

5 Nonviolence theory: insights for communication

How can nonviolent action against repression, aggression, and oppression be improved? Our focus here is on the role of communication. In fast-breaking events such as the 1991 Soviet coup, communication is obviously important for mobilizing and coordinating resistance, winning over opponents, and alerting people outside the immediate situation. Just as important to consider are times when action is needed but little or none occurs, such as periods in Soviet history when serious repression occurred but there was insufficient or ineffective opposition. In such situations, it may be useful to focus on barriers to effective communication and action.

In this chapter we approach this issue through scrutinizing ideas from a number of theorists of nonviolent action and social defense. We look specifically at how communication fits into their frameworks and how they might deal with the problem of absence of action. In the next chapter we look at communication theories. Through these two chapters we canvass a wide range of ideas, always seeking what can help opponents of repression, aggression, and oppression.

Note that this is not a complete survey of nonviolence theory. Nor do we attempt to give a comprehensive treatment of the work of any particular theorist. Rather, our aim is to examine some key perspectives to draw out insights relevant to communication and nonviolence. In some cases, the lessons may be primarily negative: namely, the approach might not be a useful one for the purposes here. Even then, there can be value in ruling out certain directions and hence needing to search elsewhere.

Gandhi

Mohandas K. Gandhi was the foremost practitioner of nonviolent action in the twentieth century and the inspiration for many of those

who followed him.¹ During his time in South Africa in the early 1900s, he became involved in campaigns against discrimination, gradually developing his experience and understanding of nonviolent action. On returning to India, he soon became a leader in the country's struggle against British colonial rule.

Perhaps the most famous campaign led by Gandhi was the 1930 salt march.² The British claimed a monopoly on the manufacture of salt and taxed its sale. Following extensive preparation and nonviolence training, Gandhi led a 24-day march to the sea with the express intent of making salt from seawater, a form of civil disobedience. The salt laws provided an excellent target, since they symbolized British oppression and could be challenged by popular action. The march itself provided a potent means of mobilizing support along the way, so that momentum could be gathered before engaging in the civil disobedience. There were parallel salt law disobedience actions around the country.

The British responded with mass arrests, beatings of demonstrators with lathis (wooden batons), and firing on unarmed crowds. The salt campaign was followed by negotiations, but the British reneged on some of their promises. Nevertheless, the campaign generated great support for the independence movement both in India and around the world.

The effectiveness of nonviolent action in challenging and ending British colonial rule is

1 Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1927); Richard B. Gregg, *The Power of Nonviolence* (New York: Schocken Books, [1935] 1966); Krishnalal Shridharani, *War Without Violence: A Study of Gandhi's Method and its Accomplishments* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939).

2 Thomas Weber, *On the Salt March: The Historiography of Gandhi's March to Dandi* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 1997).

sometimes belittled by the claim that the British were benign colonialists. However, the effects on India were hardly benign. In 1760, at the beginning of the industrial revolution, India's wealth and industry were equal to or better than England's. Things were difficult for the poor in each country. But while wealth increased dramatically in England over the decades, India remained shackled and impoverished. Indeed, British colonial rule destroyed the foundation for Indian economic development and fostered social rifts. The overall cost of imperialism in terms of lost and blighted lives was enormous.³

Furthermore, British imperialists were hardly soft-hearted humanitarians. In Kenya, another British colony, the violent Mau Mau rebellion was met by horrendous killing and torture, with prison camps set up around the country.⁴ Arguably, there were relatively few direct killings in India in large part because the resistance was nonviolent, not because the British were especially kind.

Gandhi was concerned with much more than independence from Britain. He campaigned against oppression from the Indian caste system, especially discrimination against so-called "untouchables." He promoted economic self-reliance, for example through spinning of cotton to produce the home-made cloth khadi. He opposed the system of monopoly capitalism and powerful government, instead supporting village democracy.

However, our aim here is not to assess Gandhi's practice but rather to extract insights from his framework for conceptualizing nonviolent action. This is not so easy. Gandhi expounded his ideas in a vast quantity of writing, but seldom in a systematic, well-organized fashion. It is possible to draw many ideas from his writings, sometimes contradic-

tory ones. Furthermore, Gandhi's "theory of nonviolence" is not necessarily identical to the way nonviolence worked in his own campaigns.

Gandhi's approach included personal nonviolence as a way of life, constructive work, and the use of nonviolence against direct and structural violence. His approach to conflict included a belief that means cannot be separated from ends (good goals do not justify bad methods), a belief in the unity of all life, and a willingness to suffer for one's beliefs.

Gandhi saw nonviolence as a matter of principle: it was a moral necessity. It was necessary because violence, oppression, and exploitation are evils that must be opposed: to tolerate or ignore them is to support them. The best way to challenge evil is by opening the eyes of those who cause it. Violence is not a good method since, as well as causing harm itself, it shuts down the dialogue that is the best way to bring about a change of heart in the oppressor.⁵ Nonviolence is a moral necessity because it is the best way to bring about a genuine change in attitude.

In contrast to the Gandhian approach of principled nonviolence is the pragmatic approach, in which nonviolence is preferred because, or when, it is more effective than violence. Most of the other theorists whose work we will examine adopt the pragmatic approach.

Although Gandhi supported nonviolence as a matter of principle, he believed it was the most effective way to bring about beneficial change. However, in undertaking nonviolent action the focus is on carrying out the action in a principled manner, even at the expense of immediate effectiveness. For example, the attitudes of nonviolent activists must be purely moral, and absolutely no violence is allowed. On occasion Gandhi called off major campaigns because of a lapse into violence by some participants.

Underlying Gandhi's approach is an assumption that the commitment and voluntary suffering of nonviolent activists will change

3 Paul A. Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1957), pp. 144–150.

4 Robert B. Edgerton, *Mau Mau: An African Crucible* (New York: Free Press, 1989). This comparison between British imperialism in India and Kenya was drawn by Robert Burrowes.

5 If the choice was between doing nothing or using violence, Gandhi preferred violence against evil.

the fundamental attitudes of others, whether it is police beating protesters, rich landowners who exploit those who work their land, or British colonial administrators. This is an assumption about communication: nonviolent action will “melt the hearts” of those supporting evil.

Gandhi saw nonviolent action as a means of fostering dialogue. In any campaign, he would first seek to approach authorities to request that they voluntarily change their policies or behavior. If this was unsuccessful, campaigns of nonviolent action would be launched in order to demonstrate, through the commitment and sacrifice of activists, their strong concern about the issue in question. This was seen by Gandhi as a way of opening the hearts of the oppressors. He was ready to reopen dialogue at any time, often at the expense of a campaign’s momentum and coherence.

For Gandhi, nonviolent action was a search for truth. He introduced the term “satyagraha,” literally “truth-force,” which is often translated as nonviolent action. The idea of truth has come under sustained critical attack in recent decades and would seem to undermine the foundation of Gandhi’s approach.⁶

Communication is central to Gandhi’s approach, which is based on persuading opponents through a moral commitment to a search for truth. Gandhi assumes that persuasion occurs through direct dialogue or observation and that the responsibility for making this happen lies with nonviolent activists, who must be selfless and willing to accept suffering — including beatings, imprisonment, and even death — in support of their beliefs.

We will return in a later section to a discussion of how communication actually operated in some of Gandhi’s campaigns. For now we summarize the strengths and weaknesses of Gandhi’s framework in relation to communication.

A central strength of principled nonviolence is its focus on persuasion via dialogue. Nonviolent action is seen as a means of opening dialogue, by impressing on opponents the commitment and sincerity of activists. Violence is avoided in part because it shuts down dialogue. (At the extreme, a dead opponent cannot be persuaded.) In a search for truth, dialogue is an essential tool. Nonviolent action is a means by which those with less power can open a more balanced dialogue with those with more power. Demanding sacrifice and purity of motive from nonviolent activists minimizes the chance that activists will serve their own interests and oppress others.

A central weakness of principled nonviolence is that it has no framework for conceiving change beyond direct persuasion. When oppressors are far away from the action, for example, it is not obvious how persuasion is supposed to operate. It is well known that crew on military aircraft are far less affected by the remote effects of the bombs they drop than are soldiers by the impact of hand-to-hand combat.⁷ It is not immediately obvious how to adapt Gandhi’s framework to deal with bombers and other threats that seem to restrict opportunities for direct persuasion of opponents. This is an increasingly important issue, given that innovations in military technology are distancing victims ever further from the instigators and executors of violence.

