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Intifada after two years

THE Intifada has reached its second anniversary.

In some ways it is truly an amazing, quite unprecedented event—stones versus machine-guns; masked youths with sling-shots against soldiers armed with Uzis; shopkeepers standing up to the taxman; underground squads taking on Israel's own underground of collaborators.

But in other ways it really isn't that unusual at all—for it is the classic story of the oppressed taking on their oppressors, those occupied rising up against their occupiers, those seeking freedom and dignity rebelling against those who would keep them in chains to manipulate and exploit.

But trying to determine whether or not the Intifada is a "success" is a somewhat more difficult challenge than discussing its manner. And how we define this term "success" actually becomes the primary determinant of how the question is answered.

If defined in a straight-forward manner, very sadly the answer has to be in the negative. For, the Palestinian people are not really near to having an independent Palestinian state as yet, declarations of aspirations and PLO slogans aside.

Yasser Arafat's repeated assertions to statehood being "but a stonethrow" away are political hyperbole at best.

Furthermore, the Israeli occupation is not about to collapse or be withdrawn. Israel's determination, and Israel's power, remain far too substantial at this stage in the history of the Mid-east for that desirable outcome; even though it be an outcome which could well be in Israel's long-term interests as well as that of the Palestinians. Plus, of course, there are those of us who think the American Empire has its own reasons for keeping the pot simmering as it is.

The realpolitik situation is that Israel's geostrategic game is far more complex than many appreciate with the Israelis still having many cards yet up their sleeves awaiting the right moment.

For instance, if the going really gets tough the Israelis are now more likely than ever to attempt the long-discussed "destabilisation" of Jordan leading to, so they hope, Israeli-sponsored Palestinian rule on the West Bank of the Jordan River. Arafat is aware of this Israeli card.

In the end, such a historic gambit would likely fail to resolve the historic clash between Palestinian and Jewish nationalisms, though it may stretch out the conflict over a longer period of years. But then who knows what would happen in the interim, many Israelis ponder; who can be sure just what cards history will itself deal within the years ahead?

When I was in Israel a few months ago no less a personality than Professor Shlomo Avneri, former Labour Party director of the Foreign Ministry and an important political strategist, publicly voiced just such a potential strategy right in the pages of *The Jerusalem Post*.

So the struggle for an independent Palestinian state is likely to be an ongoing one for some time to come. And there are probably many as yet unforeseen developments ahead on what seems destined to be a very long and protracted road to the national liberation of at least a part of historic Palestine.

But if we define "success" is more guarded, less immediately time-bound terms—within the context of the Intifada, having reasserted the Palestinian case in dramatic human terms, the Intifada as having gained considerable sympathy and understanding for the Palestinian predicament throughout the world, the Intifada representing a general

resurgence of Palestinian consciousness—then at a minimum the Intifada has to be considered a partial success.

For in the past two years the people of the occupied Palestine—rather than their leaders—have quite dramatically proved that the occupation is just that, the rule of one distinct people over another. And in our contemporary age this situation is in itself widely understood to be against the norms of international life as they have commonly come to be understood since World War II.

But the most important ongoing fallout from the Intifada is somewhat intangible. It is the appreciation, still spreading, that there are times in history—rare but nevertheless real times—when mortality and justice do play a role, however tortuously slow, in creating new political conditions. And the new political consciousness now coming forward is what may make possible in the future what might not yet be possible in the present.

There are times when the "might makes right" phenomenon so exposes its hypocrisy and so over-extends its brutality in full public glare that national suffering—as currently dramatised by the ongoing Intifada—takes on the character of a struggle for freedom and dignity which captures the world's attention.

And it is in these contexts that the Palestinian Intifada is having its success, with future ramifications yet difficult, even impossible, to accurately foresee.

One manifestation of this kind of success came in the recent Rand Corporation study which to the surprise of so many here suggests the "inevitability" of a Palestinian state.

