Pursuing "Peace" in Israel/Palestine

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PURSUING "PEACE" IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE
By Maia Hallward*

INTRODUCTION

Nine years after the outbreak of the second intifada (uprising) in September 2000 and sixteen years after the signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993, Israelis and Palestinians seem as far as ever from a final status agreement. Diplomatic efforts by the George W. Bush administration—notably the Performance-Based Road Map to Peace and the 2007 Annapolis Conference—avoided the core conflict issues, and delayed such negotiations by emphasizing "provisional" borders.¹ Not only do such tactics allow more time for consolidating "facts on the ground" that can prejudice final status negotiations, but the lack of a political horizon undercuts moderates working to "sell" peace to the public.² Military approaches to solving the conflict have also failed to achieve results. Qassam rocket attacks from Gaza have resulted in dire poverty from an on-going siege of the Strip, while Israel's military attempts to secure the release of soldiers captured by Hamas and Hezbollah in 2006 have failed, bringing condemnation of the government's war effort.³ The intense conflict in Gaza and Southern Israel during Operation "Cast Lead" (December 27, 2008-January 28, 2009) resulted in over 1300 Palestinian deaths, four Israeli deaths, not to mention the thousands of Palestinians and scores of Israelis who were injured.⁴

Several problems exist in mainstream scholarly and media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and efforts to "manage" or "resolve" it.⁵ First, there is little consideration given to what the term "peace" means to Israelis and Palestinians, who not only tend to have quite different views regarding the notion but also view it as a "dirty" word given the failures of the Oslo "peace" process. Second, the focus tends to be on conflict and on failures or obstacles rather than on the Israelis and Palestinians who continue to work nonviolently for a just, lasting, and secure peace between the peoples. While it is important to identify the obstacles to a durable, negotiated settlement at the official level so that scholars, policy makers and practitioners can address those challenges, "success" stories from groups that have persisted in pursuing peace even in times of violent conflict can similarly assist in the effort. Not only can the
experiences of such groups inform policy choices by Israeli and Palestinian political actors, but news of such groups’ efforts can work to ameliorate the negative stereotypes prevalent in both societies and the “no partner” narrative that dominates the discourse. Mainstream media coverage and the traditional portrayal of this conflict in literature tends to differ significantly from the lived situation on the ground, zeroing in on particular events, failing to cover others, and providing one-sided interpretations, which omit the multiplicity of perspectives found in Israeli and Palestinian societies (Deadly Distortion, 2005). In order to counter such myopic treatments of the conflict and to illustrate alternative frameworks for “peace” pursued by nongovernmental organizations, this article will provide a) an overview of official peacemaking efforts, b) a discussion of varying Israeli and Palestinian perspectives on “peace” and c) snapshots of a range of nonviolent civil society peacemaking efforts that have continued despite the absence of official peace efforts.

TALKING ABOUT TALKING: THE OSLO “PEACE” PROCESS

The Oslo Accords were signed in 1993 by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat. The Accords were the result of secret back-channel negotiations mediated by Norway and pre-empted the official negotiations that were simultaneously being conducted under the auspices of the US State Department. Although the accords were widely heralded, they were also widely misrepresented as a peace agreement; instead, the Oslo Accords consisted of an exchange of letters of mutual recognition and a Declaration of Principles (DoP) that established a “transitional period not exceeding five years, leading to a permanent settlement based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.” Thus, the Oslo agreement was not an agreement on “peace”, but an agreement to begin a process of negotiation in pursuit of “a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement and historic reconciliation through the agreed political process.”

