

“The Power of Nonviolent Action in Conflict Zones”

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While the world is no less conflict-ridden than it has been in the past, recent decades have witnessed a remarkable shift in many areas regarding how conflict has been waged. In many places where either armed struggle or acquiescence to violence and injustice were once seen as the only alternatives, strategic nonviolent action has proven to be remarkably effective, even in cases of struggles against repressive dictatorships, minority rule, and foreign occupation, and even in the midst of war zones.

It was not the leftist guerrillas of the New People’s Army who brought down the U.S.-backed Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines. It was nuns praying the rosary in front of the regime’s tanks, and the millions of others who brought greater Manila to a standstill.

It was not the eleven weeks of bombing that brought down Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic, the infamous “butcher of the Balkans.” It was a nonviolent resistance movement led by young students, whose generation had been sacrificed in a series of bloody military campaigns against neighboring Yugoslav republics, who were able to mobilize a large cross-section of the population to rise up against a stolen election.

It was not the armed wing of the African National Congress that brought majority rule to South Africa. It was workers, students, and township dwellers who—through the use of strikes, boycotts, the creation of alternative institutions, and other acts of defiance—made it impossible for the apartheid system to continue.

It was not NATO that brought down the communist regimes of Eastern Europe or freed the Baltic republics from Soviet control. It was Polish dockworkers, East German church people, Estonian folk singers, Czech intellectuals, and millions of ordinary citizens.

Similarly, such tyrants as Jean-Claude Duvalier in Haiti, Augusto Pinochet in Chile, King Gyanendra in Nepal, General Suharto in Indonesia, and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia, as well as other dictators from Bolivia to Benin, Madagascar to the Maldives, were forced to step down when it became clear that they were powerless in the face of massive nonviolent resistance and noncooperation.

History has shown that, in most cases, strategic nonviolent action can be more effective than armed struggle. A recent Freedom House study demonstrated how, of the nearly 70 countries that had made the transition from dictatorship to varying degrees of democracy in the previous four decades, only a small minority did so through armed struggle from below or reform instigated from above. Hardly any new democracies resulted from foreign invasion. In nearly three-quarters of the transitions, change was rooted in democratic civil-society organizations that employed nonviolent methods.

Similarly, in the highly-acclaimed book *Why Civil Resistance Works*, authors Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan (who are decidedly mainstream quantitative-oriented strategic analysts) note how, of the nearly 350 major insurrections in support of self-determination and democratic rule over the past century, primarily violent resistance was successful only 26 percent of the time, whereas primarily nonviolent campaigns had a 53 percent rate of success. Similarly, they have noted that successful armed struggles take an average of eight years while successful unarmed struggles take an average of only two years.

Nonviolent action has also been a powerful tool in reversing coup d'états. In Germany in 1920, in Bolivia in 1979, in Argentina in 1986, in Russia in 1991, in Burkina Faso in 2015, and nearly a dozen other cases coups have been reversed when the plotters realized that, after people took to the streets, that physically controlling key buildings and institutions did not mean they had actually seized power.

Indeed rulers are only as powerful as their subjects' willingness to obdy.

It's important to realize that in any liberation struggle, people will unfortunately be killed when challenging an oppressive regime. Still, nonviolent struggles generally result in far fewer casualties than armed struggles. Soldiers and police are far less likely to shoot into crowds of unarmed demonstrators than to shoot at people shooting at them. And they are far

more likely to defect. Over 5000 people were killed by the Syrian regime during the initial nine months of the uprising when the resistance was mostly nonviolent. Since the struggle became mostly violent, nearly fifty times more civilians have died, and nearly half of that country's population have become refugees and other displaced persons. Furthermore, defections by soldiers, police, and government officials—which had been quite high during the revolution's nonviolent phase-- plummeted,

Similarly, while nearly 300 people were killed during the initial nonviolent phase of the Libyan uprising against Qaddafi, as many as 30,000 people died in the course of six months of the armed struggle that followed.

Not all nonviolent pro-democracy movements have been successful, of course; in addition to Syria, nonviolent struggles have been successfully repressed in China, Iran, Bahrain and elsewhere.

It is important to remember, however, that nonviolent struggle, like armed struggle, will only succeed if the resistance uses appropriate strategies and tactics. A guerrilla army cannot expect instant success through a frontal assault on the capital. They know they need to initially build cadre and engage in small low-risk operations, such as hit and run attacks. They need to be able to seek sanctuary and take the time to mobilize their base in peripheral areas before they have a chance of defeating the well-armed military forces of the state. Similarly, it may not make sense for a nonviolent movement to rely primarily on the tactic of massive street demonstrations in the early phases of a movement, but diversify their tactics, understand their strengths and weaknesses, analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the regime, and act accordingly. Such a movement may need to initially focus on small decentralized actions or low-risk activities which invite widespread participation, like strikes and boycotts. There are hundreds of different methods of nonviolent resistance. As in warfare, using the same tactic in the same way over and over again will not get you very far. If someone says, "we tried nonviolence and it didn't work," one needs to ask what kinds of nonviolent strategies were employed, what kind of sequencing of tactics were developed, for how long and under what circumstances did they take place. Neither violence nor nonviolence "works." While, on

average, primarily nonviolent struggles are more effective than primarily violent ones, both depend on good strategic thinking and effective implementation.

