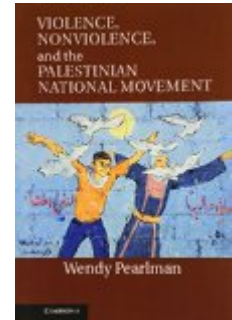


**Wendy Pearlman.** *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement.*  
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**Reviewed by** Erik Mohns

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This highly praised study on the politics of the Palestinian national movement, based on the author's doctoral dissertation in political science, addresses a clear-cut theoretical puzzle: Why do some self-determination movements chose violent over non-violent forms of protest? Contrary to a range of influential studies across several research programs that examine how movements mobilize support for violent uprising, Wendy Pearlman investigates the conditions for national movements to engage in nonviolent protest. Her bipartite argument is straightforward and precise: "a movement must be cohesive to use nonviolent protest, and fragmented movements are more likely than cohesive ones to use violent protest" (p. 11). Movement cohesion is defined here as "[t]he capacity for internal command and control that enables a composite social actor to act as if it were a unitary one" (p. 9). Accordingly, only cohesive movements possess adequate institutional capacity to mobilize mass participation, enforce discipline, contain disruptive dissent, and rein in violence driven by particularistic motives of single activists. Pearlman, currently assistant professor of political science at Northwestern Uni-

versity, does not make the commonplace suggestion that a movement's degree of cohesion affects the probability that it will mobilize collective action, or that this contentious action will leave an impact. She emphasizes instead that a movement's organizational structure affects the *very form* that its collective action can or is likely to take, that is if they chose violent or nonviolent modes of action. While numerous parameters have the potential to convey a movement's conflict behaviour, the study's emphasis on the movement's organizational structure as mediating those factors' impact suggests that a simple correlation between any of these parameters and a movement's form of protest would be misleading.

Pearlman's "organizational mediation theory of protest" that is developed in the book provides a suitable theoretical framework for a detailed and rigorous analysis of the Palestinian national movement and its protest strategies from the Balfour Declaration to the recent past. By immersing into Palestinian domestic politics and its organizational contours, her scholarly inquiry provides a very convincing explanation why the Palestinian

national movement has resorted at times to non-violent protest and at other times violent protest, and how those phases are inextricably linked. In five successive chapters delineating each a distinctive historical era of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, the strength of the movement's leadership, its institutions, and collective purpose in each distinctive period are skilfully assessed. This *longue durée* investigation elucidates how the movement's strategies and forms of protests have varied over time, not only between but also within successive periods.

The study's findings suggest that the Palestinian national movement chose unarmed forms of mass protest, such as during the general strike in the 1930s and the intifada of 1987, when internal cohesion prevailed. During these episodes of contention, a legitimate leadership and grassroots network organized civil nonviolent forms of protest in which Palestinians across classes, religions, and regions took part. During periods of armed uprising and violent forms of protest, the national movement lacked a strong central leadership, institutions and a popular consensus, and was organizationally fragmented, as, for example, during the periods of the guerrilla warfare in the 1960s, or during the second Intifada in 2000. Weak authority structures allowed external actors to intervene and induce or coerce Palestinian parties to act in ways that furthered outsiders' interests. These divisions left the movement with an institutional incapacity to carry out nonviolent protest on a mass scale, even if support for such a strategy existed.

By basing her well-illustrated investigation on a broad range of sources, including archival materials, government documents, memoirs, newspaper, survey data as well as interviews, Pearlman's study challenges most prevailing scholarly narratives about the politics and political strategies of the Palestinian national movement. Several previous studies have argued, for instance, that during the British Mandate period (1918-1948), protests

for self-determination turned violent, as nonviolent contentious action did not bear fruit. It is commonly assumed that Palestinian political elites were the primary engine to escalate radical strategies as nonviolent strategies failed to change the policies of the British Mandate authorities. In contrast to this narrative, Pearlman spells out how multiple wider social and political processes – such as increasing Jewish immigration, land acquisition and the British refusal to accommodate Arab demands – left their mark on modes of political organization as well as on the movement's organizational cohesion. As political elites increasingly lost backing in society and forfeited authority to prevent or control outbreaks of grassroots violence, the resulting fragmentation left the national movement without any political tools to mobilize nonviolent protest or impose constraint on the recourse to force.

The next chapters compellingly analyze in detail the processes and factors in the subsequent periods of the Palestinian people's struggle for self-determination that had affected the movement's degree of cohesion/fragmentation as well as its forms of protest respectively. It is convincingly demonstrated how the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the national movement's institutional framework was never able to consolidate, even in its heydays, a monopoly over decision-making. Chronic division and armed struggle created opportunities for an 'escalatory outbidding' among multiple political factions. At the height of the first Intifada in 1987, however, "repression was met by the most extensive example of cooperation and unified political action in Palestinian history" (p. 121). The Palestinian national movement inside the territories, bolstered by the society's sense of collective purpose and a unified national leadership leading a network of neighbourhood committees, possessed an extraordinary degree of organizational cohesiveness that sustained the prevalent nonviolent nature of the uprising. This cohesive organizational structure fragmented in the uprising's waning years when

Israeli counterinsurgency measures took their toll and the perspective of ending occupation became increasingly elusive.

The study's fifth and sixth chapters portray the lacking internal cohesion of the national movement under the Oslo framework and the deficient institutionalization of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) that left it vulnerable to 'spoiling'. Pearlman argues that the fractured Palestinian movement's capacity for command and control was in decline and further weakened in sustained armed confrontations with the Israeli army. The escalation of violence constricted alternative venues for non-militarized protests and encouraged more violence by generating motivations for militancy apart from the goal of self-determination. Militancy and claims of military success served as means to advance the status of actors vis-à-vis their political rivals.

The study's seventh chapter tests the generalizability of its theoretical framework by applying it to the South African anti-apartheid struggle and the Northern Irish Republican movement. Pearlman convincingly shows the approach's validity in explaining aspects of protest that are often left unexplained in other studies. In comparison with the self-determination movements in South Africa and Northern Ireland, the organizational fragmentation of the Palestinian movement proved most conducive to spoiler violence; in contrast to these cases, it lacked the institutional capacity to control and command the different constituencies of the whole movement.

The importance of this comparative study of political violence and nonviolence does not only lie in its contribution to social movement theory and studies of political violence. It also adds substantive knowledge to studies of Palestinian nationalism and politics. Pearlman reminds us that a national movement's 'success' is not determined by the strength of its collective identity, as a whole range of recent studies about the Palestinian national movement had argued; a sense of

belonging does not alone coordinate and channel collective action. Whereas Palestinian national identification has been growing since the Balfour Declaration, political cohesion of the national movement has experienced ups and downs on its trajectory. But as Pearlman argues, "[i]t is this organizational structure of the Palestinian struggle as a movement," - that is leadership, institutions, and collective purpose -, "not the collective consciousness of Palestinians as a people, that has mediated forms of protest" (p. 21).

The policy implications that can be drawn from Pearlman's study are of great value, not solely for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict's contemporary constellation. Any attempt of conflict resolution involving non-state actors should be accompanied by efforts to convey movement cohesion. Agreements with fragmented movements have only slim chances to be sustainable. Furthermore, it is insufficient to solely look at the conflict interactions between states and their non-state challengers while overlooking politics within movements. Movements are rarely unified actors; hence, obstacles to pacify asymmetric conflicts are closely tied to movements' organizational structures.

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