Numerous factors contributed to the signing of the Oslo Accords, including structural shifts from the end of the Cold War and the 1991 Gulf War. The Palestinian intifada, which began in December 1987 caught the PLO leadership in exile by surprise, and Arafat perceived the rise in the unified local leadership in the West Bank and Gaza as a potential threat to his authority. Israeli leaders wished to end the uprising, which was expensive, caused negative press (images of Palestinian youth with rocks against Israeli tanks), and created security challenges. The Madrid Conference (1991) following the Gulf War led to a series of bilateral negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians (officially part of the Jordanian delegation) as well as back-channel talks, such as those in Oslo.
Peace in the Making? The Content of the Oslo Accords

After the famous handshake on the White House Lawn, Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams reached several interim agreements, although they made no progress on “final status” issues, which included borders, security, water, settlements, refugees, and the status of Jerusalem. The Oslo II agreement (1995) created the Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority (PA) and divided the West Bank into areas A, B and C with varying degrees of Palestinian and Israeli civil and security control.\(^{11}\) In total, this meant that Palestinians controlled about 7% of the territory in the West Bank, most of which was non-contiguous.\(^{12}\) Other agreements included the Hebron Protocol (1997) and the Wye River Memorandum (1998), which committed the parties to implementing prior agreements and resulted in the redeployment of Israeli troops from parts of Hebron, where several hundred Israeli Jewish settlers live in the heart of the city of several hundred thousand Palestinians.

For all intents and purposes, the Oslo process ended with the Camp David summit between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in July 2000. Barak sought to end the interim period and the Oslo redeployment process by presenting a final offer to the Palestinians (and the Israeli public) prior to elections. While Barak went farther than any previous Israeli leader (who refused to discuss any of the final status issues, particularly Jerusalem), Israel was to annex large settlement blocks, retain control of water resources, bypass roads, airspace and borders. Furthermore, Palestinians were divided into three major canton blocks, autonomy in Jerusalem was limited, and there was no mention of the Palestinian refugee issue. The talks ended in disaster, and US President Bill Clinton joined with Israel in blaming Arafat for rejecting what became known as “Barak’s generous offer.”\(^{13}\) Although the Al-Aqsa, or second, intifada began after Ariel Sharon’s controversial visit to the Temple Mount/Haram esh-Sharif on September 28, 2000, Palestinian and Israeli negotiators met in Taba in January 2001 to move forward from where they had left off at Camp David. There, Clinton presented his “parameters” for a negotiated two-state solution, which included proposed processes (not specific formulations) concerning the exchange of land, the Palestinian refugee question, and the final status of Jerusalem.\(^{14}\)

Neither “peace” nor “process”: problems with the Oslo Accords

One of the major problems with the Oslo Accords was the general misconception that they represented a peace agreement, rather than agreement on an interim process that might lead to final status negotiations on the core conflict issues. From the beginning, the Oslo Accords highlighted the
“asymmetry” of the conflict. Israel is a sovereign state with a developed economy and the fourth largest military in the world, has the backing of the world’s sole remaining superpower, and boasts an influential Jewish Diaspora. In contrast, Palestinians lack statehood, are impoverished, and lack a military, though there is a substantial, but largely disenfranchised, Palestinian Diaspora. The letters of “mutual recognition” exchanged between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat as part of the Oslo Accords reflect this asymmetry. The PLO recognized the State of Israel’s right “to exist in peace and security,” affirmed its commitment to UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 (the basis for a two-state solution), committed itself to the peace process, and renounced terrorism. In contrast, the brief letter from Yitzhak Rabin states: “...in light of the PLO commitments included in your letter, the Government of Israel has decided to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and commence negotiations with the PLO within the Middle East peace process”. What is more, Rabin does not mention UN resolutions, Palestinian statehood, or a commitment to negotiations. This asymmetry was aggravated by the fact that the Palestinian negotiators had been living in exile and were ignorant of the situation on the ground.

