

Hunger Strike Wins Concessions

Israel has subjected thousands of Palestinians to detention without trial, a tactic that finally provoked a hunger strike and at least modest concessions from Israeli authorities regarding prison conditions, as described by ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The agreement that ended a hunger strike by as many as two thousand of the Palestinians held prisoner by Israel is modest, uncertain and shaky.

Negotiated with the involvement of Egypt and the Palestinian Authority, the deal calls for Israel to ease the conditions of detention in several respects. About 20 prisoners will be taken out of solitary confinement. Family members from the Gaza Strip will be permitted prison visits, which have been denied them in recent years.

Prisoners under “administrative detention”, incarceration in which neither they, their families, nor anyone else in the outside world are told anything about why they are imprisoned, are supposed to be detained beyond six months only if evidence about them is brought before a military court.

The prisoners reportedly made some vaguely defined commitment about not engaging in any activity that would support terrorism. It is unclear whether a couple of the prisoners who have been engaging in hunger strikes longer than the rest will end their fasts.

Israel has not conceded much. It is not ending administrative detention, a legal netherworld in which those incarcerated are treated neither as criminal suspects nor as prisoners of war and which makes the U.S. concept of “illegal combatant” look like a paragon of due process. We don’t know anything about the sorts of procedures that would lead a current detainee to be kept imprisoned beyond six months.

In any case, there seems to be no impediment to Israel continuing to catch and release and catch again, resulting in serial detentions of the same individuals without anything ever being said about why they are imprisoned. It also is easy to envision the whole arrangement breaking down, with Israel declaring the deal to be void at the first sign of anything that can be labeled terrorist activity and can be connected in any way to anyone imprisoned.

Many Palestinians nevertheless see the deal as a success. Insofar as it is seen as such, it will sustain a belief that has gained increasing traction among

Palestinians in recent years: that peaceful protest has potential to gain relief from the Palestinians' predicament. It is a belief that is based on appeal to the conscience of Israelis and of the world community.

In appealing to the conscience of the world community, it dovetails with the Palestinian diplomatic strategy of framing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a multilateral issue worthy of attention in the most multilateral of forums, the United Nations.

Despite the meager nature of results thus far from actions such as the hunger strike, an intensified Palestinian commitment to peaceful protest is all to the good, for multiple reasons that ultimately redound to the benefit of both Palestinians and Israelis.

It is good because the continued lack of resolution of the conflict between these two peoples is fundamentally a moral issue involving political rights, having to do with the principles that conflicting claims to land ought not to be resolved through the might-makes-right device of superior military force, that peoples with a national identity ought to enjoy self-determination rather than to endure subjugation and that all peoples are entitled to a secure life inside their own homelands.

It is good also because peaceful protest represents a rejection of past Palestinian uses of violence, which were condemnable failures both in the direct harm and suffering they caused and in leading Israelis understandably to frame the conflict in terms of their own security. Peaceful protests that do no physical harm to Israel do not have those ill effects.

Peaceful tactics aimed clearly and specifically at relieving the plight of the Palestinians as a subjugated people also avoid contributing to the fallacious notion, which Israeli spokesmen and apologists habitually voice, that the problem is an effort to "delegitimize Israel" by those who somehow hope to destroy it.

Anyone who has such views and intentions today is a fringe that is almost irrelevant to resolution of this conflict. Such views are not held by the Palestinian leadership, by the community of Arab states as expressed through the Arab League, or by the vast majority of people throughout the world who have ever had anything critical to say about Israeli policies.

The central problem is not illegitimacy of a state or efforts to impute illegitimacy to a state but instead the illegitimacy of denying political rights through conquest and colonization.

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How Crucial Is Media?

Perhaps the Right's biggest advantage in U.S. politics is its advanced media infrastructure built over several decades and designed to reach the entire country on a variety of levels especially when it's compared to the Left's general neglect of a messaging system, an imbalance that Danny Schechter addresses.

By Danny Schechter

When do you feel like you are over the hill?

When you get letters like this one from Jose Hevia after writing an op-ed featuring [an essay](#) from your recent book [Blogothon](#), recounting your experiences as a network-TV-insider-turned-independent-media-outsider. The essay offered a case study of how the nominally non-commercial network, PBS, turned its back on a human rights TV series I co-produced. It is about the challenges progressives face in offering a counter-narrative to parochial mainstream thinking.

My critical correspondent wondered what I was whining about: "Complaining that the old media is getting more and more monopolized Is ... who cares about old media? Nobody in my inner circle under 30 watches old media any more. Bye."

Take that, old man. Hahaha!.

I am not sure his view is totally true, what with the Comedy Channel, movie channels galore and unlimited sports coverage. The New York Times reports "Television is America's No. 1 pastime, with an average of four hours and 39 minutes consumed by **every person** every day." At the same time, Jose is right that Americans ages 12 to 34 are spending less time in front of TV sets. And, what they are not watching is traditional TV news, maybe because it is so uninteresting and disconnected from their lives.

