

Naval War College Review

Volume 61
Number 2 *Spring*

Article 17

2008

Psychological Warfare in the Intifada: Israeli and Palestinian Media Politics and Military Strategies

Robert L. Perry

Ron Schleifer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Perry, Robert L. and Schleifer, Ron (2008) "Psychological Warfare in the Intifada: Israeli and Palestinian Media Politics and Military Strategies," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 61 : No. 2 , Article 17.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol61/iss2/17>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

attempts to anticipate the patterns of future strategic history will be more right than wrong.

STEPHEN B. SMITH
University of Reading
United Kingdom



Schleifer, Ron. *Psychological Warfare in the Intifada: Israeli and Palestinian Media Politics and Military Strategies*. Portland, Ore.: Sussex Academic, 2006. 272pp. \$69.50

In the wake of the second Palestinian intifada against Israel (2002 through 2006), it has been easy to lose sight of the fact that the first intifada (December 1987 through October 1991) was largely nonviolent but highly successful. It achieved the primary goal of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)—forcing Israel to recognize the PLO by initiating negotiations. In this work Ron Schleifer offers a unique, though logically flawed, perspective of the first intifada, which he describes as “political warfare.” That is, he examines how the PLO assumed control of what began as a spontaneous nonviolent uprising in December 1987 to produce a successful campaign that was based on a range of largely persuasive techniques and lasted more than three years. Schleifer analyzes the successful Palestinian tactics and compares them to the unsuccessful Israeli response through the components of “psychological operations” (PSYOP) as presented in the *U.S. Army Manual of Psychological Warfare*.

Schleifer’s book is based on research gathered for his doctoral dissertation completed at the University of Leeds. He chose the PSYOP manual and its

taxonomy as his theoretical basis, and he is at his best when using the components of the PSYOP manual to analyze and compare how both sides prepared their campaigns, determined and applied consistent themes or messages, chose and used dissemination techniques and tactics, responded to enemy messages, and applied countermeasures. He offers convincing evidence that within the first few weeks of the uprising, the PLO seized and maintained the initiative and dominated what we now call “the information environment,” while the Israelis, riven by internal ambiguity and dissent, floundered.

Unfortunately, this work is ultimately unsatisfying, because its organization and thesis have logical flaws. Readers interested in a more concise, better organized analysis of nonviolent conflict based on psychological operations can find it in Schleifer’s 2006 article “Psychological Operations: A New Variation of an Age Old Art: Hezbollah versus Israel,” published in *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, volume 29, pp. 1–19. For readers interested in the specific tactics used in the first intifada, this book will serve as a high-quality resource. This work has several critical shortcomings, one of them its title. A better title might have focused on the key concept and not the methods. Second, although he thoroughly reviews how “propaganda” and “psychological operations” acquired their negative connotations before and after World War II, Schleifer applies only a restrictive definition of PSYOP. The PSYOP manual, however, uses a different primary definition and categorizes different types. He analyzes a complete taxonomy in terms of his own different, limited, definition.

Third, although his basic premise is that the Palestinians were conducting “political warfare,” he only briefly discusses the concept and does not apply all the elements of his definition to the intifada. Schleifer asserts that the term, invented by the British to replace “propaganda,” encompasses a broader range of strategies, everything from nonviolent propaganda and civil disobedience to violent terrorism and insurgency. He claims that the primary commonality of these strategies (to replace or complement conventional warfare) is sufficient for a theoretical analysis of the intifada. But he excludes violent action (terrorism and insurgency, as practiced primarily by Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah) from his analysis of how the Palestinians conducted political warfare. Examining only a few categories of political warfare appears to undermine his theory.

In sum, Schleifer has written an interesting study of how the PLO and its partners used a variety of nonviolent persuasive tactics to achieve a significant short-term political goal. Future study should define “political warfare” more precisely and examine how and why this term substantively differs from civil disobedience, nonviolent conflict, low-intensity conflict, propaganda, and psychological operations, and whether it offers a significant new perspective.

ROBERT L. PERRY
Naval War College



West, Diana. *The Death of the Grown-Up: How America's Arrested Development Is Bringing Down Western Civilization*. New York: St. Martin's, 2007. 256pp. \$23.95

“Stop, before you hurt yourself! Why? Because I said so”—a common diktat from a caring parent to child, about setting limits on behavior. The historical role of grown-ups has been to nurture, protect, and teach fledglings about self-destructive behavior. So how, then, is raising children the unifying theme of a book about the decline of Western civilization?

The answer, as Diana West argues convincingly, is a direct correlation between decades of moribund moral norms, owing to vanishing societal maturity, and America's inability to grasp the seriousness of emerging global dangers. Like a child that keeps playing, unwilling to obey the call for bedtime, America is simply not paying attention to a world of growing challenges. Worse yet, the author contends, there are no adults around to take away the toys.

Of course West, an esteemed syndicated columnist and writer, is not the first to observe the decline of adult influence or the erosion of individual responsibility, nor is she original in excoriating society and lamenting the erosion of the nuclear family. Nonetheless, West's meticulous assemblage of tangible evidence, superb research, insightful analysis, and application of theory to national security issues make this book extraordinary.

According to West, the gradual “death of the grown-up” began not with the revolutionary 1960s but rather directly following World War II. Business visionaries saw the exploding generation of youth as future consumers with unparalleled financial potential. Throughout the 1950s the magic of the anti-adult was personified, according to West, by the likes of music's Elvis Presley, fiction's Holden Caulfield, and