Although there is no Palestinian state, the international community has largely used an inter-state conflict resolution framework for addressing the conflict, overlooking inter-group conflict dynamics (Barak, 2005). Because of the secrecy of the negotiations, the Israeli and Palestinian publics were neither adequately involved in nor prepared for the compromises necessary in the pursuit of peace. Consequently, spoilers existed in both communities, and extremist violence (such as the 1994 massacre of praying Muslims by settler Baruch Goldstein or the suicide bombings carried out by Hamas) posed an obstacle to implementing agreements. The interim, phased approach of Oslo did not build trust, as Israel escalated settlement construction to create “facts on the ground” and the PA did not fully reign in militants. These trends, combined with the institution of checkpoints and road blocks, which numbered in the hundreds during the second intifada, contributed to skepticism regarding the prospect of peace.

The Palestinian Authority was often treated as if it were a state, yet many Palestinians saw the PA as an agent of Israel, created by the Oslo Accords to circumvent the Palestinian Diaspora. Its powers were limited by Israel; most importantly in the financial sector. Israel, for instance, controlled tax revenues collected from Palestinians, which it then released to the PA for use in paying salaries. From an economic standpoint, the PA, whose duties included such things as arresting militants, as well as providing health, education, and sanitation services, were more cost effective for Israel, thereby decreasing the price of its occupation of Palestinian lands. Although the PA
was designed to be an “interim” government, the interim period extended beyond the five-year mark without any provision for new elections. Palestinians and Israelis alike were frustrated with the ineptitude and corruption of the PA, yet interpreted it differently. For Israel, it demonstrated the lack of a real partner for peace, and for Palestinians, it showed the PA was simply another form of occupation. This example illustrates a broader problem with Oslo and its aftermath: Palestinians and Israelis tend to have very different conceptions regarding the roots of the conflict and the parameters of “peace”. The next section will explore some of these differences.

CONTENDING CONCEPTIONS OF CONFLICT & “PEACE”

Palestinians and Israelis experience the conflict in different ways, which affects their definition of “peace”. Peace and conflict resolution scholars and practitioners often distinguish between “negative” peace (the absence of war or armed violence) and “positive” peace (the presence of freedom, equity, satisfaction of basic needs). Israelis tend to emphasize the need for “peace with security” (negative peace), due to the threat of suicide attacks, Qassam rocket bombardments, and its history of regional conflict. Israel’s conditioning of negotiations on an end of Palestinian violence also illustrates its focus on negative peace. Palestinians, in contrast, call for “peace with justice” (positive peace), inasmuch as they experience the conflict in terms of a lack of self-determination (freedom) and the socio-economic and political hardships of living under Israeli military occupation. Because of the very different socio-political conditions in which Israelis and Palestinians live and the rival views of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, Palestinian and Israelis have tended to define peace and conflict resolution efforts differently. This reflects a divide between peace studies, which tends to focus on nonviolent social change in the pursuit of justice and which occasionally leads to an increase in “conflict”, and conflict resolution, which aims to reduce violent conflict, and may privilege status quo power relations by focusing on overt rather than “structural” or “latent” disputes.

Palestinian Perspectives on “Peace”

For many Palestinians, the Oslo Accords were not a victory for peace, but rather a legitimation of Israel’s occupation. Corrupt PA officials, many of whom returned to the West Bank after years of exile, were recognized by their fancy cars. Because many Palestinians equated the Oslo “peace” process with a worsening social, economic and political situation, the word “peace” had been sullied within the Palestinian context. Many Palestinians felt they were:
cheated by the word “peace,” which hasn’t meant justice for Palestinians...while the whole world was talking about peace [during Oslo], the Palestinian economy was going downhill, checkpoints were being instigated, homes demolished, settlements built. So Palestinians believe that they were misled by this peace process, and that the Israeli peace groups were in it for how it would benefit them, without achieving justice and freedom and an end to occupation.^^

This experience has led to an avoidance of the word “peace” to describe Palestinian organizations and activities that might be labeled as such elsewhere. To further compound this distrust of “peace” initiatives, U.S. President George W. Bush called Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, known for his role in the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres, a “man of peace” in 2004.