The model of principled nonviolence also has no obvious way for dealing with absence of action. If no one is creating dialogue with oppressors through discussion or direct action, then the principled nonviolent activist will simply say that efforts should be made to do so. The theory’s conceptual tools are not well

6 F. G. Bailey, *The Prevalence of Deceit* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 19–26, argues that Gandhi’s approach is built on the assumption that there is a single truth. Hence, satyagraha contains an unspoken coercive element, in that its adherents believe they have access to this truth and will not compromise until they obtain it. The postmodern view is that there are multiple truths, a perspective compatible with the pragmatic approach to nonviolence discussed in the rest of this chapter.

7 For an insightful treatment, see Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995).

suited for analyzing why action is not occurring.

Gene Sharp

We now turn to the pragmatic approach to nonviolent action, which is the most commonly held approach, especially outside India. Pragmatic supporters or users of nonviolent action believe it is superior to violence, either at all times or for a specific campaign or purpose. When social activists use violence, it often alienates supporters and third parties and solidifies opposition. To be seen to use violence against nonviolent resisters can be very damaging. That police resort to using infiltrators (agents provocateurs) to foment violence in dissident movements shows the drawback of being seen to be violent.

However, the distinction between principled and pragmatic approaches to nonviolence is often blurred in practice. Many principled adherents of nonviolence argue that it is pragmatically superior as well, while pragmatic supporters of nonviolence may raise principled objections to violence as a way of building and maintaining adherence to their preferred tactics.

Of all the theorists of nonviolent action since Gandhi, undoubtedly the pivotal figure is Gene Sharp, the world's foremost writer on the subject.⁸ Sharp's 1973 epic book *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* is the unrivalled classic in the field.⁹ His other books include *Social Power and Political Freedom* and

Gandhi as a Political Strategist.¹⁰ He has written other books and numerous articles, given talks around the world, and been a high-profile figure in the field for decades.

Theoretically speaking, Sharp's key role has been to systematize the study of nonviolent action in two ways. First, he classified methods of nonviolent action and catalogued hundreds of different techniques along with an extensive array of historical examples. In *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* Sharp listed 198 different methods of nonviolent action.¹¹ These include:

- protest and persuasion, such as public statements, slogans, leaflets, banners, demonstrations, marches, disrobings, vigils, mock funerals, teach-ins, and renouncing honors;
- noncooperation, such as ostracism, stay-at-home, protest emigration, consumer boycotts, embargoes, strikes, bans, working to rule, refusal to pay tax or debts, withdrawal of bank deposits, boycotts of government institutions, civil disobedience, evasions, delays, and mock incapability;
- intervention and alternative institutions, such as fasts (a psychological intervention), sit-ins, nonviolent obstructions and occupations, and establishment of alternative institutions for markets, government, transport, media, welfare, health, and education.

For each of the 198 methods of nonviolent action, Sharp listed historical examples. Since his book was published, Sharp has discovered hundreds of additional methods. Sharp's classification has produced conceptual order out of the scattered experiences of and writings on nonviolent action.

Sharp's second pioneering contribution is his consent theory of power, which he uses to

8 Portions of the following are adapted from Brian Martin, "Gene Sharp's theory of power," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1989, pp. 213–222. For other assessments of Sharp's work, see Lewis Lipsitz and Herbert M. Kritzer, "Unconventional approaches to conflict resolution: Erikson and Sharp on nonviolence," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 19, No. 4, December 1975, pp. 713–733; Ralph Summy, "One person's search for a functional alternative to violence," *Gandhi Marg*, Vol. 5, No. 1, April 1983, pp. 26–44.

9 Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973).

10 Gene Sharp, *Gandhi as a Political Strategist* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1979); Gene Sharp, *Social Power and Political Freedom* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1980).

11 Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, pp. 107–445. This is Part Two of the book, sometimes published as a separate volume titled *The Methods of Nonviolent Action*.

explain how nonviolent action works. While Sharp's theory has been given relatively little scholarly attention, it has had an enormous influence among nonviolent activists. In activist circles, it is often taught as part of nonviolent action training, along with such topics as social analysis, group dynamics, consensus decision making, role playing of direct action, and practical information about laws, safety, supplies, and the like. Sharp's theoretical ideas, more than any others, have been incorporated into activist thinking and practice.

The basic ideas of Sharp's theory of power are quite simple:

- people in society may be divided into rulers and subjects;
- the power of rulers derives from consent by the subjects;
- nonviolent action is a process of withdrawing consent and thus is a way to challenge problems of dictatorship, genocide, war, and systems of oppression.

Nonviolent action constitutes a refusal by subjects to obey. The power of the ruler will collapse if consent is withdrawn in an active way. The "active" here is vital. The ruler will not be threatened by grumbling, alienation, or critical analyses alone. Sharp is not concerned with passivity and submissiveness, but instead with activity, challenge, and struggle.

Sharp's consent theory of power provides the theoretical foundation for his analysis of nonviolent action. He analyses the "dynamics of nonviolent action,"¹² which includes:

- laying the groundwork for nonviolent action;
- making challenges, which usually brings on repression;
- building solidarity and discipline to oppose repression;
- building support;

- achieving success by conversion, accommodation, or nonviolent coercion;
- redistributing power.

For Gandhi, nonviolence was a moral imperative. For Sharp, nonviolence is a pragmatic imperative: by withdrawing consent and using the powerful dynamics of nonviolent action, major problems including dictatorship, war, genocide, and systems of oppression can be challenged and transformed. Sharp aims to provide a solid, indeed exhaustive, treatment of nonviolent action, demonstrating its superiority to violent methods, in order to convince people, including political and military leaders, to adopt it. However, neither scholars, politicians, nor military commanders have rushed to follow Sharp, whose ideas have been adopted to a far greater extent by social activists.¹³

Sharp's model is individualistic and voluntaristic. These characteristics provide both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness.

By focusing on withdrawal of consent, Sharp's theory of power provides a framework for activists that is simple, congenial, and empowering. It implies that anyone can contribute to opposing repression and oppression: the means are at hand, namely symbolic actions, noncooperation, intervention, and setting up alternative institutions. Since the key is withdrawing consent, action can be taken by anyone and begin at any time. Sharp's analysis of the dynamics of nonviolent action provides a way of understanding the evolution of campaigns, in which nonviolent action provides the tools for challenge and eventual transformation of oppressive systems.

Actual campaigns can be readily analyzed using Sharp's framework of the dynamics of nonviolent action. Consider the case of 1998 Indonesian popular opposition to the Suharto regime.

Laying the groundwork for nonviolent action. There had always been critics of the

12 Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, pp. 447–814. This is Part Three of the book, sometimes published as a separate volume titled *The Dynamics of Nonviolent Action*.

13 This is ironic, given Sharp's attempts to distance civilian-based defense from groups such as pacifists, feminists, and environmentalists.

regime, but due to repression and divide-and-rule techniques, they had been weak and isolated. With the economic downturn, opposition groups became emboldened.

Making challenges, which usually brings on repression. Student protests, the most visible sign of opposition, were met by armed force.

Building solidarity and discipline to oppose repression. Students maintained nonviolent discipline. They took stringent measures to keep out infiltrators who might have provoked violence to discredit the student protest.

Building support. When four students were killed in one protest, this caused a dramatic backlash against the government, demonstrating the importance of “political jiu-jitsu” in which violence by the regime is used by its nonviolent opponents to generate greater resistance.

Achieving success by conversion, accommodation, or nonviolent coercion. A few members of the elite were persuaded about the need for change. Others supported limited change to protect their positions, a form of accommodation. Suharto himself was essentially coerced, using nonviolent means, to resign.

*Redistributing power.*¹⁴ The nonviolent struggle against the regime built self-esteem in the opposition movement and reduced centralization of political power.