Advances in military technology have given the state and other status quo powers an increasing advantage in recent years. Even when an armed insurgency or armed intervention is “successful,” large segments of the population are displaced, farms and villages are destroyed, cities and much of the nation’s infrastructure are severely damaged, the economy is wrecked, and there is widespread environmental devastation. I visited Vietnam for the first time a few years ago and you can still see the bomb craters, the hillsides still denuded of vegetation from the defoliants, and the large numbers of people in wheel chairs. We have to wonder if the benefits of waging an armed insurrection, even when victorious, are worth the consequences.

Another disadvantage of military means is the tendency, once in power, for successful armed movements against dictatorships to fail in establishing pluralistic, democratic, and independent political systems capable of supporting social and economic development, demilitarization, and human rights. Indeed, armed struggle often promotes the ethos of a secret elite vanguard, a strict hierarchy of command and control, and the message that power comes from the barrel of a gun, resulting in little tolerance for dissent. By contrast, successful nonviolent movements require the building of broad coalitions of disparate elements of civil society and are therefore more open to compromise, providing a model of political pluralism which can serve as the basis of a democratic society that respects human rights.

In some countries, like Algeria and Guinea-Bissau, the more progressive elements of the revolutionary leadership fell victim to military coups not long after their armed movements ousted European colonialists, and the new governments abandoned many of their progressive ideals and slid into authoritarianism. Other victorious armed anti-imperialist struggles, like those in Angola and Mozambique, fell into bloody civil wars. In Eritrea, an armed revolution which once inspired many of us, we now see the victorious EPLF ruling one of the world’s most militarized and totalitarian states.

By contrast, despite some notable exceptions—such as Iran and Egypt, which slid back into dictatorship not long after revolutions ousted autocratic leaders— history has shown us that *most* dictatorships overthrown by primarily nonviolent means have become stable

democracies within a few years.. Indeed, the vast majority of dictatorships overthrown in armed struggles have become new dictatorships and/or plunged into chaos, with ongoing battles between rival armed groups, with an increase militarization. While Tunisia, whose dictatorship was overthrown in an unarmed insurrection, has made real—if uneven—progress toward democracy and demilitarization, in neighboring Libya—whose dictator was overthrown in a NATO-backed armed struggle—finds itself in a state of ongoing chaos and civil war, with extremist groups controlling parts of the country. And, of course, we are continuing to see the tragic results of the U.S.-led overthrow of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

As someone who lives in a modern democratic state, I cannot pass moral judgment against people who feel the need to take up arms, but neither should those in the West romanticize armed struggle. Our homes have never been subjected to drone attacks or other forms of counter-insurgency warfare. I remember during my activism in the anti-apartheid movement while in university in the late 1970s, the debate was dominated between those in my university administration who argued that the best way to end apartheid was through the supposedly benign influence of foreign capital and these born-again student Marxists who insisted that it only come through the armed wing of ANC marching to Pretoria in a bloody armed revolution. Neither side recognized the realities of South Africa itself and that the key to bringing down apartheid was massive noncooperation and unarmed resistance, combined with international solidarity efforts of boycotts, divestment, and sanctions targeting the white minority regime.

One thing I need to emphasize that is even more important, however: I have helped lead workshops and seminars on strategic nonviolent action on five continents, arguing that unarmed civil resistance is the most effective means of advancing democracy and social justice. Though I have generally been well-received, it places me in an awkward situation as an American, given that the U.S. government provides more military, diplomatic and economic support for autocratic regimes and occupation armies than any government in the world. This is why I put at least as much time in my research and advocacy challenging U.S. foreign policy as I do on the question of strategic nonviolent action in authoritarian societies. As I tell my American audiences, if you care about human rights, democracy, and self-determination

overseas, you must be willing to work for a change in U.S. policy. Indeed, I would argue that the country in most need of large-scale nonviolent resistance in support for human rights, democracy, and disarmament is the United States!

My advocacy of nonviolent action is not rooted in pacifism. While I greatly respect those who have a religious or moral objection to violence, I am speaking as a political scientist and a strategic analyst. The nonviolence I am talking about is in regard to a means of waging struggle, not a personal philosophy. While questions regarding the morality of the utilization of armed struggle as compared with the utilization of nonviolent methods are indeed important, what I am primarily interested in is what works.