Another manifestation comes in the form of nearly 1,300 non-government organisations (NGOs) now on the mailing list of the United Nations as sup-

porting the Palestinian cause (up from just a few hundred before the Intifada). It is these groups that will be meeting in occupied Jerusalem in a few weeks planning to demonstrate with their presence the world demand that Palestinian self-determination finally be fulfilled.

Yet another manifestation is the remarkable theatrical performance now touring the country by the San Francisco Mime Troupe. The political play *Seeing Double*, and the outright appeal of the actors at the end for justice for the Palestinians, is one of the most intriguing examples of this "partial success" which the Intifada is having.

Among some important segments of American Jewry, as well, the Intifada continues to have a growing resonance.

Over the past few days for instance, both in New York and Washington, I've met a number of American Jews who by the depth of their expressions of concern for the Palestinians coupled with their outrage at Israeli and American policies further convinced me that the Intifada is indeed having an important psychological impact.

And it is an impact which is gradually seeping into the overall American political consciousness.

Let me emphasise again that there probably is not an immediate political pay-off ahead—maybe not even soon; and surely not soon enough whatever the case. Yet the winds of conscious change have begun to blow; and it is the Intifada which provides the fuel that is making all this occur.

Take, for instance, the case of an older wealthy American Jew, a religious Orthodox Jew with his kippah always on his head. He asked me to meet him at a kosher restaurant in midtown New York, and had to leave early to get ready for the Jewish sabbath that begins rather early on Friday afternoons at this time

From



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of year.

Here is a very thoughtful and successful older man who is morally in continual anguish by Israel's relentless assault on the Palestinians in the name of the Judaism he holds so dear. Consequently he is a man who is contributing very substantially to a variety of Palestinian causes, a man in touch with other fellow religious Jews whom it is known are helping the Palestinians in a variety of ways, a man who repeats often that he does what he does so no one will ever be able to say that he was like the "Good Germans" (a reference, for those who might be a bit unclear, to many Germans in the 30s and 40s who claimed they didn't know what was happening and couldn't do anything to help).

Or, take another very different case—that of a highly educated, very successful, middle-aged Washington attorney who has held fairly high government positions during his Washington career, whom I had known 13 years ago, and whom I just happened to run into on the subway last month.

He then invited me to lunch at a popular Lebanese restaurant in downtown Washington, one frequented by some of Washington's power-brokers. And when he found out about my views concerning the politically dangerous and morally unconscionable situation in Israel and occupied Palestine, only then did he let me in on his own story. For his own feelings have resulted in his having to break long ongoing relations between himself and his relatives in Israel.

Actually this particularly American Jew hasn't been to Israel since 1966 when in his 20s. But he has maintained contact with that branch of his family who went to Israel from Europe after the war.

And during the past two

years, since the outbreak of the Intifada, this man's ongoing correspondence with those family members in Israel has led to this major schism within his family.

For this American Jew, like a growing number of others like him, has felt compelled to say what he thinks about what Israel is doing to the Palestinians; and his relatives have apparently felt compelled to respond with their own convictions. Result—impasse, end to correspondence, pretty much an end to relationships.

And as a last example let me quote from a recent article in *Tikkun* magazine, a magazine of American Jewish liberals deeply committed to Israel, by a well-known writer, Milton Viorst.

After pointedly criticising the Israelis for turning the 1980s into "the most shameful decade in the history of the Jews", Viorst turns his fire to the American Jewish community.

"We good Jews in America," he writes, "do our part to preserve the status-quo by making sure that Israel's \$3 billion subsidy comes uninterrupted, while euphemisms like 'rubber bullets' (actually steel balls with a thin rubber coating)—meant to conceal that Israeli boys are ordered to fire on the unarmed—eat away at our collective soul."

The young generation in occupied Palestine is suffering and bleeding. They are the vanguard. It is to them that history has dealt the task of being on the frontlines.

Still their tremendous efforts probably are not going to result anytime soon in the independent Palestinian state they seek.

Yet, as the third year of the Intifada begins, let them know that they are having an important "partial success" in the ways I've just described; and let them know that by continuing on the course they have so courageously charted there is hope for all of us.