

## Engaging “Terrorism”: The Case of Palestine/Israel

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What counts as terrorism? A young Palestinian man enters a pizzeria on Jaffa Road in West Jerusalem, explosives strapped around his waist, and blows himself up, killing with him twenty Israelis: this horrific act is routinely named terrorism by media outlets and government officials. But how about the following: five boys from Khan Younis are walking home from school when one of them kicks a metal object by the side of the road. The object turns out to be a bomb planted by the Israeli military; it explodes, and all five children die. Was the Israeli decision to plant an explosive device in an area frequented by civilians an act of terror? Or consider the case of three-month-old Iman Hijo, also of Khan Younis, killed by a stray bullet from indiscriminate fire from Israeli military outposts guarding colonies in the Gaza Strip: terror victim or collateral damage? And what about pregnant Palestinian women trying to reach a hospital but turned back by Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint? When the baby dies, is she a victim of terror?

Terrorism, as a particular form of violence, is notoriously difficult to define. As with the case of pornography, it's hard to reach a consensus definition of terrorism, but also like pornography, people think they know it when they see it. For a pacifist to enter into the debate about what constitutes terrorism is particularly challenging, as it requires the pacifist to differentiate between species of a genus, violence, which must be categorically rejected as wrong, as sinful.

In this paper I undertake two interrelated tasks: first, examining the case of the Palestinian *intifada* (uprising, shaking off) against Israeli occupation, I describe how the discourse of terrorism as produced by government institutions, think-tanks, and the media serves ideological interests by delegitimizing the violence of one group as terrorism while justifying the violence

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of another group as counter-terrorism; second, rejecting the easy moral equivalence suggested by the phrase, “One person’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter,” I suggest that pacifist Christians can make moral distinctions among types of violence while simultaneously maintaining our conviction that *all* violence is a rebellious turning away from God, a failure to worship God properly. Making such distinctions, I suggest, is part of the pacifist Christian’s responsibility to use “middle axioms” (appeals to standards recognized by non-Christian actors) as we encourage states and revolutionary groups which aspire to statehood to place limitations on the sin-laden enterprise of war and revolution.<sup>1</sup> Even as we make these distinctions, however, and even as we promote practical alternatives to the politics of violence, the case of Palestine/Israel should prove a healthy reminder that our witness on behalf of the nonviolent politics of the Lamb will often appear foolish when measured against the ruling wisdom.

### **The Deceptive Discourse of “Terrorism”**

The way in which the discourse of terrorism can be deployed to serve ideological interests can be clearly seen in how it is routinely used to describe the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.<sup>2</sup> Israeli academics and military officers make up a significant percentage of the world’s self-proclaimed “experts” on terrorism, pundits who present their purportedly objective and scholarly analysis over talk show airwaves and in the pages of newsweeklies. Foremost in this group is former Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. A self-made terror “expert,” Netanyahu routinely expounds the view that terrorism presents a unique threat directed against the West from fanatical stateless groups; the notion that states might be purveyors of terror does not fit into Netanyahu’s conceptual scheme.<sup>3</sup> For Netanyahu, Israeli government officials, and pro-Israeli apologetes generally, all violence directed against Israel qualifies as terrorism. Not only, then, is the indiscriminate killing of Israeli civilians inside Israel proper by a suicide bomber terrorism, but so are attacks on settler-colonists and Israeli military personnel in the occupied territories.

While the delegitimizing of all Palestinian resistance to the military occupation has been a standard trope of Israeli discourse for decades, it gained new vigor since the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, with the Israeli government not-so-subtly seeking to use the U.S.-led “war on terror”

for its own ends, namely, to tar all Palestinian resistance with the brush of terrorism. Now perhaps Americans will understand the daily reality of Israelis, several pundits opined. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon repeatedly described Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat as “our Bin Laden,” with the implication that it would be hypocritical for the United States and its allies to criticize Israel for its actions in the occupied territories, as Israel was simply engaged in a similar form of counter-terrorism to that of the United States in its battle against al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Gideon Samet observes that the Arafat equals Bin Laden equation dominates the Israeli security establishment, and notes that this rhetorical move has had some effect in Washington. For example, at an Israeli conference on security in Herzilya in December 2001, former CIA director James Woolsey described Israel as a greater victim of terrorism than the United States, calculating Israeli casualties since the beginning of the intifada as at least three times the Twin Towers disaster (when measured by percentage of victims relative to the overall population of each country).<sup>4</sup> [Woolsey passed over in silence the Palestinian casualties of the intifada, which at the time were well over ten times the casualties of the New York attacks, again when calculated relative to the percentage of the overall population.]