Empowerment of activists is a feature of nonviolent action whether undertaken on a principled or pragmatic basis. This occurs

through the experience of collective action, especially when the process is participatory and when the action is direct. In participatory actions, those involved gain skills in group dynamics, decision-making, and mutual support, whereas hierarchical processes can perpetuate dependence. In direct action — such as attending a banned meeting, working-in at a workplace, or squatting in a vacant building — participants themselves help achieve a goal, whereas in much conventional citizen action, such as voting, lobbying, writing to politicians, or holding protest meetings, the aim is to get someone else, such as politicians or administrators, to take action. Although Sharp and others recognize these empowering effects of nonviolent action on participants, most of their attention has been on the effects on opponents.¹⁵

The individualistic and voluntaristic features of Sharp’s model are also a weakness. The model works best when applied to systems where the distinction between ruler and subjects is most obvious and accentuated, such as military dictatorships. It does not work nearly so well when applied to oppressive systems in which people are embedded in complex relationships, sometimes as subordinates and sometimes as superordinates. For example, in most large organizations, such as corporations and government departments, many employees are both bosses to their subordinates and subordinates to their own bosses. Many workers have multiple roles, having different degrees and types of power depending on whether they are dealing with clients or other workers. Consumers in the marketplace are implicated in a complex system of exchange in which the power exercised by sellers and buyers often varies from transaction to transaction. Only a very few managers or capitalists could unambiguously be said to be rulers, whereas nearly everyone else is sometimes more a “ruler” and sometimes more a “subject.” Patriarchy, the

14 Sharp’s discussion of the redistribution of power (*The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, pp. 777–810) is very general and does not discuss the sorts of structural changes common in literature on revolution. However, other writers on nonviolence give more attention to revolutionary transformations of social structures through nonviolent action: George Lakey, *Strategy for a Living Revolution* (New York: Grossman, 1974); Brian Martin, *Uprooting War* (London: Freedom Press, 1984); Martin Oppenheimer, *The Urban Guerilla* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1969); Geoffrey Ostergaard, *Nonviolent Revolution in India* (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1985).

15. Julia Kraft and Andreas Speck, “Nonviolence and social empowerment,” <http://www.wri-irg.org/nvse/nvse-2.htm>, translated from an article in *Gewaltfreie Aktion*, Vol. 32, No. 123, 2000.

system of male domination, is similarly complex in its power relationships, so that the ruler-subject distinction provides little conceptual leverage.¹⁶ When dealing with complex systems of power, the idea of subjects withdrawing consent from rulers does not provide nearly as much useful guidance as in cases where there are obvious rulers. This can be illustrated by using Sharp's framework to examine the anti-MAI campaign.

Laying the groundwork for nonviolent action. Analysis of globalization initiatives and building of networks were the most effective means of preparation

Making challenges, which usually brings on repression. The challenge was primarily by mobilizing popular opinion against the MAI. Repression against opponents of the MAI did not play a significant role.

Building solidarity and discipline to oppose repression. Since repression was never a major factor, this stage is not very relevant.

Building support. Winning over unconverted parties was vital to the anti-MAI campaign, but the role of "political jiu-jitsu," in which third parties are outraged by repression, was minimal.

Achieving success by conversion, accommodation, or nonviolent coercion. Conversion, accommodation, and coercion all played a role.

Redistributing power. The campaign helped to prevent a redistribution of power to multinational corporations.

Because the ruler-subject dichotomy is not so obviously applicable to capitalism as a system of power, Sharp's model of the dynamics of nonviolent action provides less insight into the operation of the anti-MAI campaign than into the campaign against the Suharto regime.¹⁷

More generally, it appears that Sharp's model works best when applied to systems of *repression*, where overt physical violence is a prominent means of maintaining unequal power, and is less helpful for analyzing systems of *oppression*, where overt violence is less salient. Ironically, the concept of hegemony is commonly deployed in explaining the persistence of oppressive systems, and hegemony essentially involves people believing in or acquiescing to a way of doing things that does not best serve their own real interests.¹⁸ While consent — or some related process of psychological adjustment — may be involved in hegemony, the problem is that *withdrawal of consent* is more problematical when power relations are not neatly captured by a ruler-subject dichotomy.

In summary, as a general theory of power, consent theory has serious weaknesses, but as a theory of withdrawal of consent to challenge repression, it has enormous strengths.

Concerning absence of action, Sharp's framework gives little help. His major works focus almost entirely on nonviolent action, with relatively little attention to explaining why action might not be occurring, except when he examines obedience, a central concept in his theory of power: "the most important single quality of any government, without which it would not exist, must be the obedience and submission of its subjects. Obedience is at the heart of political power."¹⁹ He suggests that there is no single answer to the question of why people obey, but that habit, fear of sanctions, moral obligation, self-interest, psychological identification with the ruler, zones of indifference, and absence of

reasonably well, whereas the case of global corporate domination does not.

18 On hegemony, see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971). The idea of hegemony usually implies false consciousness, namely that people do not fully realize their real interests. For an argument against this, see James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

19 Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, p. 16.

16 Kate McGuinness, "Gene Sharp's theory of power: a feminist critique of consent," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1993, pp. 101–115.

17 Of our three case studies, the Indonesian and Soviet cases fit Sharp's ruler-subject model

self-confidence among subjects are important. A major weakness is that these explanations are at the level of individual psychology. The interaction of psychology with social systems such as capitalism and patriarchy is absent from Sharp's model.²⁰ Likewise, Sharp does not analyze systems of communication such as the mass media.

In summary, Sharp's analysis of the dynamics of nonviolent action is excellent for examining immediate struggles such as the resistance to the Soviet coup, but is far less effective for dealing with systems such as capitalism in which people are enmeshed in complex webs of power. By focusing on withdrawal of consent, Sharp's framework is tremendously empowering to activists but provides little guidance for explaining the absence of action.

Social defense

So far we have discussed nonviolent action as a general-purpose method, typically used by social activists to oppose social problems such as racism, male domination, environmentally damaging practices, war, and economic exploitation. It is also possible to imagine nonviolent action used in a more systematically organized fashion as an alternative to military defense. Instead of relying on military forces for defense, a community would instead defend itself using rallies, strikes, boycotts, sit-ins, alternative institutions, and many other methods of noncooperation. This alternative to military defense goes by many names, including nonviolent defense, social defense, civilian defense, civilian-based defense, and defense by civil resistance.²¹ We normally use the term social defense here.

20 On the psychology of oppression, see Philip Lichtenberg, *Community and Confluence: Undoing the Clinch of Oppression* (Cleveland: Gestalt Institute of Cleveland Press, 1994).

21 It is important to distinguish social defense from civil defense, which is protection against military attack, for example using gas masks and bomb shelters. A social defense system might include civil defense preparations, but the essence

At first glance, it might seem that social defense is an absolutely hopeless proposition. How can rallies, strikes, and the like deter or defeat an armed aggressor? That this is so difficult to imagine shows how deeply the military model has penetrated standard ways of thinking. The very word "defense" in conventional discussions is taken to imply military defense. Furthermore, the word "defense" usually implies the capacity for (military) offense too. Decades ago, before euphemisms became so standard, what are now called departments of defense were called departments of war.

Social defense operates not by conquering an opponent but by undermining it. This can happen at several locations. Invading or occupying soldiers are more easily mobilized against a violent resistance. Nonviolent resistance is more likely to weaken their resolve or even win them over. This was apparent in the resistance to the Soviet coup, when some soldiers resisted orders to attack.

A second location for resistance is the population of the attacking or occupying country. A government normally finds it far easier to mobilize popular support for military action against an armed opponent than against an unarmed one. As already noted, the British colonialists ruling Kenya could use prison camps and torture with relative impunity against the armed resistance, whereas the colonial government in India felt more constrained, with the nonviolent resistance having generated support from British people.

Yet another location for resistance is among people in other parts of the world, aside from the two countries that are involved in the "war." Concerned citizens can exert pressure via a range of channels, for example through churches, trade unions, governments, nongovernment organizations, and direct contact. The Palestinian intifada, an unarmed struggle against Israeli occupiers from 1987 to 1993, was far more successful in gaining international support than terrorism by the Palestinian Liberation Organization had been previously.

of social defense is nonviolent resistance by civilians.

