Palestinians in Budrus protest Israel's separation barrier, 2003-2004

Time period notes: The series of nonviolent protests took place between 2003 and 2004, although the start and end dates are unclear. In 2005, the campaign turned to some stone throwing.

2003 to: 2004

Country: Palestine
Country: Israel
Location City/State/Province: Budrus
Location Description: Village in the West Bank

Goals:
To stop construction of the Separation Barrier

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:
Methods in 2nd segment:
Methods in 3rd segment:
Methods in 4th segment:
Methods in 5th segment:
Methods in 6th segment:
Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols → "The Wall Must Fall"
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications → displayed anti-wall slogans, international observers held signs that said "Everyone is watching"
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors → Green Palestinian national flags
- 032. Taunting officials → Israeli peace activists mocked the Border Police
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support → Representatives from Hamas, Fatah and the Popular Front assembled in the village to protest the wall
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 171. Nonviolent interjection
Classifications

Classification: Defense
Cluster: Human Rights, National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:
- Palestinian Villagers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
Ayed Morrar

Partners:
Ahmed Awwad, members of Hamas party, members of the Popular Front

External allies:
Anarchists Against the Wall, Israeli peace activists, international observers

Involvement of social elites:
Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:
Groups in 2nd Segment:
Groups in 3rd Segment:
Groups in 4th Segment:
Groups in 5th Segment:
Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:
Joining order not known

Segment Length: Approximately 50 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:
Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), Israeli government

Nonviolent responses of opponent:
None known

Campaigner violence:
Some villagers threw stones at soldiers. Violence was not sanctioned by campaign leaders.

Repressive Violence:
Israeli military officers used clubs, rubber-coated bullets, arrests and live ammunition
Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:
6 points out of 6 points

Survival:
1 point out of 1 points

Growth:
3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:
The village protests expanded as members of other political factions joined the struggle, as well as Israeli allies. The villagers intended to have the wall re-routed so that it would not intersect their village, which was the final outcome of the campaign.

The history of Israel-Palestine relations since 1987 can be marked by a series of Palestinian uprisings against Israeli occupation (for more information see the BBC’s timeline of the First Intifada and its causes-http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/events/israel_at_50/history/82302.stm [3]). In 2002, the Israeli government began construction of a wall to separate Israel from the West Bank territories. The government justified the barrier as a necessary security measure to shield communities from terrorist threats. The Israeli Supreme Court pointed to the atrocities of the Second Intifada as reason to build a protective barrier.

In 2003, the government modified the proposed route of the wall, extending it further into the edges of the West Bank. Rather than build the wall along the Green Line, the internationally recognized boundary between Israeli and Palestinian territories, the barrier encircled six small villages. One such village was Budrus, an agricultural community whose history and livelihood was centered on the surrounding olive trees. Besides severing the village from 300 acres of land, the proposed wall would block access to 3,000 olive trees and intersect the village territory.

When local resident Ayed Morrar heard of the plans, he called a meeting of villagers to discuss how they could stop the wall’s construction. As a long-time Fatah activist, Morrar took on a natural leadership role in organizing the resistance. The villagers ultimately decided to launch a nonviolent campaign, which they planned to sustain until the Israelis left their land and olive trees alone. At first, the campaign consisted of a few scattered protests in which a group of men surrounded the construction site with signs and banners. After the first few protests, the village women joined the campaign with their own contingent. The women typically formed a line in front of the other protesters to protect them from the Israeli guards, who refrained from using violence when the women stood in the foreground. At one point, Morrar’s fifteen-year-old daughter led other women past the guards and jumped in front of a bulldozer to stop it from uprooting an olive tree. Besides physically obstructing the bulldozers, the protesters joined together in songs and chants.