Though the efficacy of nonviolent resistance against state actors has become increasingly appreciated, what about non-state actors, particularly in situations where the conflict is dominated by competing armed groups, war lords, terrorists, and those who don't care about popular support or international reputations? Even in these cases of what could be referred to as "fragmented tyrannies," we have seen some remarkable successes, such as in war-torn Liberia and Sierra Leone, where primarily women-led nonviolent movements played a major role in bringing peace to those countries by forcing the war lords—despite their blood diamonds and utilization of child soldiers and mass atrocities—to make peace and allow for a restoration of democracy. In rural Colombia—suffering from decades of civil war in which its citizens were threatened by armed forces of the government, leftist guerrillas, right-wing paramilitaries, and drug kingpins—towns and villages successfully established themselves as "peace communities," declaring a strict neutrality in the conflict and a refusal to bear arms or provide any logistical support for any armed group while administering their autonomous municipalities through nonviolent conflict resolution and participatory democracy. In the Niger Delta of Nigeria, beset with environmental disasters, government repression, criminal gangs, and armed vigilantes working for the oil companies, we have seen mass demonstrations, occupation of oil platforms, and other nonviolent resistance efforts, largely led by women, supplemented by an international boycott of the oil companies most liable.

We have seen such remarkable examples of nonviolent resistance in even the most war-torn areas of the Middle East. In Yemen, while simultaneously opposing the terror bombing of their country by the Saudis, hundreds of thousands of Yemenis have nonviolently defended their universities, businesses, neighborhoods, and even entire cities from control by armed Houthi rebels. Protests have even successfully challenged Al-Qaeda's totalitarian rule in parts of the country. Similarly, in Syria, there are still ongoing acts of nonviolent resistance, not just against the Assad regime, but also against hardline Islamists who have taken control in parts of Idlib and other areas in the country, limiting their ability to impose their reactionary agenda. During the counter-insurgency war in Iraq, residents of Ramadi engaged in a general strike that totally shut down the Iraqi city of Ramadi in protest of the U.S. military siege, assaults on civilian neighborhoods and the random arrests of thousands of young men by American occupation forces, resulting in the Americans modifying their tactics. And the recent successes in driving Daesh (ISIS) from Syrian and Iraqi cities came not just from the bombing campaigns (which also killed thousands of innocent civilians) but by widespread noncooperation by those under their rule. Not only did the majority of the population of these cities manage to flee despite threats of death to those trying to escape, thereby limiting the work force and tax revenues Daesh needed, but 80% of those who remained refused to send their children to Daesh-runs schools to be indoctrinated.

The question that is perhaps most on the minds of many of you is whether nonviolent action can work against a military occupation. I acknowledge that nonviolent resistance to occupation is particularly challenging, more so than struggling against one's own dictator. One of the factors that has made unarmed civil resistance movements effective have been in the reluctance of soldiers to fire into crowds of unarmed people, some of whom may be friends, neighbors, or even family members, and—in any case—are recognized as compatriots with whom they can identify. When those whom you are ordered to suppress are people you have been taught to see as somehow less than human because of their ethnicity, nationality, religion, language, or culture, you are far more likely to rationalize to yourself about the legitimacy of engaging in brutal repression. Similarly, despite anti-occupation activists

employing nonviolent tactics and simply demanding an end to the occupation, if you have been convinced that they would really want to kill you and your family and destroy your country if given a chance, you would also be more willing to justify violence against them.

At the same time, there have been a number of cases which show promise of the power of strategic nonviolent action by subjugated peoples under foreign belligerent occupation. It took a full six months for Soviet occupation troops to consolidate their control of Czechoslovakia following their 1968 invasion of that country and the resistance paved the way for the Communist regime's overthrow two decades later. Nonviolent resistance in the occupied Western Sahara has forced Morocco to offer an autonomy proposal which—while still falling well short of their obligation to grant the Sahrawis their right of self-determination—at least has forced them to acknowledge that the territory is not simply another part of Morocco. Ongoing acts of resistance to the German occupation of Denmark and Norway during WWII not only saved the lives of the vast majority of the Jews in those countries, the Nazis never completely controlled the population, particularly in the final years. Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia freed themselves from Soviet occupation through nonviolent resistance prior to USSR's collapse. In Lebanon, a nation ravaged by war for decades, thirty years of Syrian domination was ended through a large-scale nonviolent uprising in 2005. In Ukraine, Mariupol became the largest city to be liberated from control by Russian-backed rebels, not by bombings and artillery strikes by the Ukrainian military, but when thousands of unarmed steelworkers marched peacefully into occupied sections of the downtown and drove out the armed separatists.