Arguably, a completely nonviolent struggle, avoiding the throwing of stones, might well have been even more effective in stimulating support.²²

In terms of Sharp's theory of power, social defense relies on systematic withdrawal of consent as a comprehensive strategy to deter and undermine aggression: consent of soldiers, consent of citizens of the aggressor state, and consent of people around the world.

No country has ever adopted social defense as a matter of policy, except as a small supplement to military defense. Therefore, in historical terms, there is no firm evidence of its viability and effectiveness. The cases that give the closest approximation to social defense in operation are the 1923 German resistance to French and Belgian occupation and the 1968 Czechoslovak resistance to the Warsaw Pact invasion. In neither of these cases was there any preparation or training. To assess social defense by using these cases would be like assessing military defense by using a case of spontaneous armed resistance in which there was no planning or preparation, no training, and no special equipment.

Social defense, as a policy option, could require just as much planning, preparation, training, and investment as military defense. Possible threats would be investigated and plans made for countering them. People would participate in training, which might include nonviolent discipline, decision-making, communication systems, and many other skills. Preparations could include setting up self-reliant systems for energy, agriculture, water supply, and transport, so that enemies could not shut them down by attack or sabotage. It could include learning foreign languages and customs in order to communicate effectively with people in other parts of the world. It could include establishing links with pro-democracy groups in potential aggressor countries. It could include setting up

multiple systems for communication, such as e-mail, telephone, and short-wave radio. It could include education in how opinion can be manipulated by appeals to racism and xenophobia, and how to counter this.

Social defense does not mean just dispensing with military defense and then just refusing to cooperate with an aggressor. Rather, to have a reasonable chance of success, it must be as carefully and systematically organized as military defense but in a very different manner. Military forces are only the tip of the iceberg of a military defense system, which also includes such things as economic infrastructure, arms manufacture, military bases, spy operations, education and training, alliances, training exercises, and public opinion formation and manipulation. Similarly, methods of nonviolent action such as strikes and boycotts are just the visible manifestations of a social defense system, which would have an analogous set of social and technological supports.

While social defense has quite a number of structural similarities to military defense, there are some fundamental differences, of which the absence of violence is just the most obvious. Another important difference is that social defense is, by necessity, people's defense. Military forces involve only a small proportion of the population. In rich countries, many armies are now largely professional, with little or no reliance on conscription.²³ Social defense, to be successful, must have widespread support — though not necessarily universal backing — and a high level of popular participation. (It is sometimes called "popular nonviolent defense" for this reason.) Most soldiers in most countries are young fit men. Participation in nonviolent resistance, in comparison, can readily involve women, people with disabilities, children, and the elderly. Nearly every sector of the population

22 Souad R. Dajani, *Eyes Without Country: Searching for a Palestinian Strategy of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995); Andrew Rigby, *Living the Intifada* (London: Zed Books, 1991).

23 Economic pressures and discrimination in employment may result in a form of de facto conscription, typically of those who are poor or in ethnic minorities.

can participate in methods such as rallies, strikes, and boycotts.²⁴

Military defense is normally taken to be defense of a state. The well-known definition by classic sociologist Max Weber is that a state is a set of social institutions based on a monopoly, within a territory, over the legitimate use of force.²⁵ The “legitimate” force is exercised by the police and the military, which are the ultimate defenders of the state. If social defense is a direct replacement for military defense, then social defense is also a defense of the state, though with such an alternative the definition of the state becomes problematic, given that the legitimate use of force within a territory is no longer such a defining characteristic. In conventional parlance, states are identified with countries, such as Angola, Germany, and Peru, so social defense could be taken to be defense of the country and its people from aggression or repression.

However, a broader interpretation of social defense sees it as defense of a “community,” namely a group of people with a conception of itself as having certain common interests. Communities are often geographically defined, but they could be narrower or wider than countries. Furthermore, communities can also be defined nongeographically, such as a social class, religious group, political group, or ethnic group.

As noted earlier, systems for military defense commonly can be used for military

attack. Soldiers can defend or attack, and likewise weapons such as rifles, tanks, bombers, and missiles have dual capacities. One school of (military) defense thinking advocates “nonoffensive defense” or “defensive defense”: weapons with offensive capacities, such as bombers, and long-range missiles, are eschewed, with emphasis on technologies that are mainly useful for defense, such as fighter aircraft, short-range missiles, and fortifications. The aim of defensive defense is to reduce the threat perceived by potential enemies and thus reduce the likelihood of being attacked. Social defense takes this process one step further, at least as regards weapons systems. Because there are no weapons, there is absolutely no capacity for military attack, and thus potential enemies can be reassured that there is no military threat.

However, social defense can include the capacity for nonviolent offense or attack.²⁶ This could involve attempts to undermine a foreign government or reverse one of its policies, for example by building links with foreign opposition movements, distributing information via e-mail, sending nonviolent change agents as visitors, and coordinating international pressure through letter-writing, boycotts, fasts, and rallies.²⁷ Social defense is limited if it means only preparing for defense and leaving potential aggressors to prepare an assault. By supplementing social defense with social attack, potential aggressors may be undermined before their preparations become dangerous.

Australian military defense thinking has long included preparation to deal with the “Indonesian threat,” namely the potential for military attack from Indonesia. The assumption is that Australia needs military defense to defend against this threat. Social defense for Australia would involve preparations for

24 On participation by people with disabilities, see Brian Martin and Wendy Varney, “Nonviolent action and people with disabilities,” *Civilian-Based Defense*, Vol. 15, No. 3, Year-End 2000, pp. 4–17. While nearly everyone can participate in many types of nonviolent action, there are limits to and differences in participation depending on the method and group involved. For example, some risky methods, such as swimming or kayaking in front of a ship, require high levels of fitness and alertness.

25 This definition is not quite accurate since, in most states, male violence against women within marriage, and some other contexts, is legal and thus considered “legitimate” by the state.

26 In English, the expression “social offense” implies a breach of propriety, so “social attack” perhaps better conveys what is involved here.

27 Brian Martin, “Revolutionary social defence,” *Bulletin of Peace Proposals*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1991, pp. 97–105.

nonviolent resistance to any attack from Indonesia, but also involve support for prodemocracy forces in Indonesia. Ironically, the Australian government has given considerable support to the Indonesian military, thus fostering the foreign military capacity that provides the rationale for having Australian military forces.

The anti-MAI campaign can be conceived of as a form of social defense against an assault by the capitalist class. Antiglobalists could take the attack in any of a number of ways, for example by campaigns to undermine the loyalty of employees of transnational corporations.

Military defense is normally justified as necessary for defending against attack, but what good is military defense when there is a military coup? There are numerous coups and attempted coups around the world every year, not to mention military dictatorships. Indeed, military forces are more likely to be used against their own people than against a foreign enemy. Militaries are central to the power of the state and are used against both internal and external threats. A coup is a change of the guard of the state elite. It does not change the system of state power, though it may have serious ramifications for the population.

Social defense provides a ready solution to the problem of coups: since there is no military, there can be no military coups. Furthermore, since social defense by necessity must be based on widespread support, a nonviolent coup could be readily challenged through popular action.

The radical implications of social defense become apparent here. By preparing a population to be able to use a variety of methods of nonviolent action against aggression and repression, the population is given the skills to use those same methods against others: unpopular laws, exploitative employers, elite corruption, and unjust privilege. A population equipped with the capacity for nonviolent struggle is one that can take on any government or powerful interest group. In comparison, military and police forces are used, for the most part, to support ruling groups, often in the face of popular opposition.

Social defense is not a guarantee of just behavior, since nonviolent action can be used for unjust purposes, for example when a dominant ethnic group uses ostracism against minorities. Though both violent and nonviolent action can be used for just and unjust purposes, there is an asymmetry in their application. The consequences of violence are usually far more severe (and often permanent, in the case of killing), participation in violence is far more limited, and violence is more readily used by elite groups to protect their interests. Some of the most serious problems, including war and genocide, cannot be undertaken using social defense.