The campaign attracted significant media attention after Morrar invited Israeli groups like Anarchists Against the Wall to join the campaign. Villagers commonly hosted the Israelis in their homes and hid them from soldiers during demonstrations. In other cases, Israeli activists stood on the front lines with the village women and openly heckled the soldiers. The Israeli presence not only served to protect the villagers from arrest, but their role as witnesses also prevented the police from using more hostile methods in the early stages of the campaign. As Yasmin Levy, one of the police members revealed, the military commanders explicitly forbid the police from touching Israeli activists because of their Jewish origins. In terms of responding to the rest of the Palestinian villagers, they employed traditional crowd dispersal methods: soldiers would run amongst the crowd of resisters, beating them with batons and shoving them away from the construction area. They also used rubber bullets and stun grenades on men, women and children alike.

Besides the Israeli and international activists, the campaign also received support from outside political factions such as Hamas. One of the local Hamas leaders, Ahmed Awwad, joined Morrar in organizing protests and rallies. Morrar often took the stage at such rallies to preach about the need for Palestinian unity and cooperation between political groups. The new wave of support
from Hamas members contributed to a shift in the campaign’s iconic symbols: rather than use the rainbow peace flags, as people did in the initial protests, demonstrators in the later protests waved the Palestinian national flag to signify their unified opposition.

As the campaign drew more crowds of Israelis and international observers, the Israeli military increased their methods of repression. They first declared the construction site to be a closed military zone and threatened to arrest anyone who crossed the boundaries. Israeli soldiers occupied the village and imposed a curfew on the villagers in an effort to quell the resistance. Doron Spielman, the army’s public affairs officer in charge of supervising the project, ordered soldiers to fire indiscriminately at all resisters, including the Israelis. At one point, Morrar came close to canceling a demonstration because he feared that the soldiers would attack the village children on their way home from school.

The Budrus campaign, which encompassed a total of 55 peaceful demonstrations, lasted ten months within the period of 2003-2004. It should be noted, however, that tensions between the villagers and the Israeli soldiers escalated in March 2005. Violence erupted after a group of village boys began hurling rocks at the nearby soldiers, openly defying Morrar’s instructions to stay within the boundaries of nonviolence. In response, the soldiers opened fire on the boys. Both the exact date of the incident and its duration are unclear, as well as the village’s collective response- while many of the women pleaded with the boys to stop provoking the soldiers, some of the men justified the attack as a natural response to the soldiers’ presence. On March 11, Israeli military and border police invaded Budrus during a wedding celebration and used rubber bullets, tear gas, and live ammunition to attack the villagers, leaving three villagers severely wounded. They also arrested twenty-five year old Hassan Mohamad Awad, as he tried to escape. The arrest of Awad marked a new phase of confrontation in the campaign. After the military left, villagers sabotaged several dozen meters of the fence to protest the arrest.

In 2005, the Israeli military requested that the government re-route the wall so that it would not encroach on the villagers’ land. On February 20, 2006, the Israeli cabinet approved a new route. The resulting Separation Barrier spared the village cemetery, as well as 95% of their land. Although Spielman claimed that the decision was spurred by legal and political motives that had nothing to do with the villagers’ campaign, the government was clearly influenced by the 10-month struggle and the visible international support it received.

Besides achieving its immediate goals, the Budrus struggle inspired over fifteen similar campaigns in surrounding West Bank villages. Communities such as Qibya, Ni’lin, Dier Qaddis and Shukba were inspired to start their own campaigns to resist construction of the wall. While most protests were triggered by the problem of land confiscation, some campaigns were fought over the issue of house demolition orders. The Israeli response to these villages has been far more violent when compared to the original Budrus campaign. Since 2005, twenty-one Palestinians have been killed and thousands have been injured while participating in anti-wall protests. Police forces have also used scare tactics such as raiding villages to arrest the campaign leaders and their children in an effort to frighten the community into submission. Despite these risks, many villages continued to engage in weekly demonstrations.

Research Notes

Influences:

The campaign drew on the non-violent methods used in the first weeks of the Second Intifada (1).

Budrus’ victory in re-routing the wall sparked a wave of nonviolent resistance efforts in Palestinian villages facing similar circumstances (2)

Sources:


**Additional Notes:**
For more information on the campaign and its leader, watch Budrus, a documentary directed by Julia Bacha.

**Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:**
Carmen Smith-Estrada, 02/10/2011

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