oppressors, ultimately giving victory to Truth.... If Islam is endangered we should be willing to sacrifice ourselves and save Islam by our blood.... The military government of Iran is illegal, and is condemned by the principles of Islam. It is the duty of all to protest it and to refuse to be a part of it in any way. People should refuse to pay taxes to the government, and all employees of the Iranian oil company should endeavor to stop the flow of oil abroad.... The clergy fulfill their duties to God by disclosing the crimes of the regime more than ever.... I call on the clergy, the students, journalists, workers, peasants, merchants, civil servants and all the tribes to work side by side... You ... should hold mourning sessions without acquiring the permission of SAVAK or the police....³²

The strikes became more sweeping and more effective and the demands more ideological. “5,000 bank clerks, 30,000 oil workers, and 100,000 government employees—coupled their economic demands ... with such sweeping political demands as the abolition of SAVAK, the lifting of martial law, the release of all political prisoners,

²⁹ Ibid. 198.

³⁰ Ibid. 199.

³¹ Ibid. 202.

³² Lynne Shivers, “Inside the Iranian Revolution,” in *Tell the American People*, David H. Albert, ed. (Philadelphia: Movement for a New Society, 1980).

the return of Khomeini, and the end of tyrannical rule.”³³ In Muharram (December) men went into the streets in white sheets symbolizing their willingness to be martyred or chanted slogans from the rooftops. Despite BBC reports of 700 deaths, the protests mounted.³⁴

The state’s attempts to pacify the opposition came too late. Certain bizarre concessions, such as the release of imprisoned guerilla leaders,³⁵ could have been aimed at increasing the violence. That the shah’s fate was sealed was made clear by the comment of a striking refinery worker that they would only export more oil after they had “exported the shah and his generals,” a threat that undercut Washington’s support for the monarch.³⁶

Later, when the new Islamic state began to degenerate into authoritarianism, some of the nonviolent tactics employed against the shah were turned against the new regime. Most notable was the demonstration of Iranian women, in a twist on their earlier demonstrations against the shah’s prohibition of the chador, against calls by conservatives in the new regime for state-enforced chadors.³⁷

The First Intifadah

Despite a history of nonviolence in the modern Arab world, including the Palestinian general strike of 1936, the first 39 years of the Palestinian resistance to their occupation by Israel focused on armed resistance, diplomacy, and economic sanctions. The first of these is clearly violent and the second carries the threat of violence behind it. Even the third must be distinguished from the classic nonviolent technique of boycott in that some states employed compulsory sanctions that coerced their citizenry into participation. There were a few Palestinian groups dedicated to nonviolent struggle, but they were small and the best known of them was directed by Mubarak Awad, a Christian inspired by the Quaker tradition.³⁸ In 1987, however, an indigenous nonviolent movement erupted that was so powerful that it forced the Israelis to enter into a deal with their militant

³³ Abrahamian, 518.

³⁴ Bashiiriyeh, 204.

³⁵ Abrahamian, 522.

³⁶ Ibid. 523.

³⁷ Bashiiriyah, 226.

³⁸ Philip Grant, “Nonviolent Political struggle in the Occupied Territories,” in Arab Nonviolent Political struggle in the Middle East, Ralph E. Crow, Philip Grant, and Saad E. Ibrahim, eds. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1990), p. 61. While Christians were an important part of the Intifadah, they were the tail on the dog; see F. Robert Hunter, *The Palestinian Uprising: A War by Other Means*, (Berkeley: UC Berkeley, 1991), p. 115-6.

opponents, the Palestine Liberation Organization, in order to end it. This was the first “Intifadah.”³⁹

When the Arab leaders snubbed the PLO at the Nov. 1987 summit in Amman, it left the residents of the occupied territories embittered. Young people, no longer content to follow the directions of the aging PLO leadership, took to the streets in spontaneous demonstrations often with little boys in the vanguards “firing their slingshots at troops dispatched to disburse them.”⁴⁰ The first eruption was a reaction to a minor incident, in which an army tank-transport killed four Arabs and injured seven others in a traffic accident. As the Israeli response became one of collective punishment, the resistance expanded beyond the youth to include all segments of society.⁴¹