Prior to the 1950s, a number of writers, of whom the most well known names are Bertrand Russell and Gandhi, suggested that militaries could be replaced by nonviolent resistance. However, it was not until 1958, with the publication of Stephen King-Hall's book *Defense in the Nuclear Age*, that social defense was presented systematically as a full-scale alternative.²⁸ A number of other authors have made important contributions, such as Theodor Ebert, Johan Galtung and Stephen King-Hall.²⁹ In order to proceed with our

28 Stephen King-Hall, *Defence in the Nuclear Age* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1958).

29 Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack, *War Without Weapons: Non-violence in National Defence* (London: Frances Pinter, 1974); Robert J. Burrowes, *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defense: A Gandhian Approach* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Giliam de Valk in cooperation with Johan Niezing, *Research on Civilian-Based Defence* (Amsterdam: SISWO, 1993); Theodor Ebert, *Gewaltfreier Aufstand: Alternative zum Bürgerkrieg [Nonviolent Insurrection: Alternative to Civil War]* (Freiburg: Rombach, 1968); Gustaaf Geeraerts (ed.), *Possibilities of Civilian Defence in Western Europe* (Amsterdam: Swets and Zeitlinger, 1977); Bradford Lyttle, *National Defense Thru Nonviolent Resistance* (Chicago, IL: Shahn-ti Sena, 1958); Brian Martin, *Social Defence, Social Change* (London: Freedom Press, 1993); Johan Niezing, *Sociale Verdediging als Logisch Alternatief: Van Utopie naar Optie [Social Defense as a Logical Alternative: From Utopia Towards Option]* (Assen, Netherlands: Van

examination of nonviolence and communication, we analyze the works of a few social defense theorists.

Conditions for the success of social defense?

In 1982, the Netherlands government commissioned a report on social defense from the State University of Leiden. A few years later, the report, a book entitled *Social Defence and Soviet Military Power*, was published; the lead author was Alex P. Schmid.³⁰ Its conclusion is that social defense would not be a viable method to oppose a Soviet invasion, then the threat considered most likely in Western Europe. The book is perhaps the most carefully argued case against social defense ever produced and hence is worthy of consideration.³¹

The book contains four parts. The first is a short survey of concepts of nonviolence and social defense. The second is a major study of Soviet military interventions and nuclear threats since 1945, including conflicts within the Soviet bloc, conflicts between the Soviet Union and the West, and Soviet involvement in Third World conflicts.

Gorcum, 1987); Michael Randle, *Civil Resistance* (London: Fontana, 1994); Adam Roberts (ed.), *The Strategy of Civilian Defence: Non-violent Resistance to Aggression* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967); Gene Sharp, *Making Europe Unconquerable: The Potential of Civilian-based Deterrence and Defense* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1985); Gene Sharp with the assistance of Bruce Jenkins, *Civilian-Based Defense: A Post-Military Weapons System* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

30 Alex P. Schmid, with E. Berends and L. Zonneveld, *Social Defence and Soviet Military Power: An Inquiry into the Relevance of an Alternative Defence Concept* (Leiden: Center for the Study of Social Conflict, State University of Leiden, 1985).

31 Portions of this section are adapted from a review of *Social Defence and Soviet Military Power* by Brian Martin, *Civilian-Based Defense: News & Opinion*, Vol. 4, No. 4, May 1988, pp. 6–11.

The third part presents four East European case studies: Lithuanian resistance against Soviet reoccupation (1944 to about 1952), East Germany 1953, Hungary 1956, and Czechoslovakia 1968. In each case, the events are compared with ten “conditions” for social defense to infer whether social defense would have been more successful than the resistance that actually occurred.

The final part of the book looks at social defense as part of a more comprehensive defense system, examines Sweden’s psychological defense, and presents resource mobilization theory (used by social scientists to analyze social movements) as an alternative to the social defense perspective.

Schmid’s basic conclusion is that social defense would not work against a Soviet invasion because the Soviet government was mostly immune to persuasion, publicity, and economic pressures: “the Soviet military power instrument cannot be balanced by economic noncooperation and cultural persuasion alone as the USSR is economically invulnerable and culturally impenetrable. It can be matched only by military power.”³²

With the benefit of hindsight — namely, the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern European communist regimes, largely without outside pressure³³ — it is easy to criticize this conclusion. The Soviet Union had serious internal weaknesses, few of which were ever exploited by opponents in the West, as we argued in chapter 3. In spite of this, it is useful to examine *Social Defence and Soviet Military Power* in order to see what insights can be gleaned. In this case negative insights, namely knowledge that certain approaches are unfruitful, may be of greater interest.

An important point made in the study is that the outcome of many struggles, whether violent or nonviolent, depends only in a limited fashion on the methods used and the strength of the resistance. At least as important

32 Schmid, p. 209.

33 Ralph Summy and Michael E. Salla (eds.), *Why the Cold War Ended: A Range of Interpretations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995).

is the wider configuration of power internationally. For example, the Lithuanian partisans never had much of a chance without the West coming to their aid. This was only likely in the context of a World War Three, which is what many of them hoped for; with the conclusion of the Korean war, their remaining hopes for and illusions about Western support were dashed.

Schmid presents ten conditions that must be satisfied in order for social defense to be a viable option.³⁴

1. There must be an organization or movement to promote nonviolent resistance.
2. The community being defended must have a degree of independence for the purpose of preparing for defense.
3. The defenders must be able to communicate with each other, with third parties, and with the attacker (including the attacker's community).
4. Resistance is aided by a tradition of democracy and diffusion of political power.
5. The political system of the defenders must have greater legitimacy than the political system of the attackers.
6. The defending community must have a high level of social cohesion.
7. The attacker must be dependent, to some extent, on the defenders or on an ally of the defenders.
8. Interaction must be possible between individual attackers and defenders.
9. The community being defended must have some legitimacy with public opinion, foreign governments, or the attacker.
10. The attacker "must be rational and not permanently fanatical or crazy."

Many of these conditions seem to be common sense. Condition 3 is especially relevant to our interest in communication. But whether they are sensible as a means of judging whether social defense is a viable option is another question. The value of the ten

conditions is weakened by Schmid's assumptions about the nature of social defense.

First, he assumes that social defense is national defense that would occur in one country (the Netherlands) without accompanying changes in other countries. The Soviet military threat, which is his prime concern, would remain a potent one in this circumstance. An alternative is to see the introduction of social defense as a part of a process that transcends national boundaries, leading to change in the Soviet Union as well as the Netherlands and other countries.

Second, Schmid assumes that social defense has no offensive capacity. As noted earlier, nonviolent attack is certainly possible, for example through radio broadcasts, visits by activists, boycotts, and interventions by peace brigades.

Third, Schmid assumes that social defense must substitute for all the strengths of military defense, including withstanding a Soviet invasion. He makes little mention of the failures of military approaches, nor of the capabilities of social defense that are not possible using violent methods. The dangers of military coups, attacks on civil liberties, militarization of the economy, and weapons of mass destruction are not attributed to military approaches but rather accepted as parts of the present world order. For example, Schmid notes that social defense provides no defense against nuclear attack; he thinks that a nuclear deterrent is essential. This ignores the fact that possessing nuclear weapons is precisely what is most likely to make one a nuclear target and to stimulate the "enemy" towards building its own nuclear weapons.

Fourth, Schmid assumes that social defense would be introduced without any other significant changes in society. He presents social defense as a sort of "social fix," a pragmatic alternative to the present system. Yet the vulnerability of a society to attack or takeover depends on more than just formal defense measures. For example, decentralized energy systems are less vulnerable than centralized ones. A society that systematically opposes racism, sexism, and large inequalities in wealth is less vulnerable than one split along

34 Schmid, pp. 27–29. The conditions have been liberally rewritten from their original rather technical mode of expression, with the intention of maintaining their spirit.

these lines. Factories controlled by workers are less vulnerable than ones controlled by owners or bureaucrats.

Schmid's negative conclusions about social defense reflect the very restrictive assumptions he makes about its implementation. One insight that can be drawn from his study is that social defense, to be effective, cannot be just a narrow replacement for military defense. In particular,

- introducing social defense ideally should be part of a global process, rather than an exercise of "nonviolence in one country";
- social defense is best supplemented by social attack;
- social defense has a qualitatively different set of strengths and weaknesses than military defense;
- introducing social defense involves considerable social change outside the strict ambit of what is commonly thought of as defense issues.