Rather than talk about “peace,” some Palestinians emphasize those aspects of their history related to nonviolent resistance against Israeli occupation and their rejection of arms in the quest for freedom. This resistance comes in a variety of forms, including trying to build a sustainable economy in the face of military occupation and attempting to maintain dignity despite the humiliation suffered at checkpoints. In the Palestinian context, peace and conflict resolution work entails nonviolent efforts toward ending the conflict, often including “…consciousness-raising activity, human rights advocacy, dialogue, and the provision of services intended to familiarize others to the Palestinian concern for justice.” Palestinians pursue peace through seeking justice; they assert that peace requires an end to Israel’s occupation. For many, this means eschewing cooperation with Israelis who do not openly speak against the occupation because they view such relationships—between occupier and occupied—as inherently unequal and contrary to peacebuilding.

**Israeli Perspectives on “Peace”**

Although in the wake of the second intifada “peace” is also seen as a dirty word by many Israelis, the Oslo Accords were seen as a success by the mainstream Israeli peace movement as it recognized the PLO and affirmed the two-state solution. For Israelis, peace means secure borders without the threat of terrorism or invasion, as well as normal relations with all its neighbors. The mainstream Israeli peace movement as epitomized by Peace Now, has tended to be strongly Zionist with close ties to the Israeli military. In contrast to peace movements in other parts of the world, which tend to focus on “universal” principles, including those of liberty, equality, and human rights, the Israeli peace movement has tended to be more “particular” or ethnocentric.
because the goal of the two-state solution is to preserve Israel’s Jewish majority. Furthermore, Israeli “peace” activism in Israel is generally distinct from movements for economic and social justice, even though the “radical” peace movement is working to highlight the socio-economic implications of Israel’s occupation and settlement policies. Mainstream Israeli peace activists often seek recognition of Israel from their Palestinian counterparts and believe joint activities form the basis for friendship and peace; they often see Palestinian boycotts as contrary to the spirit of peacemaking and an indication of rejectionism.

Peace work in Israel is often divided into two camps: those focusing on matters related to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and those emphasizing issues associated with the 1967 Six-Day War. After 1948, a number of Palestinian Arabs remained in what became Israel; they now have Israeli citizenship and account for 20% of Israel’s population. A number of organizations work on Arab-Jewish relations within Israel, some focus on “coexistence” and micro-level problems of fear, hatred, and negative stereotypes, while others address the cultural and socio-economic inequalities between Arabs and Jews and struggle for full civic equality. For the other camp of Israeli peacemakers, the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 is an important issue, for it has provided the Israeli government with a bargaining chip with which it might exchange “land for peace.” For most Israelis, the struggle with Palestinians dwelling in the Occupied Territories is distinct from their conflict with Arabs living within the 1948 boundaries, although this is starting to change.

Overall, the Oslo years were positive for Israel. It experienced economic benefits from “peace” with increased tourism and increased trade partnerships. Most thought that peace had arrived, and thus there was little effort on the part of mainstream peace movements to encourage the Israeli government to fulfill its obligations under the Oslo. The failed Camp David summit and the collapse of joint initiatives were seen as evidence that Palestinians could not be regarded as true partners for peace (IPCRI, 2002). Partly due to this understanding, Israel has undertaken a policy of unilateral separation as evidenced in the building of the “security fence” and the 2005 disengagement from Gaza. Such policies highlight the orientation toward negative peace, and ignore issues of structural violence. Likewise, calls by the current Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, for an “economic peace” highlights a significant difference between Israeli and Palestinian understandings of the conflict; the plan would delay discussion of political issues until after economic improvement, and it ignores the structural impediments to economic growth (such as roadblocks, the lack of border control, etc). This approach has been criticized by some in the Israeli peace movement for (falsely) assuming that Palestinians with “full stomachs” will be
OFFICIAL PEACEKEEPING EFFORTS IN THE WAKE OF OSLO'S FAILURE

Several peace initiatives have occurred since the Oslo Accords, although none has maintained momentum. For example, the Geneva Accord (2003), sponsored by the Geneva Initiative, was a Track II (unofficial) initiative drafted by high level Israelis and Palestinians with experience in government. Like the Oslo Accords, the Geneva Initiative aimed at a two-state solution; unlike Oslo, the Geneva Initiative sought to address the permanent status issues like borders, Jerusalem, refugees, and settlements that had evaded Oslo negotiators. The Geneva Initiative sought to provide a model from which government officials could negotiate and to demonstrate that there was a partner on the other side of the Green Line (the border between Israel proper and the Occupied Territories).