I will return later in this paper to discuss what this discourse omits: specifically, a) any acknowledgment of the indiscriminate, punitive, and retributive character of Israeli violence in the occupied territories and the human toll this has exacted on Palestinians; and b) any nuanced appraisal of the forms of violence deployed against Israel. For now, I will limit myself to two points.

First, the Israeli discourse of terrorism is flexible enough to stigmatize *all* Palestinian resistance, even unarmed civilian (i.e., nonviolent) resistance. Dov Tamari, a former Brigadier-General in the Israeli Defense Forces, recently observed that in 1982 while serving in Lebanon, he found that the term “terrorist infrastructure” was so vague that it essentially meant the entire people: “To ‘dismantle’ it you have to start killing people en masse, and if you don’t want to do that you should just give up the idea.”<sup>5</sup> If entire political movements are labeled as terrorist (say, for example, the political factions within the PLO) because of actions carried out by the military wings associated with those movements, then all activities conducted by those movements become terrorist

activities. Thus, for example, a health clinic operated by an NGO whose board members are predominantly affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine becomes a terrorist institution because of attacks by the PFLP’s military wing deemed to be “terrorist” attacks. When the Palestinian Authority does not succeed in securing absolute calm in the occupied territories, then it, too, becomes a terrorist organization, or at least an entity which “harbors” terrorists. This rhetorical move of guilt-by-association can be taken to comical lengths: Uzi Landau, Israel’s Internal Security Minister, defended his decision to ban a reception in Jerusalem for foreign diplomats to mark Eid al-Fitr, the feast at the end of the Muslim month of Ramadan, on the grounds that it was organized by Sari Nusseibeh, holder of the Jerusalem file for the Palestine Liberation Organization and was thus a “terror-related” activity.<sup>6</sup>

The second initial point to make is that the case of Palestine/Israel confirms a broader thesis, articulated most pointedly by Edward Herman, that the news media manufacture consent to state policy, particularly military policy, by presenting only certain forms of violence as terrorism; violent resistance by stateless groups is stigmatized as terrorism, while violence carried out by states, regardless of the extent of “collateral damage” to civilians, is justified as a legitimate attempt to secure order and justice.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Difficulties of Defining Terrorism**

The ability of the discourse of terrorism to legitimize certain forms of violence while stigmatizing others depends, Herman suggests, on a specific definitional move, namely that of excluding states from the possibility of engaging in terrorism. Once one questions the givenness of this definitional move, then it becomes clear that states often engage in violent acts similar in nature and scope to those classified as terrorism, save for the fact that the actors are the state and its representatives rather than non-state actors. As the similarity between the violence perpetrated by state and non-state actors becomes apparent, the temptation becomes great for the pacifist to pronounce a pox on everyone’s house and dismiss all talk of terrorism as ideological attempts to justify one form of violence over another; the cynicism with which particular governments (say, the United States and Israel) use the discourse of terrorism increases this temptation. While understanding the appeal of this temptation, I suggest that, despite the ideological distortions to which the discourse of

terrorism is prone, the word “terrorism” can minimally suggest to us that certain forms of violence, regardless of the actor, are worse than others. Perhaps the word “terrorism” itself is too emotive and prone to ideological distortion. John Rempel, director of Mennonite Central Committee’s liaison office to the United Nations in New York, states that “‘terrorism’ is not a neutral concept. One person’s terrorist,” he continues, “is another’s freedom fighter.”<sup>8</sup> While Rempel captures an important truth, I suggest that Christian pacifists should learn from an engagement with the discourse of terrorism to be nuanced about the forms in which violence can manifest itself: all violence embodies a sinful turning away from God, but not all violence is thereby of the same scope and quality.