It is worth noting that the option of defense by military forces is never assessed according to "conditions" before deciding whether to use it as a defense option; rather, military defense is unquestioningly assumed to be required, and a military system is set up to be as effective as possible within constraints such as resources and social values. If social defense is a fundamentally different option — as we have argued — then it does not make sense to "choose" it according to whether it satisfies a set of criteria that take military success as the standard.

Consider the converse process. Take the virtues of social defense as the standard and establish a set of criteria that military defense (or some other defense system) must satisfy before being considered a viable option. Here, we note a few possibilities of special interest:

1. The defense system must reflect its goals in its methods.
2. The defense system must be internally democratic.
3. The defense system must pose a low threat to other democratic societies.
4. The defense system must not be a threat to the society it is intended to defend.

5. The attacker "must be rational and not permanently fanatical or crazy."

Other conditions could be specified if desired, including many of Schmid's conditions which could be imported without change. Military defense fails on all five of these counts. Specifically:

1. The stated goal of military defense is peace, but its methods are war and the threat of violence.
2. Military forces are internally autocratic rather than democratic.
3. Military preparations threaten other societies.
4. Military forces can be used against the society they are ostensibly intended to defend.
5. Military defense is not very effective against "permanently fanatical or crazy" opponents. For example, nuclear weapons can be smuggled into a country in a suitcase, with military interdiction all but powerless to stop this short of a total blockade of commerce. Agents from an enemy can deploy biological or radiological weapons with relative ease, for example by releasing them via the air conditioning system of a large office building. Enemy agents who are or become members of the armed forces can use a military's weapons against itself.³⁵

Social defense strategy

Rather than assess social defense by a set of conditions, an alternative is to choose social

³⁵ Schmid's assumption in talking about permanently fanatical or crazy opponents is that they are commanders of foreign states who use conventional military methods. An alternative assumption is that nonconventional methods are used. Any society that relies on dangerous technologies for defense or other purposes — such as risky nuclear or biological materials — could find that they are used against it. For example, a few "crazy" opponents could make it their aim to spend however many years is necessary to gain employment in a nuclear or biological facility and then cause a major "accident" of Chernobyl or greater proportions.

defense because it is compatible with social values and aspirations and then to develop it to be as effective as possible. We examine here some key studies that focus on social defense strategy.

Stephen King-Hall, in his pioneering book *Defense in the Nuclear Age*, asked what was being defended by social defense.³⁶ His answer was “a way of life.” This is quite different from military systems which aim primarily to defend territory, plus troops, matériel, civilians, and the like. By “a way of life,” King-Hall primarily meant British parliamentary democracy. Although people may reasonably have differences about what is worth defending, the idea of defending a way of life captures the essence of social defense, which can be said to be defense of the social fabric. Resisters of the 1991 Soviet coup were defending only some aspects — and fairly recent ones — of their way of life, but there was nevertheless considerable resolve about the worth of defending them.

Thinking about the fundamental features of a society is helpful for focusing on what people really should be defending, but it provides little guidance for actually organizing and running the defense. For this, it is useful to turn to studies of social defense strategy.

A key work in the field is *War Without Weapons: Non-Violence in National Defence* by Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack. The book describes the methods of civilian defense — classified as symbolic, denial, and undermining activities — and analyzes organizational issues, especially coordination of the resistance and the appropriate role for its leadership. The authors analyze two classic cases of nonviolent resistance to occupation — Germany in 1923 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 — and two classic cases of nonviolent resistance to military coups — the 1920 Kapp putsch and the 1961 Algerian Generals’ Revolt.

War Without Weapons contains two innovative discussions of special note. The first is a comparison of social defense with guerrilla

warfare. These are different, of course, in that guerrilla warfare uses violence (as well as nonviolent means). However, in certain respects there are considerable similarities, notably the requirement to wage struggle against an opponent that has overwhelming superiority in armed force in a situation where there may be no secure haven for launching attacks. Like social defense, guerrilla warfare generally relies on support from the society.

The most important contribution by Boserup and Mack is their discussion of strategy, drawing on the classical contribution by Clausewitz.³⁷ One major element of Clausewitz’s theory is the concept of the center of gravity, namely the opponent’s central source of strength, which should be the main target for destruction. The center of gravity of the defense is determined by the mode of defense, which is the basis for Clausewitz’s idea of the superiority of the defense over the offense. Working out the center of gravity is important since it should be the basis for designing campaigns, choosing tactics, building alliances, and many other aspects of the defense system.

Boserup and Mack conclude that for a social defense system, the center of gravity is the unity of the resistance: “It is against this point that the whole thrust of the attack must be directed and to its preservation that all efforts of the defense must tend.”³⁸ If the defense is able to absorb the attack, then its next task is to mount a counterattack against the center of gravity of the opponent. Boserup and Mack say that in the case of military attack against a social defense system, the center of gravity of the offense depends on the mode of attack. Generally speaking, the center of gravity for the counteroffensive will be those things that allow the offense to continue, such as the willingness of troops to exercise repression, political support in their home

36 King-Hall, *Defence in the Nuclear Age*.

37 Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege [On War]* (Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmler, 1832).

38 Boserup and Mack, *War Without Weapons*, p. 163.

country for the leaders of the offense, and international support or noninterference.³⁹

Other social defense theorists have built on Boserup and Mack's analysis but differed about the precise nature of the center of gravity. Gene Keyes, who made a major study of the Danish nonviolent resistance to the Nazi occupation during World War II, decided that the center of gravity should be maintaining the morale of the resistance.⁴⁰ Keyes summarizes his position thus: "I suggest that the center of gravity might better be identified — for the aggressor and defender alike — as *morale*. Let unity be impaired if it comes to that. But let the parties bearing the burden of defense carry on with morale unshaken, and national integrity will remain intact. If unity frays, let it be; I would not admit defeat. But if morale collapses, all is over: for us if it's our morale; for them if it's theirs."⁴¹

A different center of gravity is identified by Robert Burrowes in his book *The Strategy of Nonviolence Defense: A Gandhian Approach*, a major contribution to the field.⁴² It presents a closely argued and highly principled perspective, beginning with a critique of classical ideas about strategy and culminating in several chapters laying out strategy of nonviolent defense.

In Burrowes' framework, the political purpose of nonviolent defense is "to create the policy, process, structural, and systemic conditions that will satisfy human needs." Within this general purpose, there are two

strategic aims, one each for the defense and for the counteroffensive. For the defense, the strategic aim is "to consolidate the power and will of the defending population to resist the aggression."⁴³ This includes mobilization of "key social groups" including worker organizations, women's groups, religious bodies, and ethnic communities.

This might sound deceptively easy but it has significant implications. For example, in choosing whether to hold mass rallies, the key thing is not how many people will attend, whether there will be media coverage, or whether police and troops are likely to use violence, but whether the action will strengthen the power and will of the population. Burrowes traces the consequences of his general framework through a range of areas, including the time frame of the struggle, communication with the opponent, selection of nonviolent tactics, secrecy, sabotage, maintaining nonviolent discipline, and making defenders less vulnerable in the face of an extremely ruthless opponent.

Parallel to the strategic aim of the defense is the strategic aim of the counteroffensive: "to *alter* the will of the opponent elite to conduct the aggression, and to *undermine* their power to do so." This has three components. First is altering the will of the troops of the opponent elite. In the case of the Palestinian intifada, for example, this would mean winning over Israeli troops or at least weakening their commitment to serve the repression. Throwing rocks at them is less likely to achieve this than engaging them in dialogue and demonstrating Palestinian commitment. The second component is altering "the will of key social groups who support the opponent elite's act of aggression."⁴⁴ For the intifada to be effective, it was necessary to undermine support within Israel for the Israeli occupation. The third component is altering the will of allies of the opponent elite. For the intifada, this means, for

39 Boserup and Mack, *War Without Weapons*, p. 169.

40. Gene Keyes, "Strategic non-violent defense: the construct of an option," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, June 1981, pp. 125–151.

41 Keyes, "Strategic non-violent defense," p. 133. Emphasis in the original.

42. Robert J. Burrowes, *The Strategy of Nonviolence Defense: A Gandhian Approach* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996). Portions of the following discussion are adapted from Brian Martin, "Nonviolent defence: Robert Burrowes' approach," *Nonviolence Today*, No. 55, July/August 1997, pp. 19–22.

