

To Change the Palestinian Mindset

by Michael Curtis



On March 21, 2017 Martin McGuinness, the paramilitary activist turned peacemaker in Northern Ireland died at the age of 66. The commander of the Provisional IRA advocating and practicing armed resistance against British rule, he transformed himself into a working political figure for Sinn Fein, a realistic conciliator and stabilizing force in Northern Ireland where he served as Deputy First Minister from 2007 until 2017.

On the same day, March 21, the students at two Palestinian universities, An-Najah National University in Nablus, and Al-Quds Open University, part of the Fatah student movement Shabiba, issued a manifesto. It proclaimed, "from the sea of blood of the Martyrs we will create a state." Israel will be erased and become "Palestine," and it will be accomplished through violence and terror.

To illustrate their violent intentions, the Palestinian students accompanied the message with a logo containing a

number of features: a coat of arms with a raised fist in the shape of "Palestine," (all of present day Israel and the areas under control of the Palestinian Authority); the Dome of the Rock; and the Palestinian Arab headdress, the Keffiyeh.

Palestine was to be created from the blood of martyrs. Already in 2016, the Palestinian students at BirZeit University, near Ramallah, had put up a poster calling for murder, illustrated by a knife dripping with blood shaped as the PA map of "Palestine."

Martin McGuinness is not the only political figure who recently illustrated the path to take of peace, the one opposite to the Palestinian bloodthirsty one. In recent generations they have included Mahatma Gandhi, Jomo Kenyatta (President of Kenya 1964-78) , Archbishop Makarios (President of Cyprus 1960-77), Hastings Banda (President of Malawi 1966-94), Kwame Nkrumah (President of Ghana 1960-66), Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela.

All of these leaders sought independence from colonial rulers or freedom from the ruling group in their country, all engaged in acts of disobedience, violent or non-violent, all were imprisoned or exiled at some point. All of them changed their political tactics, became peaceful leaders, though some when gaining power ruled in authoritarian or non-democratic fashion, guilty of nepotism or corruption. Some were founders of their liberated nation.

Perhaps the best and most influential model is Nelson Mandela who all his life was concerned with eliminating discrimination in South Africa. For this objective, he took part in student demonstrations and was expelled from his university. With the African National Congress of which he became president, he was engaged at first in non- violent civil disobedience against the apartheid regime. After his trial and non-conviction in 1956 for treason, he formed the ANC's military wing, *The Spear of the Nation*, which campaigned against the military and

government, used sabotage, and was prepared for guerilla war. In June 1964 Mandela was arrested for sabotage and treason and sentenced to life imprisonment. He served 27 years before being released in 1990, aged 71.

The remarkable part of the story is Mandela's rejection of bitterness and anger, and his giving up any thought of violence and armed struggle. In this regard he was certainly influenced by Gandhi who had lived in South Africa between 1893 and 1914. Making peace with his former enemies, the advocates of apartheid, Mandela cooperated with them. The result was that he and former foe President F.W. de Klerk shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. He became president of South Africa the next year.

Mandela spoke of his objective, to seek a democratic and free society in which all, Afrikaan, English, and Zulu, in a color blind society live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. He was inspired in prison by the poem *Invictus* (undefeated, unconquered) by William Ernest Henley, the last lines of which are well known: "I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul." Mandela had an unconquerable soul.

The film *Invictus* made by Clint Eastwood vividly illustrates one incident in Mandela's attempt to unite his country, in this case by sport. Mandela prevailed on fellow countrymen, especially the black population, to support the Springboks, the national rugby team, formerly regarded as embodying apartheid, as a symbol of national unity. His own appearance, wearing a Springbok rugby shirt and cap, on the field when the team won the World Cup Final in 1995 was wildly applauded. This has been called the game that made a nation.

What a difference this form of behavior is compared to that of Palestinian leaders, past and present, towards the state of Israel, and their hatred of Jews and Zionism. Their talk has been of a holy war, or of taking the initiative to destroy the Zionist presence in the Arab homeland, or to destroy Israel.

The phraseology may differ from time to time but the thrust is always the same. Jerusalem and all of Palestine is Islamic land. The entire land of Palestine is Islamic Waqf: it is forbidden to facilitate the occupation of even a millimeter of it. Though it pretends to have done so, the Palestinian leadership has never, in any meaningful way, recognized Israel's right to exist. The aim is to eliminate Israel, either in stages or all at once. The objective is officially pronounced in Article 1 of the Palestinian National Charter, resulting from the resolutions of the Palestine National Council in July 1-17, 1968: "Palestine is the homeland of the Arab Palestinian people; it is an indivisible part of the Arab homeland."

Palestinian authorities pay little attention to Western calls for them to abandon their threats to eliminate Israel and to turn their swords into ploughshares. They might listen to the words of Muhammad Aal Al-Sheikh, published in 2017 in the Saudi daily paper *Al Jazirah*. He wrote that the reliance of radical Palestinian groups on armed resistance constitutes a kind of political suicide that only a political ignoramus can condone. To his Palestinian brethren he said that stubbornness, contrariness, and betting on the support of the Arab masses are a hopeless effort.

Most of all, the Palestinian leadership, both Fatah and Hamas, and above all Mahmoud Abbas, now in the 12th year of his 4 year term as Palestinian President, should remember not merely the career and contributions of Martin McGuinness and Nelson Mandela, but also the comments of the Norwegian Nobel Committee in awarding to prize to Mandela in 1993. Mandela, the Committee said, looked ahead to South African reconciliation instead of back at the deep wounds of the past.

Palestinians should follow the lead of Mandela who pointed the way to the peaceful resolution of similar deep-rooted conflicts elsewhere in the world. Is any Palestinian

listening? Can President Trump help change the Palestinian mindset?