But to jump into the question of whether or not the word “terrorism” can be used with integrity is to get ahead of ourselves. Let us begin, rather, by noting some standard definitions of terrorism and the forms of violence which these definitions exclude. The U.S. State Department defines terrorism as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience.”<sup>9</sup> Three elements in this definition are particularly noteworthy: (1) terrorism is violence which targets civilians, or noncombatants; (2) the definition does not include acts committed by a state’s military forces (although a state’s “clandestine agents” could, apparently, implicate a state in terror); (3) terrorism is designed to “influence an audience,” presumably by generating enough fear to motivate a change of policy. The U.S. Defense Department’s definition sounds the same three notes: “terrorism is the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence by a revolutionary organization against individuals or property, with the intention of coercing or intimidating governments or societies, often for political or ideological purposes.”<sup>10</sup> More clearly than the State Department definition, the Defense Department’s construal of terrorism excludes states from the ranks of those who perpetrate terror. The potential victims of terrorism in Defense Department’s definition, however, form a broader group than in the State Department’s definition: not only noncombatants, but individuals generally (presumably this could include soldiers) and property can be terror victims.

What is significant for our purposes here is how both definitions view terrorism as predominantly, if not exclusively, an activity carried out by stateless,

revolutionary groups; states are thus not terror agents. That states would have a vested interest in such a definition should be obvious: after all, states routinely engage in activities meeting all of the other criteria of the two definitions, engaging in violence or threatening violence against individuals (including noncombatants) for political and ideological purposes. Not only do these limited definitions betray states’ self-interest, they also reflect outmoded social scientific analyses of war. Dov Tamari notes that wars between “a state and non-state entity” have not been properly analyzed in standard social science research, as they do not “fit the idealized criteria of Clausewitz.” Anything which doesn’t fit the model of two states at war is then often lumped “under the simple-minded label of ‘terrorism.’”<sup>11</sup>

At the international level, no consensus exists on what constitutes terrorism. Eyal Gross, an expert on international law at Tel Aviv University, insists that no obvious reason exists for excluding states from the purveyors of terror: “When a bomb explodes in a school and 20 children are killed — that is terror, but when a plane bombs the same school and the same children are killed — it is referred to as a military action. These things should be said,” he continues. “According to the various international conventions, there is no legal differentiation between the attacks on the Twin Towers and the bombing of a school in Kabul. Why is an attack in Ma’alot [a town in northern Israel] considered terror, while an attack on Lebanese soil not terror? Why are the acts now being committed by the Palestinians called terror, while Israel’s actions in the territories are not? There is terror committed by organizations and then there is state terror,” he concludes.<sup>12</sup>

Gideon Levy, echoing Gross, pointed in November 2001 to the planting of an explosive charge along the roadside in Khan Younis as an example of Israeli state terror: “A state places explosive charges where children are likely to pass and then claims that only the other side practices terrorism?” Levy asked indignantly. “We have to admit that an act of this kind can be considered an act of terrorism because it strikes at the innocent and doesn’t discriminate between the victims, even if the intention was not to kill and even if the goal was the war on terrorism . . . Israel must direct the demand for a cease-fire and for a cessation of terrorism not only at the Palestinians but, to a certain degree, to itself, too.”<sup>13</sup> Two months later, following the destruction of over fifty homes in Rafah by Israeli military bulldozers, Levy returned to this theme:

“A country that opposes terrorism against civilians cannot demolish homes of innocent civilians and then claim that what it did is not an act of terrorism.”<sup>14</sup>

In his condemnation of Israeli military actions, Levy’s implicit definition is clear: terrorism is violence against civilians, violence which does not discriminate between the “innocent” and others. It appears that his understanding of “innocence” involves non-participation in military confrontations or in other attacks against Israel. In other words, terrorism is violence motivated by ideological purposes that does not discriminate between combatants and non-combatants; both states and revolutionary groups practice it, under this definition.

This understanding of terrorism forms the foundation of the mainstream Palestinian consensus that while attacks on civilians should be avoided, attacks on Israeli targets in the occupied territories are legitimate. Thus, the shooting of an Israeli soldier near Nablus would not be a terrorist act under Levy’s working definition, while a gunman opening fire at a bat mitzvah in Herzilya would be. Or, to take another example, when Hizbullah (repeatedly cited by the United States and Israel as a terrorist organization but viewed throughout the Arab world as a liberation movement) attacked Israeli military targets during Israel’s occupation of southern Lebanon, this did not constitute terrorism, while the firing of a Katyusha rocket at Kiryat Shmona could be viewed as a terrorist act.<sup>15</sup>