43 Burrowes, *The Strategy of Nonviolence Defense*, p. 209.

44 Burrowes, *The Strategy of Nonviolence Defense*, p. 209. Emphasis in the original.

example, challenging the support given to Israel by the US government.⁴⁵

Burrowes' formulation of the political purpose and strategic aims of nonviolent defense has two components: will and power. This can be most easily understood in relation to the counteroffensive. One component of this is altering the commitment of opponent troops to their assigned tasks. If their commitment or "will" can be altered, then the opponent cannot succeed, except by bringing in other troops. But even if the troops remain committed to their tasks, they can be nonviolently coerced. This is the factor of "power." For example, in the 1986 "people power" revolution in the Philippines, some soldiers were won over to the resistance by talking with people opposed to the dictatorship — undermining their will — whereas others were primarily influenced by the massive demonstration — undermining their power.

Approaches to nonviolence can be divided along two axes: principled versus pragmatic and revolutionary versus reformist. Gandhi's nonviolence was principled and revolutionary. Many other writers on social defense, such as Gene Sharp, are better described as pragmatic and reformist. They justify nonviolence on the basis of its effectiveness — the pragmatic approach — and they see nonviolent defense primarily as a way to defend society as it exists — the reformist approach. Burrowes strongly criticizes non-Gandhian approaches. He criticizes Sharp's approach for being based on a faulty strategic theory (the indirect approach of Liddell Hart, subject of a critique earlier in Burrowes' book), for relying on a conception of society oriented to elites, and for failing to focus on satisfying human needs.

Burrowes' approach is principled and revolutionary, and perhaps his sort of principled nonviolence is inevitably revolutionary. Although the title of the book uses the word "defense," this is not national defense the way most people think of it. It is more akin to

nonviolent revolution.

Social defense strategy is a vital topic, worthy of much further study and practical development. However, communication is our central concern here. Although communication is an essential requirement for social defense, the discussions by Boserup and Mack, Keyes, and Burrowes give little explicit attention to it. The vital role of communication is implicit in the center of gravity of a social defense system, which these authors variously conclude to be the unity, morale, or will/power of the defenders. For any of these — unity, morale, or will/power — communication is obviously essential, especially among the resisters, in order to provide mutual support, overcome appeals and propaganda from the opponent, coordinate actions, maintain contact with third parties, support maximum participation in decision making and action, and prevent divisive internal splits and divide-and-rule tactics.

In discussing strategy, these authors assume a basic level of communication and do not focus on what can make that communication more or less effective. This may reflect an assumption that a social defense system is "up and running," with full popular support, and that the main task is dealing with the opponent, who is assumed to be coming from the outside. This is the traditional model of warfare, in which contending military forces are conceptually and physically distinct and operate within separate geographical areas.

These assumptions, which can be traced to the use of Clausewitz's model, must be questioned. It can be argued that the conditions underlying Clausewitz's analysis are satisfied less and less frequently in contemporary wars. Rather than wars being between states, each deploying troops under unified command — such as in World War II — most armed struggles in recent decades have taken a different form, including such dimensions as paramilitary forces, civil war, shifting alliances, lack of a continuous front, guerrilla warfare, military coups, and attacks on and purposeful displacement of civilian populations — such as in the wars in former

45 This brief mention of the intifada is for illustrative purposes. A sophisticated study of nonviolent strategy for Palestinian liberation is given by Dajani, *Eyes Without Country*.

Yugoslavia.⁴⁶

Even when Clausewitzian assumptions are not satisfied, the idea of the center of gravity can be useful. However, the role of communication becomes more important in these cases. In a Clausewitzian model, communication is assumed to be unproblematic among the forces on either side. But in other circumstances — such as, in the case of social defense, when a fully operative system is not (yet) in place — communication may be a source of problems. In the case of coups, communication systems are vitally important, since they are primary means by which contending forces attempt to win loyalty from the population. Symbols, language, stated goals, modes of participation, and other aspects of communication are vital to maintaining unity, morale, and will/power of resisters.

Attack cannot be assumed to come from the “outside.” Again, coups provide a threat in which the “opponent” may include neighbors or co-workers. When the enemy is separate and distant, internal communication poses far fewer complexities than when opponents are mixed among “us.” Maintaining unity, morale, and will/power in the face of “intimate” struggles is a far greater challenge.

These considerations obviously apply to the case of the Soviet coup. Of course, there was no social defense system in place, but even so the idea of the center of gravity of the resistance can be usefully applied. The point is that communication issues should be given a much higher profile in analyses.

The center of gravity is also relevant to campaigns such as anti-MAI which was not social defense in the strict sense. However, the anti-MAI campaign could be considered community resistance to corporate oppression and exploitation which itself was backed up by force, namely the police and military of

dominant states that would enforce laws and repress challenges to property and the market. Whether or not the anti-MAI campaign is considered to be a form of social defense, the key point here is that the campaigners were not located in a defined geographical area, but rather dispersed over the globe. Hence communication was absolutely fundamental to the campaigners. Note that the idea of the center of gravity of the resistance applies nicely to this campaign.

None of the writers on social defense strategy consider the issue of absence of action or what measures might be taken to overcome it. Burrowes gives an insightful analysis of social defense strategies but does not address the question of how to create a social defense system or to promote action when people are ignorant of or indifferent to social problems or where other circumstances impede organization of resistance.

Strategic nonviolent conflict

A different approach to strategy is taken by Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler in their book *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*.⁴⁷ After examining a number of major conflicts in which one side relied primarily on nonviolent action, they formulated a set of 12 principles for waging such conflicts (Table 1).

Table 1
Principles of Strategic Nonviolent Conflict⁴⁸
Principles of development

1. Formulate functional objectives.
2. Develop organizational strengths.
3. Secure access to critical material resources.
4. Cultivate external assistance.
5. Expand the repertoire of sanctions.

Principles of engagement

46 For an overview, see Mary Kaldor, “Introduction,” in Mary Kaldor and Basker Vashee (eds.), *Restructuring the Global Military Sector. Volume 1: New Wars* (London: Pinter, 1997), pp. 3–33; Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999).

47 Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994).

48 Ackerman and Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*, p. 23.

6. Attack the opponents' strategy for consolidating control.

7. Mute the impact of the opponents' violent weapons.

8. Alienate opponents from expected bases of support.

9. Maintain nonviolent discipline.

Principles of conception

10. Assess events and options in light of levels of strategic decision making.

11. Adjust offensive and defensive operations according to the relative vulnerabilities of the protagonists.

12. Sustain continuity between sanctions, mechanisms, and objectives.

These principles, as stated, are rather abstract. Their meaning comes alive in application to case studies. Ackerman and Kruegler analyze six well-documented cases of nonviolent conflict, assessing to what degree each of the 12 principles was followed:

- the Russian revolution of 1904–1906;
- the Ruhrkampf (German resistance to French and Belgian occupation of the Ruhr), 1923;
- the Indian independence movement, 1930–1931;
- Danish resistance to Nazi occupation, 1940–1945;
- toppling of the El Salvadoran dictatorship by civic strike, 1944;
- Solidarity's campaigns against the Polish communist government, 1980–1981.

This approach might seem reminiscent of Schmid's ten conditions for the success of social defense, but actually it is quite different. Ackerman and Kruegler's aim is to see how campaigns using nonviolent action can be made more effective. They assume that nonviolent action is a potent option whose success does not depend entirely on conditions such as the strength of the opponent. They note that sometimes nonviolent action works when conditions seem very unfavorable and sometime fails when prospects look good. They are concerned about a variable over which the activists have considerable control: strategy.

Boserup and Mack, Keyes, and others also focused on strategy, but with special attention to the center of gravity. Instead of taking this road of looking for a central organizing principle,⁴⁹ Ackerman and Kruegler are in a sense more eclectic theoretically, looking primarily for things that work. They also take a broader ambit by looking at "strategic nonviolent conflict" rather than social defense. Even so, their work shares assumptions with studies of social defense strategy, notably that the nonviolent activists are sufficiently well organized to be able to formulate and implement a strategy.

It would be a valuable exercise to test the case studies in this book using Ackerman and Kruegler's against 12 principles. However, for our purposes here we look at the two key issues raised in earlier chapters: the role of communication and the absence of action.