In the early 1980s, in the occupied Golan Heights, the Israeli government began pressuring the Druze to accept Israeli identification cards as a means of consolidating their illegal annexation of the Syrian territory. In December 1981, when the Israelis formally extended direct administration over the occupied Golan Heights, the government began an attempt to systematically coerce the Druze population into accepting Israeli citizenship by issues Israeli identification cards. The Druze began a nonviolent resistance campaign against the decision, which included a general strike, peaceful protests, and violating curfews. They systematically ignored military restrictions against fraternization between villages and public demonstrations. Children and adults eagerly sought arrest and many engaged in a "reverse

strike," installing a sewer pipeline which the occupation forces had refused to support. As many as 15,000 Israeli troops occupied the area, imposing a 43-day state of siege, destroying homes, arresting hundreds of people and shooting suspects. Eventually, however, the Israeli government ended their insistence that the Druze accept Israeli citizenship and promised not to conscript Golani Druze into the army, to allow them to open economic relations with their fellow Syrians across the armistice line, and to no longer interfere with Druze civil, water and land rights.

The first Palestinian intifada in the 1980s, despite the iconic image of the stone-throwing youth and the murders of suspected collaborators, the bulk of the intifada was nonviolent, utilizing such tactics as peaceful demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, tax refusal, occupations, blockades, and the creation of alternative institutions. The Unified National Leadership Command of the Uprising emerged to coordinate the resistance, which sent out directives for a variety of resistance activities, 92% of which were explicitly nonviolent. (Exiled PLO military leader Abu Jihad soon recognized the power of the largely nonviolent movement and was a key figure in convincing Arafat and others to support the resistance. It is probably not coincidental that this was when the Israeli government decided to assassinate him, not back when he was directing terrorist operations.)

Thousands of Palestinians working for Israel in the occupied territories resigned. Popular committees, many headed by women, took on a series of responsibilities supporting the population suffering from increasingly restrictive curfews and limits on movement. When the Israeli government ordered the closure of all Palestinian schools, kindergarten through university, an underground educational network emerged, despite threats of up to ten years imprisonment for teachers taking part. Indeed, Palestinians found that taking part in these popular committees was subjected to worse punishment by Israeli occupation authorities than engaging in violent acts of resistance.

This popular empowerment of the Palestinians during this period in which much of the subjugated population effectively became self-governing entities through massive noncooperation and the creation of alternative institutions. These not only challenged the Israeli occupiers, but the conservative pro-Jordanian elite which had dominated West Bank

politics for generations. More critically, it moved the locus of the Palestinian resistance from the exiled PLO, made up in large part of armed guerrilla factions, to Palestinian civil society inside the occupied territories.

Incidents of lethal violence against Israelis during the first intifada were relatively rare. During the four years of the uprising, only twelve Israeli soldiers were killed by Palestinians while over 700 Palestinians were killed by Israeli occupation forces. Unfortunately, the combination of factionalism, interference by the PLO, increased Israeli repression, and unwavering U.S. support for the Israeli government led to the decline of the movement by the beginning of the 1990s. However, the struggle for national self-determination for the Palestinians, after little progress during years of armed struggle against Israel, made significant gains during this period as the result of the shift towards largely nonviolent methods during the uprising. Indeed, the PLO, while having de-emphasized the armed struggle for a number of years, finally formally renounced it. In addition, within its first year, the intifada forced Jordan to give up its claim to the West Bank, which it had annexed in 1949 and had ruled until the Israeli conquest in 1967, and to endorse Palestinian self-determination to an unprecedented degree. It led to a discernible shift in the United States and other Western countries away from an overwhelmingly positive, even naively romantic, view of Israel to one which also recognized the negative consequences of Israel ruling over another people. The intifada exerted substantial influence on popular opinion throughout the Arab world to force some often unresponsive regimes to once again take the Palestinian question seriously. The intifada led the PLO to take the political initiative, including a declaration of independence in December 1988, and eventually led to the long-overdue recognition of the PLO as a negotiating partner by Israel and the United States.

The Palestinian population was mobilized and empowered to an unprecedented degree during the intifada and the Israelis were faced with their most intractable opposition ever. Furthermore, the non-cooperation with the occupation authorities initially led to an unprecedented degree of cooperation between the Palestinian population in the occupied territories, those living as citizens in Israel, and those in the Palestinian diaspora. It led to an unprecedented number of Israelis in the armed forces saying “Yesh g’vul,” and refusing to serve

in the occupied territories. It was hoped that the power of such tactics would eventually force an end to the Israeli occupation, not by driving Israeli forces out physically, but by making Palestinian society ungovernable by anyone but the Palestinians themselves. Indeed, it is this recognition which led to the Israeli concessions obtained in the September 1993 Principles of Understanding, negotiated in Oslo and signed in Washington, which allowed Palestinian self-governance in most urban areas of the occupied territories.