Initially the movement lacked centralized national leadership and was directed by local “popular committees.” In January 1988 Hanna Siniora, editor of *Al-Fajr* issued a call for civil disobedience.⁴² Leaflets from a “Unified Command” (UC) mysteriously began to appear.⁴³ The five tactics most frequently called for in pamphlets #18-39 were (1) strikes, (2) community support (e.g., aid to victims of the occupation), (3) demonstrations and marches, (4) prayer and (5) fasting. The model of three of the pillars of Islam on tactics (2) *zakat*, (4) *salah*, and (5) *sawm* are obvious. Tactics (1) and (3) follow respectively the Prophet’s commands to stop evil with your hands if you can and with your tongues if you lack the power with your hands.⁴⁴ All are tools of nonviolent resistance.

Among the tactics recommended in the leaflets was one seemingly inspired by Thoreau’s dictum that “under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison.”⁴⁵ The leaflets urged “village residents present themselves for arrest at police stations when security forces tried to seize a fellow villager.”⁴⁶

Various forms of noncooperation were embraced, including strikes by the merchants.⁴⁷ One unique element was the way that Israeli attempt to break the sporadic strikes of shopkeepers by forcing the stores open backfired into making the strikes so systematic

³⁹ For a detailed analysis of the escalating oppression that formed the context of the Intifadah, see Peretz, ch. 1, pp. 1-38.

⁴⁰ Grant, 64.

⁴¹ Hunter, 89.

⁴² Don Peretz, *Intifada* (Boulder: Westview, 1990), 52.

⁴³ Grant, 64.

⁴⁴ *Sahih Muslim* #79.

⁴⁵ Thoreau, op. cit.

⁴⁶ Peretz, 52.

⁴⁷ Hunter 110-112.

that shopkeepers would close stores when the Israelis ordered them open and open them when they ordered them closed.⁴⁸ Loathe to admit that the forced closings policy was failing, the Israelis falsely claimed they had abandoned it.⁴⁹ As noncooperation became more widespread, Mubarak Awad called for complete noncooperation in every respect,⁵⁰ and the Israelis retaliated by illegally deporting him.⁵¹

Israel treated any resistance, violent or nonviolent, as “incitement and hostile propaganda.”⁵² Its response was the policy called the “Iron Fist.”⁵³ The consequences were disastrous for Israel for a number of reasons. Israeli officers were concerned about its effects on the Israeli troops.⁵⁴ The Israeli public became disillusioned about the nature of the occupation.⁵⁵ New Israeli peace groups proliferated⁵⁶ and the well established but hitherto cautious Peace Now became emboldened.⁵⁷ The Israeli government fell,⁵⁸ but the new government only intensified the Iron Fist policies.⁵⁹

The impact on Palestinian society was dramatic and long lasting. On March 6, 1988 all but two of the “Palestinian employees of the Gaza Income and Property Tax division resigned.”⁶⁰ By March 13 almost half of the Palestinian police in the occupied territories had quit.⁶¹ Notwithstanding Israeli claims to the contrary, the mass resignations could not be explained by coercion by the Palestinian leadership.⁶² Tax resistance grew to

⁴⁸ Peretz, 56.

⁴⁹ Hunter, 112f.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 55.

⁵¹ Ibid. 58.

⁵² Ibid. 62.

⁵³ See e.g., Hunter, 88ff.

⁵⁴ See Peretz, 47-52.

⁵⁵ Hunter, 92.

⁵⁶ Peretz, 139.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 140.

⁵⁸ Hunter, 225f.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 226.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 124.

⁶¹ Ibid. 124.

