

Non-Violence in Palestine: Timing and Intentions

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In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

Global Research, April 17, 2009

17 April 2009

When one speaks of or advocates non-violence, does he promote such an idea because he believes that historically it has been a more effective means of liberation, or is it purely because he thinks that it is a more self-respecting means of struggle?

In recent history, many advocates of non-violence have been celebrated as modern day icons. From Ghandi to King, songs are written in their honor, their life stories fill the pages of our children's history volumes as noble examples of which everyone must aspire to emulate. Holidays are instituted in their honor and around the world; streets and boulevards carry their namesake.

Why is it that the "establishment" goes to such great lengths to lift up these individuals? Where are the holidays commemorating the life and sacrifices of Malcolm X, where are the stories of Crazy Horse or Geronimo? Could it be possible that these figures remain in the shadows of pacifists because their ideals shook up the status quo just a little too much? When the "establishment" celebrates individuals for their non-violence, could that be another way of recognizing them for making just enough commotion, but not too much commotion?

For decades, the Palestinian struggle for freedom was largely a non-violent movement. With occasional pockets of armed resistance, Palestinians in the occupied territories employed methods of general strikes, demonstrations and the like to express their demands and desires to finally live in freedom. And yet these were the years where Palestinians saw that great majority of their homeland swallowed up into what is now the State of Israel. Land was stolen with no recompense to its owners, prisons burst at the seams with prisoners who never received a trial, houses demolished by the hundreds, entire orchards of olive and fruit trees ransacked and burned. All this was carried out in the confines of an "Intifada-free" society. So, it might be suggested that Palestinians gave non-violent resistance more than a fair shot.

It seems that there is an ongoing trend among many in the "establishment" to celebrate those broken and oppressed refugees who in spite of more than sixty years of bondage call for non-violence or passive resistance. While the intention is in itself honorable, one must question the timing.

Recently, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) released a report entitled: "UN: 70% of Palestinian youth oppose violence to resolve conflict with Israel". The report addressed a survey conducted in the occupied territories that interviewed 1200 youth in the West Bank and Gaza. The survey found that nearly 70 percent of young adults in the occupied territories do believe that the use of violence is "not helpful" to resolve the

Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The report stated that only 8 percent found violence a necessary tool, and it also found that 80 percent of young Palestinians are depressed, 55 percent being “extremely depressed”.

In recent months, Palestinians have endured some of the most painful blows since the early years of Israeli rule. The recent bloodletting in the Gaza Strip claimed the lives of more than 1400, wounded thousands, and robbed millions of any sense of security, safety and hope for a better world. Human rights groups around the world decried the Israeli genocide as war crimes, World leaders committed to filing charges at the International Court of Justice and have Israeli leaders tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The liquidation of Gaza became center platform in Israeli elections. Cluster bombs, white phosphorous and God only knows what other illegal weapons were unleashed on a starved and sieged civilian population where relief workers strived to pinpoint just what chemical weapon only leaves behind the evidence of a human skeleton?

Amidst the grief and rage that followed, Belgium found it fitting to nominate one sorrow-stricken doctor and father of three lovely daughters from Gaza, the Nobel Prize, in recognition of his efforts to promote peace between Palestinians and Israelis. The 55 year old physician, Ezzeldeen Abu al-Aish, lost his three children in a most viscous way, when Israeli shells hit his house, crushing and suffocating all those inside. Dr. Abu al-Aish just happened to be talking on Israeli television about the suffering of the people of Gaza when he was informed that the shell hit his home with his family inside. He suppressed his anguish long enough to express his hope that his daughters would be the last victims of Israel’s attack.

While it cannot be denied that such a man deserves the highest honor for his commitment to the population of Gaza, and for the personal sacrifice he has endured, the irony of his distinction coming at such a time, after the most horrifying of sieges, after the grisly killing of his children, but more, after the grieving father responded with a poignant message of “reconciliation”.

In the midst of this mess, where is the call for Israel to embrace non-violence, would the media and the world community press the Israelis to embrace non-violence, had they endured such atrocities such as those witnessed in Gaza?

And once again, the intentions of the “establishment” come in to question. One has to wonder, if Abu al-Aish would have responded with the resolve of so many grieving parents who vowed to “never leave” to “rebuild” to “resist until victory or death in its pursuit”, would he still be recognized for his efforts to promote peace among Palestinians and Israelis?

Just why does the UNDP find it fitting to highlight a survey that concludes that most Palestinian youth find violence “unhelpful” at such a time? And why does the world renown a man who calls for reconciliation, a term that somehow suggests a conflict between people of equal standing, while his daughters rest in fresh graves? Some may suggest that non-violent resistance in such situations is the embodiment of the dignified struggle.

Others might call it surrender.

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