It is perhaps significant that as the main arena shifted away from popular nonviolent resistance to U.S.-led diplomacy which generally favored the Israeli occupation that the optimism for Palestinian statehood has faded. Combined with Israeli repression, Palestinian terrorism, Israeli attacks on civilian population centers, a series of right-wing Israeli governments unwilling to make the necessary compromises for peace, the rise of Hamas, and misrule by a corrupt, inept, and semi-authoritarian Palestine Authority, the effectiveness of the nonviolent resistance has been compromised. Despite this, the nonviolent struggle has continued, most notably in challenging Israeli efforts to effectively annex parts of the West Bank through the building of a separation barrier deep inside the West Bank. Unfortunately, sustained nonviolent resistance is difficult in a situation in which Israeli occupation forces effectively surround the Palestinian population, but do not exercise direct authority, and where the Israeli government wants to rule over the land but does not want the people. It is also made more difficult when the United States—the most powerful country in the world—insists on being the chief mediator of the conflict while simultaneously serving as the primary military, economic, and diplomatic supporter of the occupying power; blocking the United Nations from taking its customary role as arbiter of international disputes; and, siding with the more hardline nationalistic, expansionist, militaristic, and chauvinistic political forces in Israel against those Israelis advocating peace, justice, and reconciliation.

While the specifics differ in a number of important respects, the people of Indonesian-occupied East Timor and South African-occupied Namibia also faced enormous odds. As with the Palestinians, neither diplomatic efforts nor the armed or nonviolent wings of their national liberation movements were able to advance their struggle for self-determination. The shift

came when global civil society was mobilized to challenge the occupying powers and pressure Western governments and Western corporations to end their tacit support for the occupations. Indeed, international solidarity campaigns employing nonviolent action played a critical role in ending these occupations by threatening the profits of complicit corporations and effectively shaming Western governments that continued to back the occupying powers.

So, international solidarity is very important for nonviolent movements against foreign occupation facing enormous odds, such as in Israel/Palestine, and something which those of us internationally must recognize. And it has to be more than just sending an occasional check to the New Israel Fund or other entities which support those with a more progressive vision of the future for this shared homeland. Most importantly, just as nonviolent resistance within a nation needs to be strategically smart in order to win, so must solidarity efforts by global civil society. Progressive Israelis must join Palestinians in explicitly calling for global civil society to become actively involved in supporting the end of the occupation.

Most Palestinians now recognize that terrorism—in addition to being flagrantly illegal and morally reprehensible—was politically counter-productive. There is also an awareness that an organized armed struggle against Israeli occupation forces, while more legitimate, would be utterly futile and lead to additional suffering on a massive scale. At the same time, any realistic hope for a diplomatic solution has been undermined by the U.S. refusal to apply any tangible pressure on a succession of right-wing Israeli governments to make the necessary compromises for peace and the U.S. preventing the United Nations from enforcing its resolutions demanding Israel withdraw from its illegal settlements, rescind its annexation of greater East Jerusalem, end the occupation and ongoing violations of international humanitarian law, and allow for the establishment of a viable Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel.

This is why, thirteen years ago, recognizing that mobilizing global civil society might provide the most reasonable means to ending their suffering and making peace and justice possible, 170 Palestinian trade unions, political parties, women's organizations, professional associations, popular resistance committees, refugee networks, and others calling for an international campaign of boycotts, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) against Israel.

The campaign in support of the BDS call has grown dramatically worldwide, yet has shown little in the way of tangible benefits for the Palestinians. Furthermore, it has in many respects increased the already high levels of political polarization regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and, in many cases, allowed for the debate over BDS to overshadow the debate over the occupation itself.

BDS as a tactic is not new. There was also the large-scale BDS campaign in the 1970s and 1980s against South Africa, demanding that that country end its apartheid system and allow for majority rule. Other BDS campaigns in recent decades have targeted Burma, Sudan, and other countries with notorious human rights records. In Europe and elsewhere, there is a small but growing BDS campaign against the ongoing Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara. However, the BDS campaign targeting Israel has resulted in unprecedented controversy. Part of the reason is that it targets the world's only Jewish state, raising questions as to why the BDS campaign against Israel has become the focus of so many. There are some valid responses: While there are a large number of other governments, including many in the Middle East, which engage in even worse human rights abuses, there is a much stronger legal case for international mobilization against human rights abuses in territories recognized as being under foreign belligerent occupation, including legal restrictions on foreign companies unfairly profiting from violations of international humanitarian law. There are also clear international prohibitions against occupying powers transferring civilian settlers onto lands seized by military force and, by extension, supporting such colonization efforts economically. Similarly, there are a host of legal issues regarding the export of weapons and other military resources to countries that utilize them in suppressing the rights of those under foreign military occupation, particularly when the use of such weapons results in large-scale civilian casualties. And, in no other situation has there been such a widespread organized call by civil society for the utilization of such tactics as there has been in Palestine.

In addition, BDS advocates in the United States note how Israel gets far more U.S. aid than any other country, the United States has used its veto power in the United Nations on scores of occasions to protect Israel from international accountability, and many U.S. officials rationalize for human rights abuses and violations of international law committed by Israel that

they would condemn if committed by most other countries. Since Israel is already being “singled out” by the U.S. government for support, so goes this argument, it is thereby reasonable to single out Israel in a BDS campaign.

