



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Palestinians wage nonviolent campaign during First Intifada, 1987-1988

Time period notes: *The intifada as a whole began in December 1987 and came to an end in 1993. However, the nonviolent phase of the campaign came to an end in the fall of 1988*

December

1987

to: Fall

1988

Country: Palestine

Country: Israel

Location City/State/Province: *The West Bank and Gaza Strip*

Goals:

To end the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and attain Palestinian political, economic, and cultural autonomy in these territories.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 076. National consumers' boycott
- 085. Merchants' "general strike"
- 090. Revenue refusal
- 117. General strike
- 179. Alternative social institutions

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 076. National consumers' boycott
- 085. Merchants' "general strike"
- 090. Revenue refusal
- 117. General strike

- 198. Dual sovereignty and parallel government

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 076. National consumers' boycott
- 085. Merchants' "general strike"
- 090. Revenue refusal
- 117. General strike
- 198. Dual sovereignty and parallel government

Methods in 4th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 076. National consumers' boycott
- 085. Merchants' "general strike"
- 090. Revenue refusal
- 117. General strike
- 198. Dual sovereignty and parallel government

Methods in 5th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 076. National consumers' boycott
- 085. Merchants' "general strike"
- 090. Revenue refusal
- 117. General strike
- 198. Dual sovereignty and parallel government

Methods in 6th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 076. National consumers' boycott
- 090. Revenue refusal

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 023. Destruction of own property
- 036. Performances of plays and music
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches

- 063. Social disobedience
- 071. Consumers' boycott
- 119. Economic shutdown
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 123. Boycott of legislative bodies
- 125. Boycott of government employment and positions
- 126. Boycott of government departments, agencies, and other bodies
- 127. Withdrawal from governmental educational institutions
- 135. Popular nonobedience
- 140. Hiding, escape, and false identities
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 147. Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation by enforcement agents
- 179. Alternative social institutions
- 180. Alternative communication system
- 192. Alternative economic institutions

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Defense

Cluster:

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- Palestinian youth
- merchants
- other residents of the occupied Palestinian territories
- policemen
- students
- teachers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

United National Command for the Escalation of the Uprising in the Occupied

Territories (UNC), Mubarak Awad, Feisal Hussein, Tayseer Aroui, Popular Committees

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Israeli Women in Black, Peace Now, 21st Year, Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), some Israeli soldiers (Yash Gvul)

Involvement of social elites:

Palestinian physicians, nurses, and other health practitioners

helped form medical relief units to provide care for protesters.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Other Palestinian Residents
- Palestinian Health Practitioners
- Palestinian Merchants
- Palestinian Policemen
- Palestinian Students
- Palestinian Teachers
- Palestinian Youth

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

- 21st Year
- Israeli Women in Black
- Peace Now

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 4 months*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Israeli Civil Administration

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Some UNC leaders encouraged protesters to engage “limited” forms of violence against the IDF, including rock- and Molotov cocktail-throwing. Protesters flung bottles, pipes, and the IDF’s own tear-gas canisters back at the Israeli soldiers.

Palestinian protesters torched 14 Palestinian businesses that did not observe posted strike hours.

Palestinian protesters murdered over 190 ‘collaborators’ in the first 16 months of the campaign

Repressive Violence:

The Israeli government ordered the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) to break

the protests by using rubber bullets, plastic bullets, tear-gas canisters, and truncheons. Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin was even caught on camera suggesting that the IDF ‘break the bones’ of Palestinian protesters. The Israeli government also ordered mass arrests of UNC leaders and other protesters. In many villages and refugee camps, the IDF imposed a curfew and restricted mobility into and out of the areas. What’s more, the IDF blockaded Palestinian villages to restrict the flow of goods and services. It also cut off electricity and restricted food and medical supplies.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The protesters were unable to end the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territories and the resistance eventually turned more and more towards violence.

As of the time of writing, Popular Committees are still active in the Gaza Strip and West Bank and are currently working to help organize another nonviolent resistance campaign that is aimed specifically against the construction of the Israeli Separation Barrier.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Regarding the First Intifada as "nonviolent" is controversial because of the violence that accompanied the campaign. Aden Tedla's narrative does not try to hide the violent dimension. Three considerations lead us to include the case in this database. First, a significant part of the campaign leadership worked very hard to keep the campaign nonviolent. Second, the masses participated in the nonviolent methods, not in the violence. Third, other scholars in the field of nonviolent action include the Intifada, although acknowledging its ambiguities.

We believe it is better to include the campaign in the database where readers can examine it for themselves, possibly drawing strategic lessons from what might be judged its more and less successful aspects. Including the case also supports the consideration of a macro-level strategic lesson: the first Intifada with its largely nonviolent thrust was arguably much more successful in furthering the cause of Palestinian liberation than the second Intifada with its overwhelmingly violent methods.

The Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territories that followed Israel's victory in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war significantly expanded Israel's political and economic control over the Palestinian communities in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) set up hundreds of military checkpoints throughout these areas to restrict Palestinian mobility and to guard against potential Palestinian bombers. Palestinians were required to carry identification cards and file Israeli-government issued paperwork in order to travel from one Palestinian community to another. The Israeli government also set up the Israeli Civil Administration to oversee affairs in the Palestinian territories. This administration employed Palestinians as policemen and local government officials to help manage the needs of Palestinian residents living in refugee camps, villages, and cities. This Israeli governing body heavily taxed imports and exports that flowed across the Palestinian border, and controlled access to water and electricity. Palestinians were also required to pay taxes directly to the Israeli state, and as the Palestinian and Israeli economies became increasingly intertwined, many working-class Palestinians found themselves working for Israeli-owned companies and factories. Many of these workers were employed in the growing Israeli settlements as well, helping to lay brick foundations and build homes for incoming Israeli settlers. To add to the sting of this humiliating labor, Palestinians were paid lower wages than Israelis who performed the same work.

By the 1980s, Palestinian discontent about the quality of their living conditions and their lack of political and economic autonomy began to escalate. In 1988, 59 percent of Gaza's population was under the age of nineteen, and many of these youths had only known life under the Israeli occupation. These frustrated youths wanted to resist Israeli dominance, and many of them felt that older generations had become too accustomed to the occupation.

In addition, a shortage of arable land and a rising rate of unemployment made life increasingly difficult for many Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the Israeli government's 1985 "iron fist" policy that authorized the use of roadblocks, searches, arrests, deportations, and refusals of family reunification permits only served to further embitter Palestinian residents. By this time, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and its call for violent resistance against the

Israeli occupation had become largely discredited in the territories, as Palestinian residents realized that their past use of violent methods of resistance did not bring about the end to the occupation nor substantial changes to their everyday lives. As tensions continued to increase, calls for nonviolent resistance became increasingly appealing to this frustrated people.

The spark that ignited the 1987 intifada came in the form of a car crash at a military checkpoint, a crash in which four Palestinians were killed by an Israeli truck driver. Rumors soon spread that the crash was not an accident but an act of vengeance on the part of the Israelis, and soon Palestinian youth began gathering in the streets of Gaza and the West Bank. As such assemblies were deemed illegal by the Civil Administration, the IDF attempted to break up the crowds by firing rubber bullets at the protesters. The protesters scattered as the IDF closed off exit roads and began making arrests, but many of the youthful protesters retaliated by throwing rocks at the Israeli soldiers. Riots soon broke out in Palestinian refugee camps and villages as Palestinian teenagers continued to clash with Israeli soldiers. The international media reported on the clashes, capturing scenes of Palestinian adolescents sling-shotting rocks and Molotov cocktails at Israeli tanks and armed soldiers.

With this newly awakened energy, Palestinian proponents of nonviolence including Mubarak Awad and Feisal Hussein helped establish the United National Command for the Escalation of the Uprising in the Occupied Territories (UNC) to form an effective strategy for resistance. With the help of youth volunteers, the UNC distributed thousands of leaflets to Palestinian neighborhoods in order to instruct residents on how to resist Israeli domination. The leaflets instructed residents to boycott Israeli-made products, resign from government and police positions, refrain from paying taxes to the Israeli government, stage merchants' strikes, and wage countless other forms of nonviolent disobedience. Many of the symbolic acts of resistance helped to build and rekindle both national and cultural pride, as Palestinian flags were raised during protest marches and traditional Palestinian theater and poetry were performed in open-air spaces. Many protesters also adorned traditional Palestinian clothing to symbolize their resistance to Israeli domination.

The UNC also helped to coordinate local Popular Committees that actively provided Palestinian communities with many social services to help end dependence on the Israeli occupiers. These Committees helped provide residents with childcare, health care, education, and food. When the IDF began to crack down on the protests by brutally beating and shooting demonstrators, Popular Committees like the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees set up hundreds of mobile health clinics to tend to the injured. In addition, Committees like the Union of Women's Work Committees helped support and plan nonviolent direct actions such as protest marches and road closures. In May 1988, the UNC issued a "Civil Disobedience Statement" in which it instructed Palestinians to regard local Committees as the government of the people rather than the Civil Administration.

The atmosphere of popular protest also encouraged Palestinians to resist in their own creative ways. Some Palestinians set their watches to a different hour than the one imposed by the Israelis, an action which infuriated several IDF soldiers and led to the smashing of many watches. When the Civil Administration decided to close 900 Palestinian schools in February 1988 to prevent youth from organizing, Palestinian teachers held illegal classes in makeshift facilities to ensure that students could continue their education and that younger Palestinian students stayed off the street. In addition, many Palestinians refused to produce identification cards when confronted by Israeli soldiers at roadblocks and military checkpoints. Some burned these cards altogether.

