

Azmi Bishara and Muslims Worldwide Say No to Attacks on Non-Combatants: I Agree

by John Spritzler
June 6, 2007

[\[newdemocracyworld.org\]](http://newdemocracyworld.org)

What follows are some excerpts from Azmi Bishara's writings, and some results of opinion polls of Americans and Muslims, on the question of violence against non-combatants.

Any organization trying to gain public support for opposition to Israel must take into account what the public thinks about this question. The Zionists shrewdly make their #1 propaganda theme the lie that the conflict is simple. On one side, they say, are those who believe in killing Jewish Israeli non-combatants, and on the other side is Israel, doing what is necessary to defend Jews, even if that requires what would otherwise seem to be harsh and draconian measures, like a brutal occupation. The Zionists ask the American public to take the morally just side in this conflict, and they do everything they can to make sure people see us as being on the wrong side.

Azmi Bishara speaks out on this issue because he doesn't want the Zionists to succeed. Here is what he says.

10 - 16 February 2005

Issue No. 729

[Opinion](#)

Notes on violence

*Instinct and moral constructs: **Azmi Bishara** examines definitions of terror*

"Clearly one can conceive of violence against an occupation as unprofitable or counterproductive. But is it possible to conceive of an illegitimate form of violence against occupation? The evolution of civilisation and social organisation that checks and regulates the lust for revenge and other such instincts compel one to answer in the affirmative. A foreign occupation is an instance of the aggression of a state against civilians of another country. Resisting this aggression may justify violence targeting the occupying power but not civilians, even if they are members of the occupying power. This principle holds true even when we extend the definition of the occupying power to comprise its government, institutions of state and other official paraphernalia." [This is an excerpt from "Notes on violence" by Azmi Bishara, with full

text at <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/729/op5.htm>]

Obviously, there is nothing "anti-Palestinian" about Azmi Bishara, a man elected to the Israeli Knesset by Palestinians living in, and second-class citizens of, Israel and a man now being hunted down and accused of a *capital* offense by the Israeli government for his "crime" of insisting that Israel be a state of all its citizens, not a Jewish state. By stating his views on violence so clearly, distinguishing violence against the occupying power from violence against civilians, Bishara enlists maximum worldwide support for the anti-Zionist cause.

Bishara, again making a distinction between these two different kinds of violence, wrote in July, 2006 (in "[Channeling the resistance](#)") that, "*Contrary to the general belief, Israel perceives a greater danger from attacks against its soldiers than attacks against civilians -- it does not want the precedent to catch on.*" In this article, Bishara goes on to explain why violence by Palestinians against Israeli *combatants* helps the cause and harms the Zionists, while violence against Israeli *non-combatants* does exactly the opposite:

"Israel knows that if military confrontation became the rule this would threaten the unity of Israeli society. As long as civilians are at risk, Israelis can tell themselves they are being attacked because they are Jews and that they have no choice but to defend themselves, or that war is an imperative. But attacks against soldiers are attacks mounted directly against the occupation and the armed forces that embody the occupation. States can choose their policies, unlike people on a bus or in a restaurant. Soldiers who are killed are not said to have been murdered, like civilians who happen to have been in the wrong restaurant or on the wrong bus at the wrong time, but rather to have "died in the line of duty". The Zionist establishment is also acutely sensitive to the fact that the army, security and the military myth are fundamental to the credibility and prestige of Zionism as a historic solution. No doubt, too, selecting military targets would also alter the image of the resister. He would become a formidable adversary who plans his strategies and tactics in order to accomplish a certain agenda, instead of just a mad suicide bomber driven by dreams of martyrdom or personal revenge into blowing himself up in a marketplace so as to take the greatest number of civilian casualties. The Zionist establishment does not want anything to shake this carefully constructed and marketed image of Palestinian otherness, because otherwise the Palestinian fighter would become a legitimate party in a comprehensible struggle for liberation."

Far from being weakened by attacks on Jewish Israeli non-combatants, Israel's leaders are strengthened by it. That is precisely the reason why they carry out false-flag attacks on Jewish civilians. According to a recent report in the British [Telegraph](#), "Israeli agents 'helped Entebbe hijackers'" (when Palestinians held Jewish airline passengers hostage in 1976, killing three of them during the famous Israeli rescue mission.) In February of 2005 Israeli Military Intelligence [rained](#) rockets down on the northern Israeli town of Nahariya after telling the public that Hezbollah was going to do so. The former Israeli M.I. officer, Ari Ben-Menashe, in his book, *Profits of War* (pg. 120), writes about Israel's "*intelligence community's 'black' operations around the world. These included funding Israeli-controlled 'Palestinian terrorists' who would commit crimes in the name of the Palestinian revolution but were actually pulling them off, usually unwittingly, as part of the Israeli propaganda machine.*" Ben-Menashe specifically

recounts in great detail how this was the case with the 1985 "Palestinian" attack on the cruise ship, *Achille Lauro*, in which Palestinian individuals killed an elderly Jewish man in a wheelchair and then threw him overboard, horrifying people the world over, which was the exact intention of the Israelis who, unbeknown to the Palestinians, had orchestrated and paid for the attack.