Levy’s working definition has, I believe, much to recommend it: it captures our moral repugnance for attacks on civilians while not masking the fact that states routinely engage in such objectionable acts. Before accepting this definition, however, let us consider some objections. For one thing, there is a significant moral difference between the killing of thousands of civilians in the Twin Towers and the killing of thousands of civilians in Afghanistan as part of the “war against terror.” Binyamin Netanyahu recently articulated this position, lauding the United States for firmly establishing “a moral differentiation between terrorism and self-defense through military action that could inadvertently affect civilians.” Netanyahu went on to stress “the importance of victory, namely . . . the end justifies the means.”<sup>16</sup> If the end justifies the means in this war against terror and unlimited collateral damage is acceptable, then it becomes very difficult to see how Netanyahu proposes to establish his firm “moral differentiation” between terrorism and counter-terrorism. Both

aim for particular visions of peace, of world order, and both, if the end justifies the means, are willing to sacrifice noncombatants to secure those visions.

A second challenge to Levy’s working definition involves the observation that both states and revolutionary groups maintain that distinguishing between combatants and others is difficult-to-impossible. The Israeli government, for example, staunchly defended the demolition of fifty-plus homes in Rafah on the grounds that gunmen shot from between the homes and that Palestinians had dug tunnels underneath the homes to smuggle weapons. Regardless of the fact that most international and human rights organizations dismissed these explanations as propaganda, viewing the demolitions as collective punishment for the killing of four Israeli soldiers the day before, what is important here is that the Israeli justification blurs the distinction between combatant and non-combatant. If some civilians are killed and injured and their property damaged, that simply constitutes “collateral damage,” an incidental, perhaps even regrettable, effect of a military action against military targets. The Palestinian death toll during the current uprising against the occupation shows that the level of “collateral damage” has been quite high. Of the 686 Palestinians killed from September 29, 2000 to September 29, 2001, 59 percent died when no Palestinian-Israeli clashes were underway, 36 percent died in unarmed (i.e., stones, not guns) clashes, while only 5 percent died in armed clashes.<sup>17</sup>

Stanley Hauerwas, meanwhile, has observed that “terrorist” organizations offer strikingly similar justifications for attacks which indiscriminately affect civilians. “From the ‘terrorist’ point of view,” he notes, “distinctions between combatants and non-combatants are not easily maintained.”<sup>18</sup> A crowd of people along Jaffa Road in West Jerusalem will mostly consist of unarmed people, but how many of these people contribute to the successful functioning of the violent military occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, serving as military officers, paying taxes, etc.? Hauerwas acknowledges that “those called terrorists” do not necessarily attack non-combatants, “but if they do,” he suggests, “they are not without some moral response. Such an attack may be an attempt to make clear the kind of war they understand they are forced to wage — namely a war of the desperate that must use selective targeting in non-selective ways.” A bus bombing “may be tied to policy objectives that may even make such a bombing analogous to the defense of civilian deaths on just war grounds of indirect effect; for alleged terrorist



strategies are meant — like war itself — to make people prefer peace, or at least order, rather than continue the conflict.”<sup>19</sup> Israeli military personnel who demolish homes and carry out various types of attacks (shelling from tanks and helicopters, sniper fire, shooting into a crowd, assassinations) can claim (often cynically) a just intention — the apprehension or killing of a gunman, for example, or creating the conditions in which Palestinians will accept the “peace” of permanent Israeli control over the occupied territories — even as its actions have the indirect effect of significant civilian casualties. A Palestinian “terrorist,” meanwhile, even a bus bomber, could claim that his actions are framed by a just intent, one which aims for a different form of peace.<sup>20</sup>

The justifiable war tradition, of course, claims that constraints can and should be placed on the waging of war so that, for example, civilians are not targeted; acts traditionally labeled “terrorism,” meanwhile, disregard such constraints. The unspoken assumption in efforts to distinguish between the violence of stateless groups and the violence of state armies is that states can and do place more effective constraints on the use of violence. Any distinction between “terrorism” and war, observes Hauerwas, “gains its moral warrant from the assumption based in just war theory that there is continuity between the police function of the state and its war-making potential.” This assumption, he continues, is unwarranted, for “war lacks exactly the prior institutions and practices that limit the violence intrinsic to the police function of the state and, at least to some extent, make such violence less arbitrary.”<sup>21</sup> States may claim that they limit violence and wage just wars, but, Hauerwas poignantly suggests, the constraints of the justifiable war tradition regularly break down during war time, proving ineffective at placing controls and limits on the military.