What's more, many women and girls took the lead on loosening Palestinian food and economic dependence on Israel by collectively cultivating their lands and producing fruits and vegetables. However, as illustrated by its reaction to the Palestinian attempt to create an independently run dairy farm, the Israeli Civil Administration forcibly sought to stem any form of Palestinian economic autonomy. In 1988, several Palestinians in the village of Beit Sahour purchased 18 cows from an Israeli and set up their own dairy farm. In response, Israeli Civil Administration officials pronounced the cows a security threat and ordered the farm to be closed within 24 hours. However, the following day Israeli officials were incensed to find that the cows had been relocated to a secret location.

The Israeli government responded to the protesting Palestinians in a variety of ways. With its intelligence agency, Shin Bet, Israeli officials attempted to stop the production and distribution of the leaflets that were circulating within Palestinian neighborhoods. They were able to intercept thousands of leaflets, but the continual relocation of leaflet production sites made

suppression nearly impossible. The IDF also made thousands of arrests, rounding up both leaders and protesters. Prisons were often filled beyond capacity, and it soon became a source of pride for one's family member to be arrested by the IDF. But because the leadership model of the UNC was unlike the hierarchical model of the PLO (which played a minimal role in the non-violent campaign), new leaders constantly emerged to replace those who had been arrested. In order to break Palestinian morale and prevent protesters from organizing, the IDF imposed a curfew on Palestinian refugee camps, villages, and cities. The IDF also blockaded several Palestinian villages, restricting the flow of goods, food, medical services, and electricity. In order to force Palestinian merchants to end their strike, Israeli officials ordered the IDF to smash open the locks of striking Palestinian stores. And when Palestinian locksmiths volunteered their services to the merchants and replaced the locks, the IDF broke them again, this time in the hopes of attracting looters. In response, the Palestinians set up neighborhood watch committees to protect the shops from looters. These back-and-forth actions continued for a few more weeks until the IDF eventually gave up.

The Israeli and international media reported daily on the events occurring in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. Images of the IDF dropping tear gas and mace from helicopters onto crowds of demonstrators and of Israeli tractors bulldozing the homes of protesters induced many Western European nations to criticize the Israeli government. Israeli peace groups including the Women in Black, Peace Now, and 21st Year also criticized the actions of the IDF. Even some members of the Israeli army expressed a sense of demoralization, as a corps of Israeli military men called Yash Gvul refused to serve in the territories. Early in 1988, Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin had been caught on camera encouraging the IDF to 'break the bones' of Palestinian protesters, so when Palestinian campaign leader Mubarak Awad arranged for Israelis to visit Palestinian hospitals where they saw Palestinian children with broken arms and bones, many Israelis began to doubt the role of the military occupation in the Palestinian territories.

Despite these rebukes, the Israeli government continued its forceful repression of the Palestinian uprising. The fact that the United States also did not directly condemn Israel for its actions against the Palestinians encouraged the Israeli government to continue its policies. Israel had already suffered an economic loss of approximately \$1 billion as a result of the Palestinian labor strike, boycotted goods, and the Palestinian refusal to pay taxes. It had also increased the number of troops in the area from 12,000 to 80,000 as well as increased its military expenditures by approximately \$600 million. Although in April 1988 the commander of the IDF told Israeli officials that continued armed force would not resolve the crisis, the Israeli government ordered the round up and deportation of suspected leaders and organizers. These included Mubarak Awad, widely known as "the Arab Gandhi". The Israeli government continued to order mass arrests of committee members, and ordered the IDF to employ plastic bullets rather than rubber ones.

Indeed, as increasing numbers of leaders were placed in jail during the summer of 1988, the discipline needed to maintain the nonviolent campaign became increasingly hard to find. Some leaders of the UNC encouraged protesters to engage in 'limited' forms of violence against the IDF, including rock- and Molotov cocktail-throwing, allowing the nonviolent aspects of the campaign to be overlooked by mass media within Israel and internationally. Indeed, Palestinian protesters flung bottles, pipes, and the IDF's own tear-gas canisters back at the Israeli soldiers. The campaigners also committed acts of violence against fellow Palestinians who did not participate in or observe the strikes and protests against Israel. In the Gaza Strip, protesters torched 14 Palestinian businesses that did not observe posted strike hours. In addition, Palestinian protesters murdered over 190 'collaborators' in the first 16 months of the campaign. These violent aspects of the campaign hindered the Palestinians' ability to sway Israeli public opinion in their favor and end the occupation.

After the summer of 1988, the old leadership of the PLO took command of the uprising and the latter years of the Palestinian intifada were characterized by armed struggle, which did not succeed in bringing about the end of the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Research Notes

Influences:

UNC leaders including Mubarak Awad had studied the theories and methods of nonviolence that had been used during the Indian independence movement and American Black Freedom struggle. In addition, the influence of the historic use of non-violent resistance in Palestine (as seen with the 1936 Palestinian general strike against the British) helped shape the non-violent campaign of the first intifada. (1)

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Additional Notes:

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Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Aden Tedla, 01/05/2010

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