However, even among critics of the Israeli occupation and discrimination against Arab citizens of Israel, there are still concerns about the BDS campaign targeting Israel. As with previous Third World solidarity movements in the West, some of the most vocal advocates can take rather hardline positions, in some extreme cases including overt anti-Semitism. In addition, the fact that, historically, boycotts of Jewish businesses have long been part of anti-Semitic campaigns—including Germany immediately preceding the Holocaust—calls for boycotting Israel and companies investing in Israel (and even just the occupied territories) can quite understandably bring up fears and suspicions among many Jews both in Israel and the Diaspora.

Another problem among some observers is that the formal BDS call fails to distinguish between Israel and the occupied territories and explicitly calls for the right of return for Palestinian refugees and their descendants, which would leave Jews as a minority in Israel and end its unique role as a Jewish state. Even among many who believe that Israeli colonization of the West Bank has reached a point where a viable two-state solution is no longer possible and some sort of binational state or some other system which guarantees both individual and collective rights should be the goal, this failure to make the important legal distinction between Israel within its internationally recognized borders and territories under foreign belligerent occupation may be a tactical mistake. Focusing on the stronger moral and legal case against Israel’s ongoing occupation of Palestinian lands seized in the 1967 war, illegal colonization of occupied territory, siege of the Gaza Strip, and denial of the Palestinians’ right to self-determination—positions which have much greater popular support in the West than the effective dissolution of Israel—would seem to be far more effective. The BDS campaign would be far more effective if focused on issues of human rights, international law, and self-determination instead of being distracted by divisive arguments regarding Israel’s “right to exist as Jewish state” or the nature of Zionism.

A BDS campaign focused on ending the occupation would therefore have a much greater impact than one focused on focusing on Israel itself. Among the few major successes of

the BDS campaign has been in getting some major religious denominations and pension plans to divest from companies supporting the occupation and settlements and forcing some companies, such as Soda Stream, to end their operations in illegal settlements. By contrast, no companies have withdrawn from Israel itself and a number of entities which have divested from companies supporting the occupation have explicitly noted that they are not advocating a total boycott of Israel. Similarly, a number of prominent individuals who have pledged to support the academic and cultural boycott of Israel have stressed that they will do so until Israel ends its occupation and is not contingent on granting the wholesale right of return for Palestinian refugees and their descendants, which—despite its admittedly strong moral appeal and sound legal basis—is not as attainable or widely-supported.

Ironically, the Israeli government, the U.S. government, and many state governments in the United States also fail to distinguish between the Israel and the Israeli-occupied territories when it comes to BDS. In a number of states which have passed laws forbidding state contracts with companies and other entities which boycott Israel, as well as in a major anti-BDS bill currently before Congress, “Israel” is defined in the legislation to include “territories controlled by Israel,” thereby targeting even those who support boycotts and divestment only in regard to the occupation and settlements, not Israel itself. Since there are currently no U.S. companies which boycott Israel and it is already illegal under U.S. law to boycott of Israel, these bipartisan legislative initiatives are not “pro-Israel” bills, but pro-occupation and pro-settlements bills. In the bill currently before Congress, which appears likely to be passed, any company that refuses for political reasons to trade or invest in an Israeli settlement in the West Bank would be subjected to major fines, even if they invested in Israel itself, sold their products in Israel, and purchased goods from Israeli entities inside the Green Line.

In short, in addition to opposing Palestinian armed struggle, any role by the United Nations or international legal entities, or any diplomatic pressure on the Netanyahu government to compromise, the Trump administration and a large bipartisan majority of state and federal elected officials in the United States also appear determined to suppress nonviolent resistance to the occupation as well, even the most limited forms of BDS. Both parties have made clear that the Palestinians’ only recourse is engaging in direct negotiations with the

Netanyahu government under the auspices of the Trump administration, which—needless to say—will bring them no closer to ending the occupation and colonization of what remains of Palestine.

Despite all this, recent history has repeatedly demonstrated the power of strategic nonviolent action against seemingly insurmountable odds. As a result, I still believe it can make a difference—even here.

I wish I could provide you with a blueprint as to how to do it. I don't have one and, even if I did, you know the situation here much better than I do and I would have no right to push for it. However, I could throw out a number of ideas and general observations which would apply both to those of you who believe the establishment of a viable independent Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel is still a possibility as well to those of you believe a single state with guaranteed rights and equality for both peoples is at this point the necessary goal. And these observations would certainly apply to those of you who are simply focusing primarily on the rights of Arab citizens of Israel as well.

The theme of this conference is “Beyond Dialogue.” Dialogue is indeed important. Jews and Arabs need to hear each other's stories, learn each other's history, understand how and why each other sees things the way they do, more fully appreciate both each other's unique individuality as well as their common humanity, and commit to nonviolence. However, it is critical to also acknowledge the gross asymmetry in power at this stage in history between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs and recognize that true reconciliation is not possible in the absence of justice. There is no contradiction between the use of nonviolent methods of waging conflict and nonviolent conflict resolution. Indeed, often the former is necessary to achieve the latter.