### **Pacifist Responses Amidst the “Terror” of Palestine/Israel**

Defining “terrorism” is an ambiguous enterprise. Definitionally excluding states from being terrorists appears purely arbitrary, given that both state and non-state actors engage in similar types of violent actions, in quality and scope. Even a bare-bones definition of terrorism as violence against noncombatants proves hard to sustain, as both states and revolutionary groups often blur the distinctions between combatant and noncombatant. If, finally, we cannot offer a universally acceptable definition of terrorism, we must nevertheless grapple with how to respond as Christian pacifists to a conflict which has seen its

share of horrific violence, whether or not one calls that violence “terrorism.” In what follows I propose five tasks for Christian pacifists living and working in the midst of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, with its varied forms of violence and its charges and counter-charges of terrorism.<sup>22</sup>

### *1. Unmasking Deceptive Language*

Christians must not fall prey to the deceptive use of language which stigmatizes certain forms of violence while legitimizing others. As I suggested above, the discourse of terrorism routinely functions in this deceptive manner, both generally and particularly in the case of Palestine/Israel. We must exercise healthy suspicion of claims by states that they dispense justice (even “infinite justice”!). Ya’ir Hilu, an Israeli conscientious objector, succinctly pointed to the similarities shared by Palestinian and Israeli violence when he refused to serve “in the Israeli army or in any other terrorist organization.”<sup>23</sup> A critical reading of history, meanwhile, will remind us that, in the case of Israel, yesterday’s “terrorists” are today’s statesmen: retired U.S. diplomat Phil Wilcox, former head of the State Department’s unit on terrorism, recently observed after reading an article on events in Mandate Palestine between 1946 and 1948 that he was “struck by how much the role of the Jewish terrorists, principally from the Irgun (Etzel) and Stern Gang (Lehi), sounded like Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and how much the Zionist leadership sounded like Arafat, in its unwillingness to cooperate with the British in apprehending them.”<sup>24</sup>

### *2. Naming Forms of Violence*

Suicide bombings, gunmen opening fire in a pedestrian mall: these are the dramatic forms of violence in Palestine/Israel routinely covered in the Western media. Christians must unquestionably deplore such violence and lament its victims. At the same time, however, we must also lament the many and varied forms in which people exercise violent power in Palestine/Israel. Not only have hundreds of Palestinians been killed during the past eighteen months — most of them, as noted above, civilians, and many of them children — and not only have thousands upon thousands of Palestinians sustained injuries, many permanently disabling: in addition to this violence one must add many

other manifestations of violence, acts rarely captured on radio and television newscasts. “Aren’t massive land expropriations, systematic house destruction, the uprooting of orchards and groves, also a form of violence?,” asks Gideon Levy pointedly. “Isn’t cutting off entire towns and villages from their source of water a type of violence? Isn’t limitation on freedom of movement by slicing whole areas of the population off from each other and denying medical attention to the residents — even when it’s a matter of life and death, as painful as highway shootings? The humiliations and beating, and the settlers’ own violence against Palestinians — what should that be called?”<sup>25</sup> Christians from the United States, for that matter, should remember their complicity in violence as the U.S. government provides billions of dollars per year to Israel in military assistance. Referring to the unseen violence on which Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip depends and to U.S. aid to Israel, MCC worker Ed Nyce cautions that “the violence which we see will not cease until the violence which we do not see ceases. In the meantime, telling Palestinians to stop their actions, given our own military might, is presumption enough. Selling and giving Israel weapons and technology and providing training assistance simply adds to the audacity.”<sup>26</sup>

### *3. Appealing for Limits to Violence*

At one level, all violence shares notable characteristics. Lee Griffith correctly says that at the spiritual level terrorism and counter-terrorism are strikingly similar, both partaking in the assumption that striking fear in one’s opponent can generate significant change.<sup>27</sup> All violence, one could argue, is a form of terror, aimed to instill fear, to disrupt the status quo. Theologically, all violence represents a rebellious turning away from God, a failure to worship God properly.