The Arab Peace Initiative, endorsed by the Arab League in March 2002, was drafted by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia (then crown prince). The Arab Peace Initiative was overshadowed by a suicide bombing that occurred the same day in Netanya, and by Israel’s subsequent reinvasion of the West Bank on March 29 in Operation “Defensive Shield.” In March 2007 the Arab League fully re-endorsed the plan, which calls for full normalization of relations with Israel in exchange for a return to the 1967 borders and a just solution for the Palestinian refugees. The official Israeli response has been to acknowledge the general spirit of the plan, but to reject the specific call for repatriation of Palestinian refugees. Again, dissimilar understandings of peace and conflict pose major obstacles to the Arab Peace Initiative. For the Arab League, peaceful coexistence and the normalization of relations with Israel will, it is hoped, result from an Israeli withdrawal; for Israel, peace and normalization are the prerequisites for such action.

The Performance-Based Road Map for Peace (2003) and the Annapolis Conference (November 2007) have been criticized for being limited in their aims and for lacking implementation and enforcement mechanisms. The Road Map sought “a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict by 2005” and specified the goal of a Palestinian state, albeit with “provisional” borders. Like Oslo, the Road Map emphasized the need for Palestinians to end violence and to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure and for Israelis to end settlement construction; however, obligations and timetables were not enforced. The Annapolis conference was an effort to revive the Road Map, which had never progressed beyond Phase I (which includes an end to Palestinian violence, Palestinian political reform and Israeli withdrawal and freeze on settlement expansion) and to support Palestinian President Mahmoud
Abbas after Hamas took over control of the Gaza Strip in June 2007. Despite intensive meetings between Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams over several months, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President Abbas failed to reach any declaration of principles on final status issues. Instead, an ambitious "joint understanding" sought to reach a bilateral agreement by the end of 2008. Both leaders, however, faced significant domestic political constraints, not to mention the continued lack of ability to implement Phase I of the Road Map obligations, a pre-requisite for implementing any peace agreement.

WORKING FOR PEACE IN TIMES OF CONFLICT

Despite peacemaking challenges at the official level, including distrust, different strategic interests, and domestic political challenges, some Israelis and Palestinians have continued to work across the socio-political divide for a just, lasting, and secure peace. These activists face many obstacles, including the difficulty for Israelis and Palestinians to meet in person—Israeli law prohibits Israeli citizens from entering Palestinian controlled areas and it is extremely difficult for Palestinians to obtain permits to enter Israel. Furthermore, Palestinians and Israelis face considerable domestic or "internal" challenges, including being seen as a "collaborator" or a "traitor". Some nonviolent activists have been killed by the Israeli military, others seriously injured, and many more arrested. Divides within the peace movement and the obstacles posed by the government and military also hamper activism.

Peace activism comes in a wide range of forms; the Multi-track diplomacy model, for example, identifies nine such "tracks" that interact for the purpose of peace. Given space limitations, only a few types of initiatives will be discussed here, i.e., those related to problem-solving (Track II), human rights and international law, coexistence, and nonviolent action. For each case, the basic premises of the model will be briefly summarized and a contemporary Israeli-Palestinian example will be given.