It is also critical to understand that just as an armed struggle or an electoral campaign cannot be won without study, preparation, and a good strategy, the same is true with nonviolent movements. Even while recognizing the unique aspects of the struggle here in Israel and Palestine, there is much that can be learned from other civil resistance campaigns and nonviolent movements from around the world as well as insights and analysis gained from

scholarly research of these struggles. We no longer have to rely simply on Gandhi or King, as inspirational as they may be. And, while those of us interested in nonviolent action owe a great intellectual debt to the late Gene Sharp, there are now scores of scholarly works and manuals which have greatly expanded on his work which may be even more useful in better understanding how nonviolent movements could make a difference in the particularly challenging situation with which you are faced. Consider checking out the online resources provided by the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (www.nonviolent-conflict.org) to get some ideas of the plethora of materials available.

To wage an effective nonviolent campaign, it helps to have a clear long-term goal. This has become more difficult in regard to ending the occupation, however. Many Israelis, Palestinians, and others have struggled for decades for an end to the occupation, which would then allow for a workable two-state solution through the creation of a viable Palestinian state in the occupied territories, with security guarantees for Israel, a withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces and settlers (with equitable land swaps where necessary), and a shared co-capital in Jerusalem. Many long-term advocates of a two-state solution are now considering the possibility that the demographics of dramatically expanded settlements, the right-wing Israeli government's opposition to such a peace plan, and the U.S. government's support for Israeli policies may have made that goal out of reach. As a result, rather than ending the occupation and withdrawing from the settlements, a more realistic goal at this point may be some kind of one-state solution guaranteeing the collective rights of both Israeli Jews and Palestinian rights.

Regardless of one's opinion on this question, there is still an important legal distinction between Israel within its internationally-recognized borders and territories recognized by the international community as being under a foreign belligerent occupation. And this distinction is important on a practical level as well because, if it's not too late for a viable two-state solution, an anti-occupation civil resistance campaign is necessary to make it happen. If it is too late, an anti-occupation civil resistance campaign will make clear to Israelis and to the world that it is the Israeli government, not the Palestinians, who have made it impossible.

Even putting this difficult question aside, it is absolutely critical to challenge the sense of normalcy by many Israeli Jews. The ongoing injustice of the occupation and colonization of East Jerusalem and the West Bank, the inhumane siege of the Gaza Strip, and the denial of equal rights for Arab citizens of Israel is not only morally wrong, but threatens the long terms security of Israeli Jews as well.

When I was born in the Southern United States in the 1950s, segregation and discrimination against African-Americans was accepted as normal. Martin Luther King and other supporters of Civil Rights for African-Americans came to the realization that the most effective means to achieve racial justice was to challenge this sense of normalcy by engaging in a campaign of nonviolent civil disobedience.

At that time, there were many liberal white Americans who opposed segregation and sincerely believed racism was wrong, yet opposed the use of nonviolent action. They argued that, since the United States was a democracy, black Americans and their allies should work through the system and that breaking even unjust laws would create disharmony and discord, resulting in violence. King responded by noting that not only was there ongoing violence by white authorities and vigilantes against African-Americans that would routinely go unpunished, but the structural violence of segregation and discrimination was even worse. Furthermore, the political and legal system in the South at that time was incapable of making the necessary changes without pressure from below. King recognized that nonviolent resistance would provoke a creative tension which would force white America to face up to the injustice of segregation and discrimination, that the repression of authorities using police dogs, fire hoses, and truncheons against nonviolent protesters would make visible the injustice that was already there, and that the sense of normalcy would no longer be possible.

This is what you are facing here in Israel today. For there to be peace and justice in Israel and Palestine, a large-scale campaign of civil resistance is necessary.

King and the others realized that such a resistance had to be nonviolent. Violent resistance by the African-American minority would alienate white allies, justify even more brutal repression, and make victory impossible. What emerged was what observers at the time referred to as the “New Negro”—challenging both the stereotype of African-Americans as weak

and subservient to their white masters as well as the stereotype of African-Americans as violent savages. Americans were able to see black people as the brave and civilized ones facing up to the brutal repression of Southern authorities.

This is why civil resistance needs to be nonviolent.

Let me note that I am not a strict pacifist. Indeed, under international law, those under foreign belligerent occupation have the right to take up arms to fight for their freedom, as long as they target military personnel and not civilians. However, the state of Israel has all the advantages when it comes to military force. This is not a land of mountains and jungle that can provide sanctuary for a guerrilla army. The Israeli state has the technology, the weapons, and the will to savagely suppress any use of military force, as they have demonstrated in the wars in Gaza where the casualty ratio was more than 40:1 and 70% of the Palestinian casualties were civilian.