Recognition of these similarities, however, should not prevent us from recognizing the impulse behind the emotive and ideologically-fraught discourse of terrorism to declare certain violent practices unacceptable. Establishing universal consensus on which practices these are would probably prove elusive: judgments on what constitutes unacceptable violence in a war-time or revolutionary situation will vary from context to context. Nevertheless, the fact that different peoples routinely make such contextual judgments provides pacifists with a point of appeal to warring parties to limit their violence. These

appeals, to standards recognized by parties engaged in armed conflict, are what the late John Howard Yoder called “middle axioms.” Appealing to Israelis and Palestinians, for example, to refrain from attacks on noncombatants would use Palestinian and Israeli leaders’ own self-proclaimed standards for the basis for that appeal.

Using the world’s (admittedly ambiguous and context-relative) standards for what constitutes unacceptable violence would not only push us to protest and lament suicide bombings, but also indiscriminate Israeli fire, extra-judicial killings (assassinations), house demolitions, and sieges on Palestinian population centers. More and more in the Israeli peace camp, one hears vocal protests against Israeli military actions in the occupied territories, protests that these actions go beyond the acceptable use of force. Adi Ophir of Tel Aviv University declared at a symposium organized by the Israeli Peace Bloc (Gush Shalom) that “The army in the Occupied Territories is involved in war crimes . . . . The problem is to find tribunals where those responsible can be tried.”<sup>28</sup> Former Israeli Minister of Education Shulamit Aloni echoed Ophir’s assessment, urging fellow peace activists that “We have to call a spade a spade. We have to say out loud that our government is committing war crimes, to say it clearly and explicitly and repeat it again and again. And, yes, the time has come to start compiling dossiers on the war criminals!”<sup>29</sup> Insisting that Israel respect the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention to regulate its behavior in the occupied territories would be a concrete example of appealing to the world’s self-proclaimed limits on violence (limits which Israel has officially acknowledged but which it denies have relevance in the occupied territories) in an effort to curb death and destruction.

#### *4. Promoting Nonviolent Alternatives*

The myth that violence can bring security grips too many Israelis. The myth that violence can secure liberation captivates too many Palestinians. These myths exercise a powerful hold on people’s imaginations, constricting the sense of the possible and blinding people to the ultimate impotence of violence. Christian pacifists must expand the sense of the possible, both raising questions about the effectiveness of violence and encouraging alternatives to violent struggle.

In both instances, Western Christians would not speak in a vacuum, but would join their voices to those of Israeli Jews and Palestinian Christians and Muslims. Even as the military-security mentality reigns supreme within Israel, many question it, recognizing that no military solution exists to Palestinian “terror.” “All of the anti-terror measures which we’ve implemented during the past year can be compared figuratively to trying to empty the sea by using a spoon,” said a senior Israeli security officer. An internal Israeli Defense Forces study admits that the siege network of roadblocks and checkpoints which severely constrict Palestinian movement do not enhance Israeli security. A former chief of Israel’s internal security services, the Shin Bet, Ami Ayalon acknowledges that “You cannot kill ideologies by killing leaders. It’s easy to prove that under circumstances of negotiations and political hope and expectation, selective killing of a terrorist will lead some away from the terror side, and bring them to the discussion sphere. But when there is no political expectation [of a peace agreement], assassinations do the opposite.”<sup>30</sup> When even those within Israel’s security establishment acknowledge the ineffectiveness of the occupation’s violence at suppressing “terror” attacks, it comes as no surprise that a growing number of Israelis assert that real security will only come from justice, from a real end to the occupation, from a real withdrawal from all of the occupied territories.

Palestinians, for their part, while unwilling to accept imposed solutions which would perpetuate Israeli control over the occupied territories and would create a Palestinian quasi-state, or Bantustan, increasingly question the militarized character of the current intifada against the occupation. The Palestinian Center for Rapprochement between Peoples in Beit Sahour, the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, the Palestinian NGO network all in different ways promote nonviolent resistance against the occupation as not only the most moral but also the most promising path of struggle. Palestinian Christian lawyer Jonathan Kuttab highlights the ineffectiveness of violence in a confrontation with Israel. During the first intifada against Israel, says Kuttab, “the nonviolent struggle highlighted the justice of our cause, which rests on morality, international solidarity and international law rather than on brute force and overwhelming military superiority. To insist on waging the struggle only in the military sphere,” he continues, is “doubly foolish because it deprives