Problem-solving/Track II

Problem-solving workshops are a type of "second track" or "citizen's" diplomacy, which brings together influential representatives of communities in conflict who lack official status to work together to identify the underlying conflict dynamics and devise strategies to address them. One of the basic premises of such workshops is that by improving communication between the parties and by building human connections, a constituency for peace is developed, one that can hopefully leverage support for official level negotiations. Over the decades, numerous problem-solving workshops have
sought either to create the pre-conditions for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations or to inject new ideas into a stalled process. The Oslo Accords, for example, were built on second track connections. Bringing Peace Together (BPT) began in 2004 in an effort to bring together representatives of the mainstream, pragmatic Israeli and Palestinian peace movements. The goal was to coordinate the efforts among the organizations due in part to the small number of members in each group and also to enhance communication between the groups, which was often lacking. At its meetings, BPT examines contemporary issues from a variety of Israeli and Palestinian perspectives, seeking common ground from which to devise policy options and negotiating strategies. The year after the Annapolis Conference, it organized a major conference to review possibilities for reaching a peace agreement. The group continues to meet several times a year to engage in dialogue on key policy issues and to strategize as to how to best influence their respective governments and civil societies in pursuit of a lasting peace agreement.

Human-rights and international law

The human rights and international law approach to peace emphasizes the importance of justice in preventing war and violence as well as the use of legal mechanisms to manage conflict nonviolently. Groups such as Rabbis for Human Rights, Machsom (Checkpoint) Watch, B'Tselem, and al-Haq use standards of human rights and humanitarian law in an effort to end egregious abuses that fuel conflict and harm Palestinian and Israeli society. International law, such as the Geneva Conventions, is also employed to challenge Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territories, which peace groups identify as a major source of the on-going conflict. For human rights activists, the integration of human rights standards into the Israeli and Palestinian judicial systems is critical for a just, lasting, and secure peace because when people are confident in the judicial process and accept the rule of law, they are less likely to use violence to achieve "justice".

International law has been critical to efforts addressing the on-going humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, especially after Israel implemented a policy of siege after the 2006 Palestinian elections. Israeli and Palestinian activists have highlighted the inconsistencies between Israeli claims and international standards of human rights and humanitarian law by documenting cases, writing reports, filing court petitions, and organizing aid convoys. For example, activists have challenged Israel's claim that Gaza is no longer occupied by pointing to its control of all entry and exit points and its denial of necessary supplies, including vital medicines, across the borders. Groups like Physicians for Human Rights-Israel have worked to secure visas for cancer...
patients and other critically ill Palestinians to access medical treatment in Israel (Gaza's health system is inadequate), and in January 2008 a coalition of 26 Israeli organizations organized a relief convoy to protest Israel's blockade. Parallel rallies were held on either side of the border although no people or goods were allowed to cross.\textsuperscript{47} Israeli and Palestinian politicians, journalists, and civil society leaders have sailed with the Free Gaza movement from Cyprus to Gaza in order to raise awareness about the dire conditions in Gaza and break the siege. During the intense conflict from December 27, 2008-January 18, 2009 Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations worked together to collect information and to appeal to the international community through blogs, press releases, and meetings with officials; since then they have pushed for an independent investigation into human rights violations.\textsuperscript{48}

**Co-existence**

Coexistence efforts focus on humanizing the “Other”, and building relationships as the foundation of peace between competing people groups. Given that 20% of Israel's population is Arab Palestinian, coexistence activities have long occurred within 1948 Israel as well as between Israeli citizens and Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Within Israel, Arabs and Jews attend separate schools and generally live in different communities. Prominent Israeli politicians, such as the current Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, openly advocate the transfer of Israel's Arab citizens to the Palestinian Territories.\textsuperscript{49} However, initiatives like the Hand-in-Hand school, which teaches Arab and Jewish students together in both Hebrew and Arabic, or the intentional Arab-Jewish village Neve Shalom-Wahat al Salaam, seek to build bridges rather than walls.\textsuperscript{50} Across the Green Line, groups such as the Bereaved Families Forum (close family members lost to the conflict), and Combatants for Peace (former Israeli soldiers and former Palestinian militants) have demonstrated the power of jointly organizing their forces. The latter has particularly made excellent use of mobilizing its members’ “patriot” status in the cause of peace. Organizations such as these work within their own societies as well as across national boundaries to humanize the other, share both narratives, and build a culture of nonviolence.\textsuperscript{51}