Even the use of non-lethal violence can be counter-productive. Many within Israel and the United States have defended Israeli border guards gunning down scores of Palestinians in Gaza in recent months on the grounds that some of the protesters were rolling burning tires and throwing projectiles, despite the fact that these did not actually threaten the lives of Israeli soldiers. Similarly, many in Israel and the United States defended the killing of ten crewmen on the humanitarian aid flotilla back in 2010, even though legally crewmen have the right to defend their ship if boarded on the high seas and five of those killed were not resisting the Israeli raid. The news media will always depict a movement which uses mixed tactics as its most violent component, even if the violent component consists of a handful of individuals among many thousands of participants.

As a result, nonviolent discipline is critically important. And, once again, I'm not saying this in terms of moral judgement, I'm saying this as a strategic analyst who has a sense of what works and what doesn't work.

Nonviolence is particularly important when it comes to the case of Israel. The history of terrorism against Israelis—as well as the history of pogroms, genocide, and other violence inflicted upon Jews over the centuries—make Israelis the last people who could respond rationally and consider the need for compromise or compassion in the face of violence.

There are many hundreds of nonviolent tactics that can be utilized. It could be as simple as replacing road signs or neatly pasting on existing road signs the Arab names for Arab villages in the place of the phonetic Hebrew in Arabic script which is currently the norm. It could include defensive actions, such as Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs blocking bulldozers tearing down Palestinian homes or preparing the ground for new illegal settlements or extensions of the separation barrier inside the West Bank. It could include joint efforts to retake confiscated West Bank land by having large numbers of Israelis and Palestinians march in and set up tents or other portable dwellings. It could include increasing numbers of Israelis recognizing “Yesh G’vul” and refuse to serve in the occupied territories. It could include blocking the Jewish-only highways connecting Israeli settlements with Israel. It could mean endorsing campaigns of boycotts, divestment, and sanctions—at least in regard to the occupation, the settlements, and other Israeli institutions which violate human rights and international law. And it can include strengthening and building more alternative institutions, such as Wahat al-Salam/Neve Shalom, which challenges the existing order by showing what a future just and equitable society might look like.

Not everyone will agree with some of these tactics and certainly not everyone would be willing to take part. But it is just a sampling of the variety of activities that fall under strategic nonviolent action.

One campaign to consider would be one targeting the United States, given the critical role Washington has taken—particularly under the current administration, but in many respects under previous administrations as well—in supporting the Israeli government in its occupation and colonization of Palestinian lands and its attacks on civilians neighborhoods as well as in failing to be an honest broker in the peace process.

It is impossible to be a fair mediator in a peace process while simultaneously being the primary military, economic, and diplomatic supporter of one of the two parties, particularly the far more powerful of the two parties. Indeed, one of the biggest myths regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is that U.S. policy is pro-Israel. It is certainly anti-Palestinian, but supporting the agenda of Likud and other right-wing parties threatens Israelis’ long-term interests as well. I would strongly encourage joint Israeli-Palestinian protests at the U.S. embassy and whenever

American officials come to visit to make clear the message that the United States is not an honest broker, that the U.S. is doing great harm to both Palestinians and Israelis, and that U.S. policy must change to support the forces of peace, justice, and reconciliation rather than the forces of occupation and repression. The American people need to see that both Palestinians and Israelis recognize that we are doing you no favors by supporting Netanyahu and the settlers.

Despite Hamas leaders cynically trying to hijack the recent popular protests along the Gaza-Israeli border for their own political purposes and despite the Palestine Authority's periodic and opportunistic lip service to nonviolent resistance, these must be people's movements and not fronts for corrupt politicians and their narrow interests. And the movements must be more inclusive and more willing to set aside political differences on some issues in order to work together where you can agree. The nonviolent resistance campaigns much include both Islamist and secular Palestinians; progressive Zionists, post-Zionists, and anti-Zionists; Palestinians within Israel and in the occupied territories; and there must be an active effort to include more Mizrachi Jews.

In conclusion, as discouraging as the current situation here may be, I am actually optimistic about the power of strategic nonviolent action to bring peace, justice, and reconciliation for Israelis and Palestinians simply because the status quo is untenable and it is the only thing that can. We have seen how the power of nonviolent civil resistance has brought down Communist regimes, military strongmen, monarchs, colonial rule, and other autocracies from the poorest nations of Africa to the relatively affluent countries of Eastern Europe, how it has ended foreign occupations and colonial rule, and how it has brought greater democracy, justice, and equality in countless societies. This has not come, in most cases, from a moral or spiritual commitment to nonviolence, but simply because it works. The people of Israel and Palestine have seen how violence does not work, how it has not provided Israelis with security and global acceptance nor has it brought Palestinians justice and self-determination for Palestinians.

So, I implore you: Do not give up on the possibility that, with a clear vision and good strategic thinking, along with the support of those in the Jewish and Palestinian diasporas and other international allies, a nonviolent movement of both Jews and Arabs can indeed bring about peace, justice, and reconciliation.

Be'ezrat Hashem/Inshallah.