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us of our natural advantages and allows the conflict to play out in an arena of military violence where our enemies are vastly superior.”<sup>31</sup>

### *5. Embracing the Foolishness of the Cross*

Mennonites have in recent years developed a professional identity as peacebuilders. Establishing graduate programs in conflict transformation, cultivating expertise in mediation and conciliation, organizing activists to intervene in Haiti and Hebron: no longer the quiet in the land, Mennonites are ready to offer the world solutions. The laudable commitment to peace which drives such activities, however, can easily be deformed into a prideful conviction that, armed with adequate training (and a diploma), we can manage tensions, defuse conflicts, make history come out right. As much as we are called to cry for justice, transform conflicts, “build” peace, we must not become peace technocrats, promoters of one more technique by which to regulate and manage the world, but must rather confess that ultimately it is not we, but God, who builds peace, who has built and builds the Kingdom, and that God’s way of peacebuilding goes through the cross. Sometimes, at a *kairos* moment, our critiques of the politics of violence will resonate with our neighbors and our suggestions for nonviolent alternatives will strike a chord. But other times, perhaps most times, our colleagues and neighbors will find our witness to a politics of nonviolence jarring, foolish, even infuriating. We must be ready to sound foolish to our neighbors; this is a difficult discipline, as few among us wish to appear foolish.

In the whirlwind of occupation and resistance in Palestine/Israel, witness to a nonviolent politics, be it by Palestinian, Israeli, or expatriate, is often drowned out by the deafening storm of voices clamoring for retribution. We can maintain this witness only if our lives are grounded in the seemingly foolish history of God’s work in the world, joined to God’s life through prayer and sacrament. May God grant us the courage to embrace the foolishness of the cross and the wisdom to deconstruct the world’s knowledge of violence.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The term “middle axioms” comes from John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1964), 72-73, 158. I discuss Yoder’s middle axioms in my article, “After Politics: John Howard Yoder, Body Politics, and the Witnessing Church,” *The Review of Politics* 61/4 (Fall 1999): 669-71.

<sup>2</sup> Space allows me only to direct the reader to Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000); Ilan Pappé, ed., *The Israel/Palestine Question* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999); Roane Carey, ed., *The New Intifada: Resisting Israel’s Apartheid* (London and New York: Verso, 2001). For discussion of Mennonite Central Committee’s work with Palestinians, see Alain Epp Weaver and Sonia Weaver, *Salt and Sign: Mennonite Central Committee in Palestine, 1949-1999* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu, *Fighting Terrorism: How Democracies Can Defeat Domestic and International Terrorists* (New York: Noonday Press, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> Gideon Samet, “The Rogue Bull and the Gods’ Blessings,” *Ha’aretz English Edition* (Wednesday, December 19, 2001), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Dov Tamari, excerpts from remarks made at Gush Shalom symposium on war crimes, “Israel on the Way to the Hague,” January 9, 2002, in Tel Aviv. English translations from this remarkable symposium quoted in this paper come from an e-mail summary distributed by Gush Shalom. For a full transcript of the symposium, where the translation differs only in phrasing, see [http://www.gush-shalom.org/archives/forum\\_eng.html/](http://www.gush-shalom.org/archives/forum_eng.html/).

<sup>6</sup> Clyde Haberman, “Juice and Cookies Trip Alarms in Jerusalem,” *International Herald Tribune* (Tuesday, December 18, 2001), 4.

<sup>7</sup> Edward S. Herman and Gerry O’Sullivan, *The Terrorism Industry: The Experts and Institutions that Shape Our View of Terror* (New York: Random House, 1990), and Edward S. Herman, *Real Terror Network: Terrorism in Fact and Propaganda* (Boston: South End Press, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> John Rempel, “Terrorism, International Law, and International Justice,” available at [http://www.mcc.org/respub/un/2001/10\\_Oct/terrorism.html](http://www.mcc.org/respub/un/2001/10_Oct/terrorism.html). The Reuters news service refuses to use the word terrorism, declaring it too emotive and subjective.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Gershom Gorenberg, “The T-Word: Its Use and Misuse,” *The Jerusalem Report* (January 28, 2002): 21.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Giving and Taking of Life: Essays Ethical* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 213.

