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## Financing the flames from a mobile home in Florida

A shadowy volunteer organization of non-Israelis working ‘against the brutal occupation of Palestine’ is tracked from the West Bank to the woods near Tampa

BY EDWIN BLACK | October 30, 2013, 2:10 pm | 67

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Illustrative photo of Palestinian and foreign activists during a 2010 protest against the security barrier at the West Bank village of Bil'in, near Ramallah (photo credit: Issam Rimawi / Flash90)

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A regular feature of West Bank confrontation between Israeli soldiers and Palestinians seems to be a corps of intrepid young women that villagers call “internationals.” They specialize in upfront and personal, in-your-face, and often nose-to-nose verbal taunting hoping to provoke a reaction that video cameras can record. If and when soldiers finally do react, these incidents are then uploaded to the Internet to prove “the brutality of the IDF.” These “internationals” often seem to appear out of nowhere at a village flashpoint. Just as suddenly, they melt into the background.

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Using false names and seemingly untrackable movements, the skilled and stealthy internationals have managed to inspire and encourage

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videographed confrontation far beyond their numbers. Who are they? What is the font of their financial wherewithal? Who is financing these flames?

Searching for answers, one night in early May 2013, I traveled to the tiny West Bank town of Deir Itsiya where the internationals quietly maintain a base of operations. The women are known to many in that local Arab community, where they are provided logistical assistance and deferential hospitality. They receive many European guests. When I asked my taxi driver, "Do you know where the house is?" he answered, "Yes, Sheik Haider (neighborhood)." He took me there.

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At an elbow in a dusty road, I found their compound behind long, ornate iron fencing. I knocked on all the doors, the ones with knockers and the ones without. No answer. I called out for anyone who was home. A neighbor strolled by to remark. The driver translated: "He said the European girls are not sleeping in town tonight. But he knows how to reach them. I will take you where he said."

Moments later, as I walked down a back alley, a man appeared at the top of the lane. After brief introductions, he dialed one of the international women on his cellphone. "Hello, dear," he said to them in English, exercising almost affectionate appreciation. "There is someone here who wishes to talk to you, dear." After listening for a few moments, he answered, "So, dear, what you wish us to do?" A few moments elapsed. "Yes, dear, I will do just as you say," he replied, with unexpected docility. In four consecutive sentences, he addressed the woman as "dear."

With a nod, the man handed me his cell. The woman on the other end of the phone spoke to me with an American accent but would not identify whether she was an American or give her real name. "We don't reveal our identities. We use false names," she explained. "Our group is the International Women's Peace Service. We are not an NGO. No money given to us is tax-deductible. Anyone who gives to us just gives to support our work. We raise money anyway we can. Every one of us fundraises."

"What is your mission here?" I asked.

She replied, "Our group is completely independent. We are here for protective presence." The term "protective presence" is shorthand for obstructive confrontation with security forces during high-profile actions. She added, "We resist the Israeli occupation, train the villagers, and we do field research. We go to the Friday demonstrations at Nabi Saleh. We work with Deir Istiya to plant trees and sometimes supply those trees."

The International Women's Peace Service bills itself as a volunteer confrontation and intervention organization. It self-describes this way: "IWPS Team is working with other activists against the brutal occupation of Palestine." The IWPS keeps member names and locations a secret to evade the Israeli police and security forces.

But who finances and organizes the operation?



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Tracking the organization's international banking information revealed their European banking and donations are channeled through BAWAG PSK bank in Vienna, Austria. Internet-based donations to the IWPS are accepted via WePay, a recently developed alternative to PayPal. WePay has become popular with alternative and protest groups seeking opacity. It was reportedly the money channel of choice during the Occupy Movement.

In the United States, checks for the IWPS are mailed to the titular American nerve center of the international movement. That location is not ensconced in the avant-garde, liberal Mission District of San Francisco, or the constricted hustle-bustle avenues of New York's socially-conscious West Village, or even the fractious, academic neighborhoods of Chicago's Hyde Park. That location is secluded in a heavily wooded area of Spring Hill, Florida, a small community in sparsely populated Hernando County about an hour north of Tampa.

A check of Internet traffic reaching the IWPS IP address daily for the past year, including the two dozen-odd websites that currently link back to the IWPS, led to the same residence in Spring Hill that receives checks.

To reach that dwelling, one must first drive from the nearest state highway, skirting the nearby sandhill preserves and state parks, and then turn down a small paved road, which after 970 feet stops abruptly but then continues for 1,700 feet as a primitive lane that was upgraded earlier this year by the county roads department from compacted limestone to reclaimed asphalt, and from that last maintained lip down along a personal dirt driveway that must first cross an adjacent private five-acre wooded lot. There, at the end of the end of the end of the road is a small mobile home on a five-acre, tree-filled parcel. County real estate records indicate that of the property's approximate \$95,000 value, about \$83,000 is in the five-acre land itself, with only \$10,000 allotted for the actual dwelling. The trailer enjoys a street-specific numbered postal address only as a theoretical extension of the nearest paved road that is used to access the asphalt extension leading to the dirt driveway that extends to the front step of the front door.

