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## BOOK REVIEWS

**A Quiet Revolution: The First Palestinian Intifada and Nonviolent Resistance**, by Mary Elizabeth King. Nation Books, 2007. 464 pages. \$16.95, paperback.

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In *A Quiet Revolution: The First Palestinian Intifada and Nonviolent Resistance*, Mary King, a leading scholar of civil resistance, offers a meticulously researched account of a remarkable, albeit often misinterpreted, period of Palestinian political struggle. Dr. King's book, the product of years of field research and hundreds of interviews conducted on both sides of the Green Line, highlights the propulsive, dynamic nature of a popular uprising that transformed Palestinian society and challenged the Israeli occupation in unprecedented ways. She analyzes the achievements and shortcomings of the first Intifada, a "shaking off" led by Palestinians living under occupation who had grown disillusioned with the armed struggle of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the empty promises of Arab leaders. The insights revealed are as relevant today (particularly after a new round of peace talks launched in Annapolis late in 2007) as during any time in the Palestinian self-determination struggle.

King starts by offering a brief overview of the historical applications of nonviolent resistance in the Middle East and beyond. She debunks the erroneous conflation of this form of struggle with pacifism and challenges the notion that nonviolent resistance is somehow not part of Arab or Muslim culture. King describes the "logic of non-cooperation" at the heart of nonviolent resistance, and how the collective application of nonviolent sanctions — boycotts, strikes, protests, civil disobedience — can produce power shifts in grossly asymmetric conflicts. In different parts of the book, King weaves in examples of nonviolent campaigns from other parts of the world, providing the reader with a helpful comparative perspective.

King shows how acts of defiance, including the construction of alternative institutions by Palestinians living inside the Occupied Territories during the 1970s and 1980s, paved the way for the popular uprising that erupted spontaneously on December 7, 1987, after four Gazans were killed by an Israeli military vehicle. The shift from spontaneity to organized resistance and the primacy placed on Palestinian self-reliance are what gave the Intifada its strength and dynamism. King chose to focus on key Palestinian constituencies that shaped the popular uprising, including intellectual activists, women, students, prisoners and workers. She shows how the writings of key scholars of nonviolent resistance, including Palestinian intellectual activists, found their way into the instructional leaflets printed and distributed secretly during the Intifada.

The creation of the United National Command of the Uprising (UNC), which included representatives from the PLO's four main factions inside the Occupied Territories, was a significant achievement during the first Intifada. King offers fascinating details about how

the UNC came into being, how it developed strategies and tactics, and how it interacted (sometimes uneasily) with representatives from Hamas and PLO officials in Tunis. (One might ask whether the recreation of such a command, possibly with greater Islamist participation, is possible today.) By 1988, the vocabulary of armed struggle had disappeared from the leaflets being written and distributed by the local leaders of the uprising. However, King notes that support for an exclusively nonviolent strategy was not universal, and there were disagreements — particularly between the outside and inside PLO leadership and between the different Palestinian factions — about the role of nonviolent resistance in their overall political strategy.

King describes the split in Israeli public opinion that occurred during the early period of the Intifada, when Israel's violent "iron fist" response to the popular uprising, captured by print and television media, showed the occupation in a negative light. The growth of Jewish solidarity groups, the surge of Israel Defense Forces (IDF) "Refuseniks," and the growth of the land-for-peace movement inside Israel were direct consequences of the mass uprising and its relatively nonviolent character. Although King is critical of the lack of strong U.S. government support for Palestinians leading the nonviolent resistance, she does note the shifts in U.S. policy during the uprising, including public criticisms of Israel's deportation and settlement policies. (One question King does not address directly: Has the PLO ever made it a priority to develop strategies to influence U.S. public opinion or to put pressure on members of Congress?) The restrictions that the Israeli government later placed on local and international media coverage inside the territories, combined with the increased use of violence by Palestinians as the Intifada wore on, helped mute the effects of backfire resulting from Israel's violent response to the uprising.