⁶² Ibid. 125.

problematic proportions.⁶³ Thoreau had said, “When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished.”⁶⁴

With the closure of the government, traditional civil society institutions returned to fill the void, among them *awni* (mutual help and charity), *atwi* (mediation of disputes by clan members), and *sulha* (extrajudicial arbitration).⁶⁵ Necessity bred a reinvigation of civil society.⁶⁶ Policies and programs to free the society from dependence on Israel helped to shake-off the consumerism that inhibited Palestinian development and enable residents to compete with the Israelis in industrial and agricultural production.⁶⁷ A major consequence was that splits within the Muslim Brotherhood surrounding the Intifadah precipitated the formation of Hamas,⁶⁸ who even claimed to have started the Intifadah.⁶⁹ Hamas attempted to stake out a middle position between violence and armed resistance by urging that violence be limited to throwing stones.⁷⁰

Most significant was the impact on the American people’s perception of the nature of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.⁷¹ The enormous American aid that sustains the apartheid state has only been politically palatable because Americans have a skewed perspective on the Israeli occupation, as the American media systematically under-reports Israeli violence and human rights violations while emphasizing Palestinian violence.⁷² In this case, however, the balance of violence was so badly skewed that the usual propaganda techniques did not work. Even the American public, notorious for its indifference to foreign affairs that do not directly affect their interests, could not accept the claim of moral equivalence between children throwing stones and the most powerful army in the region engaged in beating and shooting unarmed civilians, imprisoning thousands, and bombing Palestinian camps in Lebanon.⁷³ American sympathy for Israel was further strained in April 1990 when armed settlers took over the St. John’s Hospice and all

⁶³ Ibid, 126.

⁶⁴ Thoreau, loc. cit.

⁶⁵ Hunter, 131-2.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 136ff.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 132-6.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 116.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 117.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ See, e.g., Peretz, 167-181.

⁷² See, e.g., <http://ifamericansknew.org>.

⁷³ Ibid. 66.

Christian shrines were closed.”⁷⁴ President Bush had to uncharacteristically express regret over the deaths of 33 Palestinians by Israeli soldiers and settlers in May.⁷⁵

Just as the tide had turned against support for the Vietnam War when television brought the realities of that war into the living rooms of Americans, now, for the first time the mainstream American media were showing video footage that demonstrated that the Israeli occupation resembled the suppression of the civil rights movement in the American South—only more violent.⁷⁶ Even American Jews were revulsed.⁷⁷ The parallels in the susceptibility of the Israel and the American South to external pressure has been discussed by F. Robert Hunter.⁷⁸ I would also draw attention to the parallel effects on public opinion of the violence against student war protesters at Kent State University.

Desperate to put an end to the adverse publicity the Israeli government secretly met with the PLO and agreed to the Oslo accords. Although the Oslo accords themselves were not successful in ending the occupation, they manifested a radical departure from Israel’s traditional position. The difference in the response of the American press, public, and administration to the First Intifadah compared to all other Palestinian efforts at liberation (including the Second Intifadah, which has been characterized by frequent suicide bombings) attests to the power of nonviolent action to affect the hearts of the unwitting sponsors of state terrorism.

“... He has put affection between their hearts: not if you had spent all that is in the earth could you have produced that affection but God has done it: for He is Exalted in might Wise.”⁷⁹

Conclusions and Future Possibilities

Both just war and nonviolent actions are Islamically valid methods of social actions. Both also have a significant history in the Muslim tradition. In the modern world, given the nature of high-speed mass communication, nonviolent action is usually preferable both on moral and pragmatic grounds in cases of asymmetrically matched forces.

⁷⁴ Hunter 226-7.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 227.

⁷⁶ For a thoughtful analysis see Michael C. Hudson, “The Palestinian Challenge to US Policy,” in *The Palestinians: New Directions*, Michael C. Hudson, ed. (Washington: Center for Contemporary Arab studies), pp. 77-118.

⁷⁷ Hunter, 83.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 79.

⁷⁹ Qur’an 8:63.