One problem is that we live in a country where there's plenty of news but little diverse interpretation, context and background. Viewers are interested when it is presented interestingly, not in canned infotainment-oriented formats. When it's not, they're not. Breaking news is everywhere only to be replaced by more

breaking news that distracts your attention from what broke before.

It's odd but almost all the most active and militant youth activists who disagree on so much agree that an 80-plus-year-old named Noam Chomsky is one of their heroes. Punk groups write songs praising him. His books are passed from hand to hand. They are the most popular titles in the Occupy Wall Street Peoples Library. Chomsky just released a pamphlet about Occupy.

A few years back, Chomsky got a rare long interview on cable TV. No, it wasn't MSNBC or Fox or the Comedy Channel the networks that are widely watched but CSPAN's Book TV. I stared at the screen for what seemed like forever to watch a scroll listing some 80 books he's written go by ever so slowly. I am not sure how many people watched but it was fascinating.

I am nowhere near Chomsky's prodigious output. I have ONLY written 14 books not to mention essays published in scores of others. I am not sure it matters but I do what I can. And, yet, yes, as a journalist I am still a book guy because of my years as a student and immersion in a political culture that reveres ideas and intellectual thought.

At the same time I have also spent years inside the mainstream media machine where my work reached many more millions, even when I felt I was pumping it out into the maw where shows whiz by and are rarely remembered.

When I worked at ABC News, there was an expression that counseled producers not to get too detailed. The instruction was to avoid "MEGO" standing for "My Eyes Glaze Over." That's how they believe the audience reacts when exposed to too much analysis. They tune out!

So it's not surprising that online media like You Tube, Twitter, Facebook, etc. are so popular. They are personal, quick, easy to upload to and snappy. The Occupy Movement has taken advantage of this technology, too, with websites and twitter feeds but to their credit, also longer-form outlets.

Old-time activists like one of my mentors as an organizer, Stanley Aronowitz, now a social theorist, believes many in this generation don't understand the importance of reaching beyond their Facebook Friends and digital communities. He told me for a TV series I am doing about "Who Rules America":

"We don't have a Left that really continually, in an effective way, talks about who has power in America. The Occupy movement talked about ninety-nine percent being deprived of economic power and about inequality, but it is not even close to being an analysis that can be disseminated throughout the entire society.

"We don't have a system of daily newspapers. We don't have a weekly newspaper.

We have Twitter. We have, you know, various other kinds of social media that we have access to, but it does not replace the kind of systematic analysis that can take place as a result of having our own media.”

Maybe that’s why I write a daily 3,000-word blog every day at newsdissector.net and churn out books even though I know it’s a kind of Neanderthal pursuit in an age when even popular magazines and newspapers are facing enormous obstacles in reaching audiences. The book business seems to be barely limping along as a transition continues to heavily hyped digital nirvana.

At the same time, along with my younger critic, I do use and believe in the power of social media. I have had a computer since 1981, and been online since ’86. I tweet (Dissector Events), have a Facebook page, use a smart phone, watch videos and relish the power of interactivity. I think we need to be involved in as many media outlets as we can be.

The journalist I co-founded Globalvision Inc. with, Rory O Connor, has a brilliant must-read book out on social media, *Friends, Followers and The Future; How Social Media are Changing Politics, Threatening Big Brands, and Killing Traditional Media*. (City Lights)

Yes, he’s right this “new” media is transforming our world and providing key tools that help organize revolts and even revolutions. It’s all very exciting, but also potentially dangerous as governments create cyber-war commands to use the Internet as a tool for aggressive intervention, spying, surveillance, information collection, and social control. Social Media also addicts us to big corporate brands with questionable commitments to change and democracy.

I am reminded of a poster I saw that was created by the students at the Beaux Arts College in Paris during the May-June 1968 uprising. The slogan was more of a mocking warning than a celebration. It read, “I Participate, You Participate. We Participate. They Profit!”

Democracy should not be about enriching a techno elite, giving us more toys and apps and devices to distract us from becoming the change makers we should be. (How much is Apple or Google giving back?) That’s why I wrote *Blogothon* with the title inspired by old TV telethons that once ran around the clock. I have been blogging almost every day since Sept. 11, 2001. I believe you need to have a regular presence to win influence.

If the progressive movement is to build support, it needs to be present in all media in an effort to reach and persuade the mainstream about why change is needed and how to go about it. It needs to critique old media and vitalize new Media. We have to build a mass audience for our ideas, not just focus on

chatting with so-called friends. Outreach is essential without being condescending. We must influence the mainstream.

Then, we have to also go beyond media and get actively involved in the struggle to transform the status quo in an America of growing economic inequality, poverty and war. My *Blogothon* essays treat all of these issues with perspectives rooted in my long "career" in media and activism.

Have a read, and you tell me if they can contribute to the movement we need to build? Bye.

News Dissector Danny Schechter blogs at newsdissector.net. In addition to *Blogothon*, Cosimo Books has also just published his *Occupy: Dissecting Occupy Wall Street*. His latest film is *Plunder the Crime of our Time* on the financial crisis as a crime story. (plunderthecrimeofourtime.com.) He hosts News Dissector Radio Hour on Prograssive Radio Network (PRN.fm), Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org