King argues that the greatest accomplishments of the first Intifada overlap with its most nonviolent phase, which is also when the greatest number of Palestinians were active in the resistance: building semi-autonomous institutions throughout the Occupied Territories, refusing to pay taxes to Israeli occupation authorities, quitting jobs in the civil administration, boycotting Israeli products, organizing joint demonstrations with Israeli and international sympathizers, and engaging in countless other nonviolent campaigns. The popular pressure generated through the Intifada forced the PLO to moderate its political platform, "increased the price of military occupation to Israel" (p. 298) and eventually led to direct negotiations between the PLO and Israel.

The mass pressure and civic empowerment generated during the first year and a half of the first Intifada were not sustained, however, and the popular uprising was eventually taken over by outside PLO leaders who did not really understand the mechanics of nonviolent struggle. Factionalism, sectarianism and increased Palestinian violence (particularly internecine strife) undermined the force of the popular uprising. King calls this period a "missed historical opportunity." It was missed particularly by Israeli and U.S. leaders, who failed to embrace the local leaders of the popular uprising. Instead, the leading Palestinian voices of moderation and advocates of nonviolent resistance (including Mubarak Awad, but also countless UNC leaders) were either deported, imprisoned or killed. The Israeli government's material support of Hamas starting in the late 1970s, in hopes that it would be a counterforce to the nationalist PLO, ultimately backfired. The

leadership vacuum that was created inside the territories was filled by those who had never supported a strategy of nonviolent resistance.

King goes on to describe the negotiations that began with Madrid and ended with Oslo. After the local Palestinian leaders of the uprising were sidelined during the Madrid and Washington talks, talks between Israeli and outside PLO leaders culminated in the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993. Ironically, the Palestinian Authority (PA) came to power promising to end the Intifada (which had rescued the Tunis-based PLO from obscurity). The mushrooming of Israeli settlements, checkpoints and by-pass roads (paid for, indirectly, by U.S. taxpayers) coincided with the rise of Hamas. King shows how the eruption of the second Intifada in September 2000, which began nonviolently, was the consequence of worsening conditions inside the Occupied Territories and the PA's loss of legitimacy.

King concludes her book with a set of crucial questions. Given the cataclysmic violence that has driven Israeli-Palestinian relations to an all-time low since 2000, the continued land confiscations and the separation barrier being built by Israel in the West Bank, the divisions and internecine violence between Hamas and Fatah inside the Occupied Territories, the continuation of strategically ineffectual armed attacks by some Palestinian militant groups, and the one-sided U.S. policy towards the conflict, does nonviolent resistance have a chance today? The small but important successes resulting from sustained nonviolent resistance against the separation barrier in the West Bank villages of Budrus and Bilin could be harbingers of a national Palestinian strategy of nonviolent resistance. Participation in these campaigns has included Palestinians from different political and ideological forces — including members of Hamas — along with a small number of Israeli and international solidarity activists. The PA released a new policy platform during the past year calling for “popular struggle against the Israeli occupation.” This is a positive sign, though it is hard to imagine a leadership that has lost so much legitimacy over the past few years driving a new national strategy of popular anti-occupation resistance. In all likelihood, the impetus will need to come from the grass roots and transcend the current Fatah-Hamas divide. Forming strategic alliances with groups inside Israel — including Palestinian citizens of Israel and residents of East Jerusalem — and coordinating targeted campaigns of civil resistance with Israelis who have more direct access to Israeli institutions, could pressure and alienate factions inside Israel that oppose the peace process in ways that firing rockets from inside the Occupied Territories cannot. Groups that continue to advocate armed resistance will be silenced when they see an alternative method of struggle yielding results. At a time when the peace process remains fundamentally stalled, King's book offers crucial insight into how negotiations, backed by the constructively disruptive force of popular Palestinian nonviolent resistance, could bring a dignified peace to the Holy Land.