**Nonviolent Action**

Those engaging in nonviolent action seek to re-arrange power relations within society so as to better ensure justice and equality. Nonviolent activism puts power in the hands of the weak by allowing them to withdraw their consent from laws, policies, and authorities deemed unjust or (morally) illegitimate; it can be a strategic or spiritual choice.\textsuperscript{52} Although Palestinians are
portrayed as terrorists in the Western media, they have a long tradition of nonviolent activism that often goes unnoticed in the press. Israeli and Palestinian organizations have struggled against Israeli policies of home demolition and restrictions on freedom of movement; they have stood in front of bulldozers, organized strikes, and dismantled roadblocks. After the outbreak of the second intifada, Ta’ayush (Arab-Jewish partnership) joined with local Palestinian groups in large demonstrations and other activities aimed at ending violence and building peace. Villagers across the West Bank, often joined by Israeli activists, have demonstrated against the wall, which separates farmers from their land; Bil’in has not only engaged in over four years of weekly protest, but has organized international conferences on nonviolent struggle as well.

Israeli conscientious objection to military service is another form of nonviolent action. This has many different levels, from those refusing to serve in the occupied territories (like Yesh Gvul) to those refusing to serve in the military at all (like the Shministim). Not only can refusal result in a prison term, but because army service is a central component of Israeli identity—and a pre-requisite for many jobs and socio-economic benefits—it creates significant challenges. Israeli and Palestinian activists also protest Israel’s economic occupation through projects like Who Profits from the Occupation, a website run by the Israeli Coalition of Women for Peace (http://www.whoprofits.org/), and the boycott of settlement products organized by Gush Shalom (http://zope.gush-shalom.org/home/en/campaigns/boycott_settlements_products/). These websites document industries, products, and services benefiting from the on-going Israeli occupation and advocate consumer action. Although it is more controversial, some Israelis and Palestinians promote a more comprehensive boycott campaign targeting Israel akin to that used against apartheid South Africa.

CONCLUSION

Although in 2009 the Israeli-Palestinian conflict seems increasingly intractable at the official level, with a right-wing Israeli government led by Benjamin Netanyahu and deeply divided rival Palestinian governments, there are Israelis and Palestinians who continue to put themselves on the line for a nonviolent resolution of the conflict and a just, secure, and lasting peace agreement. Despite images portrayed in the Western media, both Israeli and Palestinian societies are highly diverse; a number of peace activists from each society have noted that they often have more in common with their fellow activists on the “other” side than they do with some in their own society. What these activists share is a dedication to nonviolence and equality, an acknowledgement of the pain suffered by the “Other,” and a long-term
commitment to struggle despite the many challenges.

A peaceful resolution of the conflict requires honoring the narratives of both peoples and finding a way for justice, security, and recognition for all. Support for Israeli and Palestinian peacemakers contributes to the bottom-up peacemaking that must accompany any successful top-down diplomatic process. The Oslo process demonstrated that without civil society engagement and public support, official agreements will not be implemented by politicians interested in short term gains. At the same time, strong leadership is needed to make tough decisions and to guide the populace along the appropriate path to reconciliation. Activists such as those discussed here have demonstrated that there is in fact a partner for peace on both sides of the Green Line; the way is not easy, but it is possible.

NOTES


5. There is wide range of terminology (and associated assumptions) regarding peace and conflict policy and practice. Some hold that conflict is natural and healthy if managed constructively (i.e., the goal is ‘management’) and that it can never be fully ‘resolved’. Others seek to ‘resolve’ violent conflicts by addressing root causes (and assume ‘managing’ means avoiding those core grievances).