<sup>11</sup> Remarks at Gush Shalom symposium. See footnote 4.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Nitzan Horowitz, “Terror — It’s All in the Eyes of the Beholder,” *Ha’aretz English Edition* (November 18, 2001). Lev Grinberg, director of the Humphrey Institute at the Ben Gurion University of the Negev in Israel argues in fact that state terror, at least in Palestine/Israel, is worse than the terror perpetrated by non-state actors: “Suicide bombs killing innocent citizens must be unequivocally condemned; they are immoral acts, and their perpetrators should be sent to jail,” he says. “But they cannot be compared to State terrorism carried out by the Israeli Government. The former are individual acts of despair of a people that sees no future,

vastly ignored by an unfair and distorted international public opinion. The latter are cold and “rational” decisions of a State and a military apparatus of occupation, well equipped, financed and backed by the only superpower in the world. Yet in the public debate, State terrorism and individual suicide bombs are not even considered as comparable cases of terrorism. The State terror and war crimes perpetrated by the Israeli Government are legitimized as “self-defense”, while Arafat, even under siege, is demanded to arrest “terrorists.” —Lev Grinberg, “Israel’s State Terrorism,” distributed via e-mail by the Palestinian Center for Rapprochement between Peoples in Beit Sahour, April 3, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Gideon Levy, “On the Way to School,” *Ha’aretz English Edition* (November 25, 2001): 5.

<sup>14</sup> Gideon Levy, “A Crime against the Innocent,” *Ha’aretz English Edition* (January 13, 2002): 5.

<sup>15</sup> Attacks on soldiers can appear less objectionable than attacks on non-combatants because soldiers are thought to have a degree of choice about being put into conflict’s way. Israeli settler-colonists in the occupied territories form an ambiguous group. Palestinians tend to view them as armed paramilitary groups, part and parcel of the military occupation; Israelis tend to view them as noncombatant civilians. The 10-month old girl Shalhevet Pass killed in Hebron must be considered a noncombatant. One obvious reason the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits an occupying power from settling its civilian population in occupied territory is to keep civilians out of harm’s way; adult settlers and the Israeli government choose to ignore and violate the Fourth Convention, placing civilians in a territory where armed resistance to a military occupation should not be unexpected.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Amnon Barzilai, “Netanyahu: Iraq is Next U.S. Target,” *Ha’aretz English Edition* (Wednesday, December 19, 2001), 2.

<sup>17</sup> Figures from <http://www.electronicintifada.net>, compiled from Palestinian Red Crescent Society and the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees.

<sup>18</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 180. Hauerwas observes that the “state of Israel was brought into power by an extended and very well organized terrorist campaign” (179).

<sup>19</sup> Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 181.

<sup>20</sup> Peace meaning here a particular type of order with an absence of conflict. Clearly, different visions of “peace” in the earthly city compete with one another; most, if not all, of these visions, will also stand in tension with the peace which the church is called to embody and proclaim.

<sup>21</sup> Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 180.

<sup>22</sup> These tasks might have relevance in other conflict situations. “Christian pacifists” in Palestine/Israel include some Palestinian Christians, such as Zoughbi Zoughbi of the Wi’am Conflict Resolution Center and Rev. Naim Ateek of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center.

<sup>23</sup> Ya’ir Hilu, “A Statement of Refusal on Grounds of Conscience,” *Challenge: A Magazine Covering the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* No. 71 (January-February 2002): 11.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Akiva Eldar, “Counting the Days — and the Dead,” *Ha’aretz English Edition* (Thursday, January 24, 2002), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Gideon Levy, “Defining Violence,” *Ha’aretz English Edition* (March 12, 2001), 5.

<sup>26</sup> Ed Nyce, “My Friends are Not Terrorists,” e-mail update, May 22, 2001, available from MCC Palestine ([mccwb@palnet.com](mailto:mccwb@palnet.com)).



<sup>27</sup> Lee Griffith, *The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Remarks made at Gush Shalom symposium; see footnote 4.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Amos Harel, "Security Brass: Targeted Killings Don't Work; No Military Solution to Terror," *Ha'aretz English Edition* (Wednesday, December 19, 2001), 2.

<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Kuttub, "Nonviolence: A Powerful Alternative," Dec. 19, 2001, distributed by Common Ground News Service.