In other words, the IWPS American location is a little trailer in the woods.

Frank and Marie Indelicato live at that address. Their phone number is unlisted. I got it.

Marie picked up the phone and confirmed that she is one of just eleven people worldwide that run IWPS. The others are located in Europe, Japan, Australia, and Latin America. There is no president or director, Marie explained, as "that would violate our principles. We govern by consensus." Marie states she came upon the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in 2002. "I saw the injustice and had to act."

IWPS knows they are operating stealthily, often in the shadows and at the edge of confrontation. "Four of our people have been caught and been banned by the Israelis from entering the country for ten years," she said. Even a reduction of four diminished the thin but effective disruption operation. Only 150 girls work with the IWPS. Marie states, "Most are paying their own way and getting assistance from the villages and others." The 150 participants are divided up between "long-term volunteers" and "short-term volunteers," with twenty-two being the minimum age for involvement. A three-year commitment is required of long-term volunteers, which includes at least an annual three-month stint secreted in the West Bank. Short-term volunteers can work on the West Bank for just four months.

A rigorous screening process awaits any applicant. That screening includes a warning: "Are you aware that our work of nonviolent resistance runs the risk of possible injury, arrest, and deportation? Our

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Volunteer Agreement draws your attention in addition to the possibility of death, though this has never happened to an IWPS volunteer. Please note that we take every precaution against all these possibilities.”

The volunteer agreement specifies: “Any medical insurance you take out may not cover you for injuries sustained through participation in any conflict, riot or war (e.g. your human-rights monitoring, nonviolent intervention, and civil resistance work).” That said, Marie explained that most volunteers resort to ordinary travelers insurance for such coverage. “If we are injured protesting at an Israeli action,” Marie added, “under our agreements with the Palestinians, we are provided treatment by the hospitals in Nablus or Ramallah free of charge.”

Training is undertaken in conjunction with the International Solidarity Movement, which on occasion takes their calls and answers emails for them from the ISM email account. ISM functions as a partner to IWPS.

But participation in IWPS is dwindling, and recently the group’s presence has been reduced. Under IWPS rules, “at least two seasoned volunteers must be in the house at all times,” Marie explained. But with a lack of participants, the house in Deir Istiya is, at press time in mid-2013, unoccupied and may not be restaffed in time for the fall 2013 harvest, when the town is traditionally more active and populated. “We may not be able to reopen it until the spring of 2014,” Marie said.

The house in Deir Istiya incurs a monthly rent of 580 Israeli shekel—about \$162. Deir Istiya mayor Abu Hejleh confirmed that the village council signed a contract with the local owner in 2009 to enable the international rental. “The house is owned by a Palestinian,” explained Abu Hejleh. “He did not know about these women. He was afraid to rent to them. So we signed the contract with him to show it was fine.” When asked about the utilities, Abu Hejleh confirmed that those costs are defrayed by the council. “We also help with the issues of electricity and water, and they pay nothing,” he stated.

One prior IWPS volunteer was a Jewish woman called Kate Raphael. She is publicly identified as a founder of a San Francisco Bay-area anti-Israeli group called “Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism.” Raphael is known as a frequent anti-Israeli protester who has repeatedly clashed with the IDF, been jailed, and also been deported from Israel, according to reportage over recent years as well as her various taped radio interviews.

Raphael has written about her involvement with the International Women’s Peace Service for Reclaiming Quarterly, a magazine for a segment of the witchcraft and magic activism community, according to that publication’s website. In that publication, Raphael is quoted as writing that the entire IWPS project “was initiated by members of the Hares Villager Council.” In a second Reclaiming Quarterly article, an interview with Raphael explores the anti-Israeli obstructive protest and confrontation skills — direct action — that she deployed for the International Solidarity Movement. She is quoted as stating, “When I heard about the March 2002 direct-action campaign, I didn’t hesitate. I thought, ‘Breaking the law, that’s something I’m good at.’ You didn’t have to be a nurse or a doctor or a lawyer. You just had to be willing to put your body in the way.” Despite efforts, Raphael could not be contacted for comment.

Those who wonder whether Palestinians and Israeli can reconcile and co-exist in peace must also confront the fact that foreign influences are working to make that more difficult. In the case of the internationals at Deir Istiya, the foreign intervention reaches all the way into the United States, and to a humble trailer located off the road, deep in the woods of Florida.

*Edwin Black is the award-winning author of the international bestseller “IBM and the Holocaust”. This article is drawn from his just-released*

newsbook, "Financing the Flames: How Tax-Exempt and Public Money Fuel a Culture of Confrontation and Terrorism in Israel."

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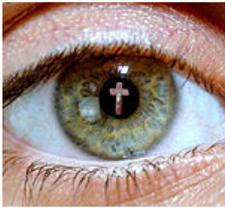
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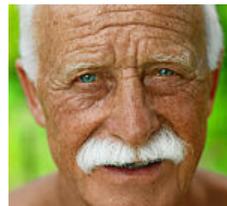
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by Taboola

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