9. Ibid.


11. Area ‘A’ consisted of major population centers (i.e. Ramallah, Bethlehem, Nablus, Jericho), over which the PA was given civil and security control. Area B consisted primarily of towns and villages, over which the PA and civil control. The remaining area (including all major roads) was deemed Area C, and was under full Israeli control.


13. For more discussion of the myth of Barak’s “generous offer” and the “no partner” myth, see (Parry, 2002) (Gordon, 2004). For a broader discussion of the problems with the peace process, see also (Meital, 2006; Slater, 2001).

14. To see the full text of the parameters, which are widely seen as the basis for a two-state solution, see “Clinton Parameters” http://www.fmep.org/documents/clinton_parameters12-3-00.html; “Barak’s Generous Offers” on http://gush-shalom.org/archives/offers.doc (accessed 20 October 2005).


http://world.mediamonitors.net/Headlines/Palestinian-Elections-At-the-Core-of-Palestinian-Calls-for-Reform (6 Feb 2009).


20. Since there is no Palestinian state, those living in the West Bank and Gaza have no citizenship, and Israel has never formally annexed the territory. Although Jewish settlers in the West Bank have full rights as Israeli citizens, Palestinians lack those rights. Palestinian refugees—except those in Jordan—also lack citizenship. Ethnic Palestinians who remained what became Israel in 1948 have Israeli citizenship.


28. The “radical” or “critical” peace movement (characterized by groups like the Alternative Information Center, Israeli Committee Against
Home Demolitions, Rabbis for Human Rights, Ta’ayush) tends to seek partnership with Palestinians, to analyze the conflict in terms of issues of power and “occupation”, and is more to the left than the ‘moderate’ peace movement, characterized by groups like Peace Now or Meretz, which tend to be comprised of middle and upper class Ashkenazi (European) Jews, often with ties to the military and political establishment.


31. Other terms include ‘separation barrier’ and ‘apartheid wall’. Approximately two times the length of the 1949 Armistice Line (‘Green Line’), the barrier consists of electronic surveillance equipment, watch towers, sand traps, roads, ditches and barbed wire. In urban centers it manifests as an eight meter high concrete wall. A 2004 International Court of Justice ruling deemed the structure illegal since much of it has been constructed within the West Bank rather than along the border, and called on Israel to dismantle it.


36. Hamas, designated a terror organization (although it is also social organization that provides educational and welfare services to the needy), was democratically elected in January 2006. Immediately, the international community—led by the US and Israel—boycotted the new government and cut off all foreign aid to the Palestinians. For more, see (Migdalovitz, 2007; Rose, 2008).

38. In order to maintain a ruling coalition in Israel, religious or ultra-nationalist parties have often held key seats necessary for securing a majority. This gives them power beyond their numbers and a say in key policy decisions. Since the Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006 when Hamas won a majority, there have been significant splits between President Abbas and his Fatah party and Hamas. Since June 2007, there have been two Palestinian governments, a Hamas government in Gaza and a largely technocratic government—under Fatah leadership—in the West Bank.

39. Palestinians are more likely to be targeted than Israelis and internationals, but activists such as Rachel Corrie (US) and Tom Hurndall (UK) were both killed by Israeli forces, and Tristan Anderson (US) remains in critical condition after being hit by a tear gas canister in Ni’lin (where four Palestinian demonstrators have been killed). In April 2009 Bassam Abu Rahme, a leader in the nonviolent struggle in Bil’in was killed by Israeli troops while he was asking them (in Hebrew) to hold fire due to an injured woman (Arraf, 2009; Macintyre, 2009).


48. For more information on the siege and efforts to overcome it, including short film clips and extensive links, see http://www.end-gaza-siege.ps/index.htm; http://gazaeng.blogspot.com/ also http://www.freegaaza.org/ (accessed 21 May 2009.)


50. For more complete descriptions, see http://nswas.org/ and http://www.handinhand12.org/ (accessed 21 May 2009)