Of course, it is impossible to oppose and expose such false-flag attacks on non-combatants if one adopts the stance that it is not permissible to criticize anything done by Palestinians in the name of the resistance. Israeli leaders hope that friends of the true Palestinian resistance will adopt this stance and remain silent when such false-flag operations occur, rather than explain to the public that opposition to Zionism is not at all the same thing as advocating the killing of Jewish non-combatants.

It is precisely because Israel's leaders *benefit* when their non-combatant civilians are attacked by Palestinians, that it makes no sense to argue, as some do, that the killing of Jewish Israeli non-combatants is a legitimate form of struggle. Making such an argument means falling right into the trap of helping the Zionist leaders gain strength from being able to [control and exploit](#) ordinary Jews by making them believe that Palestinians want to kill them simply because they are Jewish.

Opinion Polls in the U.S. and in Muslim Nations

Now let's look at some opinion poll results on this question. In December of 2006 the University of Maryland's Program on International Public Attitudes [asked random samples](#) (pdf) of people in the U.S. and in Iran the following question:

"Some people think that bombing and other types of attacks intentionally aimed at civilians are sometimes justified while others think that this kind of violence is never justified. Do you personally feel that such attacks are often justified, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?"

80% of Iranians responded "Never justified." (5% said "Rarely justified", 8% said "Sometimes justified", 3% said "Often justified" and 5% Refused/Don't know. Was the sample unrepresentative? I don't think so, because, not surprisingly, 83% said Israel has "a mainly negative influence in the world" and 73% said the Palestinians have a "mainly positive" influence.)

The *Christian Science Monitor*, in an article titled ["The myth of Muslim support for terror"](#) February 23, 2007, reported that a different 2006 poll *"from the world's most-populous Muslim countries – Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nigeria... found that 74 percent of respondents in Indonesia agreed that terrorist attacks are 'never justified'; in Pakistan, that figure was 86 percent; in Bangladesh, 81 percent."* Their [2007 poll here](#) has very similar results.

Interestingly, the University of Maryland poll asked Americans exactly the same question that it

asked Iranians and the result was quite different: 46% of Americans said that "attacks intentionally aimed at civilians" are "Never justified" (27% said they were "Rarely justified," 19% said "Sometimes justified" and 5% "Often justified" with 2% Refused/Don't know.)

At first I was surprised that so few Americans (only 46%) answered "Never justified." But then the explanation occurred to me. For most people in the world, the words "civilian" and "non-combatant" mean the same thing. But for people living in countries whose government is waging a war against insurgencies made up largely of armed civilians, the words are not understood to mean exactly the same thing. A civilian may or may not be a non-combatant, and Americans have been shown so many photographs of armed insurgent civilians in Iraq that many Americans probably visualize a combatant, not a non-combatant, when the word "civilian" is used in this context dealing with the appropriateness of violence.



[Here](#), for example, is a typical photograph of Iraqi insurgents, obviously civilians, and its caption below, like the thousands that Americans have been inundated with since the 2003 invasion of Iraq:

[photo is at http://www.chinadaily.net/english/doc/2004-06/24/xin_46060124214881126871.jpg]

The caption reads: *"Armed Iraqi insurgents chant pro-resistance slogans after clashing with U.S. forces in the western city of Falluja June 24, 2004. Rebels bent on disrupting a handover to Iraqi rule bloodied five cities Thursday with coordinated assaults on local security forces in which*

about 75 people, including three U.S. soldiers, were killed. [Reuters]"

A civilian is a person who wears civilian clothes, not a military uniform, and who is not a member of a nation's formal military forces. Some civilians are non-combatants, and some are not. Americans, far more than people living in countries not at war with an insurgency, would be keenly aware of this distinction.

Had the opinion poll question posed to Americans used the word "non-combatants" instead of "civilians" I think about as many Americans as Iranians or Indonesians or Pakistanis would have responded that "attacks intentionally aimed at **non-combatants**" are "Never justified," in other words the vast majority.

That is why, if we want to build a mass, popular movement and actually win, we need to let the public know that on this fundamental moral question, it is we, the anti-Zionists, who agree with them, and it is the Zionists who disagree with them, not simply because the Israeli government militarily attacks Palestinian and other non-Jewish non-combatants, but because the objective of Zionism, itself, is a violent ethnic cleansing attack on non-combatants.

We need the public to know that the choice is between supporting equality or supporting racism, not between opposing or supporting the killing of non-combatants, as the Zionists try to make the public believe. We should tell the public that, yes, we do disagree with the actions of some Palestinians, but that doesn't at all take away from the fact that Zionist ethnic cleansing is the root of the conflict and must be abolished, just as slavery in the United States had to be abolished regardless of the fact that some slaves wrongly killed some innocent white children.

When the Zionists accuse us of supporting the killing of non-combatants, we should follow the example of people like Azmi Bishara and say, clearly and simply, "No we don't." If we can't respond directly like that, people will wonder, Why not? They will figure that we must actually support the killing of non-combatants, just as the Zionists say we do, because otherwise we would say that we don't.

If our chief concern is to win then we have to deal with this question effectively. Let's win.

John Spritzler is the author of [*The People As Enemy: The Leaders' Hidden Agenda In World War II*](#), and a Research Scientist at the Harvard School of Public Health.