The utter failure of the violent protests of the European cartoons meant to insult Islam should be a lesson to the Muslim people. They changed the focus of the discussion from the malice, bigotry and bad taste of the publishers to the Muslims' intolerance for freedom of speech. There are many more acceptable and more effective alternative responses. Muslims could have organized mass demonstrations in which they hold signs professing their respect and love for Jesus, and condemning bigotry and hatred. They could have boycotted advertisers in the offending newspapers. The Iranian government tried to engage in a bit of nonviolent retaliation by staging a contest for cartoons mocking the holocaust. While this was nonviolent, it was not effective because it played into the hands of the bigots' premise that modern political struggles are nothing more than ancient religious hatreds. It would better for them to have uncovered the holy cows of the offending secularist newspapers and targeted them.

At a seminar on "Nonviolent Sanctions and Cultural Survival" at Harvard in 1994, "Souad R. Dajani analyzed the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from a Palestinian perspective, proposing nonviolent civilian resistance as the most practical and strategically sound method for creating an independent Palestinian state in these areas."⁸⁰

The Palestinian resistance is, in fact, mainly a nonviolent resistance. Noah Merrill, coordinator for the American Friends Service Committee's program in Southeastern New England has nonetheless described it as "invisible" in the mainstream Western media. That invisibility is its weak spot. In Israel it has had some effect. Manifested in the rise of the refusenik movement among Israelis who refuse to be a part of the occupation either because of moral considerations or because they pragmatically understand that the occupation is harmful to Israel. In America, however, "The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is painted and repainted daily as intractable by definition, with both sides locked into a violent struggle with no winners, only the consistent pain and suffering of two peoples. Palestinians particularly are painted as irrational, violent by nature, prone to corruption, and unwilling to compromise."⁸¹ Since it is the American financing of the occupation and the apartheid policies that allows them to continue, the challenge to the nonviolent resistance is to pierce the veil dividing the American public opinion from the harsh realities of what they are buying. There are problems of convincing the political leadership of the efficacy of nonviolent resistance, exemplified by the fight against the building of Israeli's "security wall."

There were martyrs in the struggle against the Wall in Budrus. Nonviolent activists were wounded and killed. But as the struggle concluded, the Israeli Wall had been re-routed, forced back by the strength of the popular committees to the path of the Green Line, leaving the villages' olive groves intact. A politician who

⁸⁰ Bill Paxton, "Eyes Without a Country: Searching for a Palestinian Strategy of Liberation," (Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, 1994) <http://www.wcfia.harvard.edu/ponsacs/seminars/Synopses/s94dajan.htm>.

⁸¹ Noah Merrill, "Celebrating Nonviolent Resistance," *Peacework* Feb (American Friends Service Committee, 2006) <http://www.afsc.org/pwork/0602/060210.htm>.

had earlier mocked Morrar was convinced: he paid for the mass printing of signs to be used in the expansion of the campaigns, which are ongoing throughout the communities being devastated by the Wall's advance. The signs read: "We Can Do It!"⁸²

Merrill argues that Israelis target international activists precisely because these strategies are so successful. The strategies need to be expanded both in the solidity of their employment within the occupied territories, but also to the United States where the key support for the occupation and persecution resides, but where the nonviolent resistance remains veiled. While violent resistance is nearly impossible to eliminate its presence can undermine the effectiveness of nonviolence. Even the minimal violence of stone-throwing has been used by the Israelis to justify their response with tanks and automatic weapons.

The practitioners of violence need to understand that their tactics have failed miserably. Not one square inch of Palestinian soil has been liberated by armed resistance. The only Israeli concession to date came as a result of the influence of nonviolence on world opinion threatening Israel's support from America. An admission that nonviolence is more effective than armed resistance is not a declaration of immorality of armed resistance, except to the degree that inefficacy is immoral. With apologies for the violent metaphor, why insist on using the peashooter of armed resistance when we possess the canon of nonviolence?

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⁸² Ibid.