Communication issues play only an incidental role in Ackerman and Kruegler's picture. For example, principle 1, "formulate functional objectives," means articulating an ultimate goal "toward which all levels of decision making are directed," as well as subordinate objectives. The objectives, they say, should be clear, concrete, specific, and attainable. Among the criteria for selecting objectives, they say that "the goals must attract the widest possible support within the societies affected by the conflict" and "objectives should resonate with the values or interests of external parties, in order to attract their support and potential assistance."⁵⁰ This suggests the importance not only of symbolic considerations — the way objectives are embedded and expressed in systems of meaning — but of methods of communicating them, whether through pictures, broadcasts, graffiti, slogans, or whatever. However, Ackerman and Kruegler do not devote much attention to this side of the issue, instead focusing on the

49 Ackerman and Kruegler do not cite the work of Boserup and Mack or Keyes, suggesting that they are not aware of it.

50 Ackerman and Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*, p. 24.

choice of objectives as ideas rather than their mode of expression.

Communication is overtly relevant especially to principle 3, “secure access to critical material resources.” One of the critical material resources (along with food, water, clothing, energy, transport, and medical supplies) is communication infrastructure. They comment that “Deep redundancy of both quantity and type of communications gear is vital. A stockpile of quality fax machines, cellular phone, inexpensive short-wave radios, video and audio cassette players gives strategists the ability to make, disseminate, execute, and adjust their plans.”⁵¹ However, aside from this mention of communication technology as a vital material resource, Ackerman and Kruegler give little attention to communication.

Ackerman and Kruegler do not address absence of action. Like the analysts of social defense strategy, they assume the existence of an organized group of nonviolent activists, including strategists.

The great chain of nonviolence

Johan Galtung, one of the world’s foremost peace researchers, has presented the “great chain of nonviolence hypothesis.”⁵² This

hypothesis, though not couched in terms of communication, is readily adapted to a communication perspective, and thus deserves our close attention.

Galtung starts with the Gandhian goal of using nonviolent action to bring about a “change of heart.” He notes that direct persuasion is often extremely difficult or unlikely because there is a great social distance between the parties in conflict; sometimes the nonviolent activists are dehumanized, so that their actions do not prick the consciences of the oppressors. Galtung thus sees the obstacle being psychological distance. This might apply, for example, in the case of East Timorese resistance to the Indonesian invasion and occupation. The Javanese rulers of Indonesia looked down on other ethnic groups as lesser people whose aspirations were inconsequential compared to Javanese hegemony. In the massacres of 1965–1966, communists were demonized and dehumanized, making killing easier and nonviolent resistance far less effective.

Galtung’s key idea is that liberation is not necessarily only the responsibility of the oppressed. Intermediate groups, especially those that have an identification with both the oppressor and the oppressed, can play a key role. Intermediate groups are links in the chain of nonviolence. If the oppressed cannot through their own actions persuade the oppressors to change their views and actions, they may nevertheless be able to create sympathy among third parties who themselves have more influence with the oppressors. Sometimes the chain will be a long one, with several intermediaries along the way between the oppressed and oppressor.

Galtung gives a table summarizing seven case studies of nonviolent action, showing in each case the oppressor, the oppressed, and intermediate groups. We reproduce the table here, adding our own case studies.

51 Ackerman and Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*, p. 31. This list suggests that Ackerman and Kruegler are aware that network communication media (such as telephone) are more valuable to nonviolent campaigners than are broadcast media (such as television). However, they comment that “The same tools can be used for domination and repression” (p. xxiii), missing the point that while tools commonly have multiple uses, they are more easily used for some purposes than others, and hence it is to be expected that some communication technologies are more useful to nonviolent activists than to oppressors, and vice versa.

52 Johan Galtung, “Principles of nonviolent action: the great chain of nonviolence hypothesis,” in *Nonviolence and Israel/Palestine* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Institute for Peace, 1989), pp. 13–33.

Table 1. Case studies of the great chain of nonviolence hypothesis⁵³

	Oppressor	Intermediate groups	Oppressed
Vietnam war	US state	US people, “doves,” including soldiers	Vietnamese people
India	British colonial state	(1) Other Britons; liberals; socialists (2) Gandhi, high-caste Indians	Indian poor
Nazi Germany: Holocaust	Nazis, Gestapo	Non-German wives of German Jews ⁵⁴	German Jews
South Africa: apartheid	South African white establishment	(1) Other South African whites (2) Famous South African blacks	South African blacks
Israel/Palestine	Israeli establishment	(1) “Moderate” Israelis (2) “Moderate” Palestinians	Palestinians
US South: civil rights	US white establishment	(1) US whites (2) Famous US blacks	US blacks
Philippines	Philippine elite (supported by US government)	Manila bourgeoisie; “leftists”	Filipino poor; rural/urban proletariat
Indonesia 1998	Suharto and ruling clique	Indonesian students	Indonesian people
Soviet Union 1991	Coup perpetrators	Media; armed forces; sections of KGB; government officials	Soviet people
MAI	Multinational corporations and governments of major capitalist states	Workers and middle-class activists in rich countries	Poor people, especially in poor countries

As described in chapter 2, Indonesian students, a relatively privileged group in Indonesian society, played a leading role in challenging the Suharto government in 1998. The students had links with workers, peasants, and dissidents, but also had connections with members of the ruling elite.

During the Soviet coup, most citizens remained inactive. Important contributing roles in the opposition were taken by a number

of groups, mainly in key cities, such as journalists, soldiers, and members of the government apparatus, including the KGB. These groups all had links to coup leaders and the mass of the population.

Campaigning against the MAI, described in chapter 4, was spearheaded by a range of activist groups, mainly in developed countries. They had links with workers’ movements on the one hand and with establishment figures on

53 Adapted from Galtung, “Principles of nonviolent action,” p. 27. Note that disagreement is possible over what groups fit under the categories of oppressor, intermediate groups, and oppressed. For example, nonviolence scholar Ralph Summy (personal communication, 21 February 2001) thinks that some of the intermediate groups listed in Table 1 should be classified under “oppressed,” such as US people and soldiers in the case of the Vietnam war and Gandhi and high caste Indians in the case of India.

54 In 1943 in Berlin, the Gestapo arrested German Jews, in preparation for transportation to concentration or death camps. Following a long public protest by spouses (mainly wives) of those arrested, the arrested Jews were released.

the other. Each of these cases thus fits nicely into the great chain model.

Galtung argues that the main danger in these cases is that the struggle benefits the in-between group, not the more severely oppressed one. For example, in the liberation of India from British colonial rule, the main beneficiaries were the Indian elite; the lives of Indian poor did not greatly benefit. Galtung's recommendation is that more struggles are needed. The great chain of nonviolence is a tool for liberation, but repeated uses are required.

Of all the perspectives on nonviolence, the great chain hypothesis is the most amenable to development using communication perspectives. Whereas Galtung conceives the gap between oppressor and oppressed as one of social distance, it can also be interpreted as a communication failure. We will develop this idea in the next chapter.

One application of the great chain model is to the 1930 salt satyagraha, described at the beginning of this chapter. Thomas Weber analyzed the campaign to see if suffering by satyagrahis converted the lathi-wielding police. Quite the contrary: despite extensive injuries to protesters, with hundreds taken to hospitals, the beatings became worse. The British colonial government brazenly denied any police brutality, claiming that protesters had faked being injured.

The campaign was a success not due to direct conversion, as postulated by Gandhi, but because of *indirect* conversion. United Press journalist Webb Miller reported on the campaign to an international audience, telling about the gallant and disciplined Indian protesters and challenging British government disinformation. This reporting helped turn international opinion against British colonial rule in India. Webb Miller and the international press served as vital links in a great chain of nonviolence between Indians and British rulers.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Thomas Weber, "The marchers simply walked forward until struck down": nonviolent suffering and conversion," *Peace & Change*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1993, pp. 267–289.

Although Galtung does not explicitly deal with the issue of absence of action, the chain of nonviolence can be readily adapted for this purpose by attributing absence of action to missing or flawed links in the chain of nonviolence. In other words, if appropriate messages cannot "get through" from the oppressed to the oppressor, the problem may lie in the absence or shortcomings of intermediate groups.

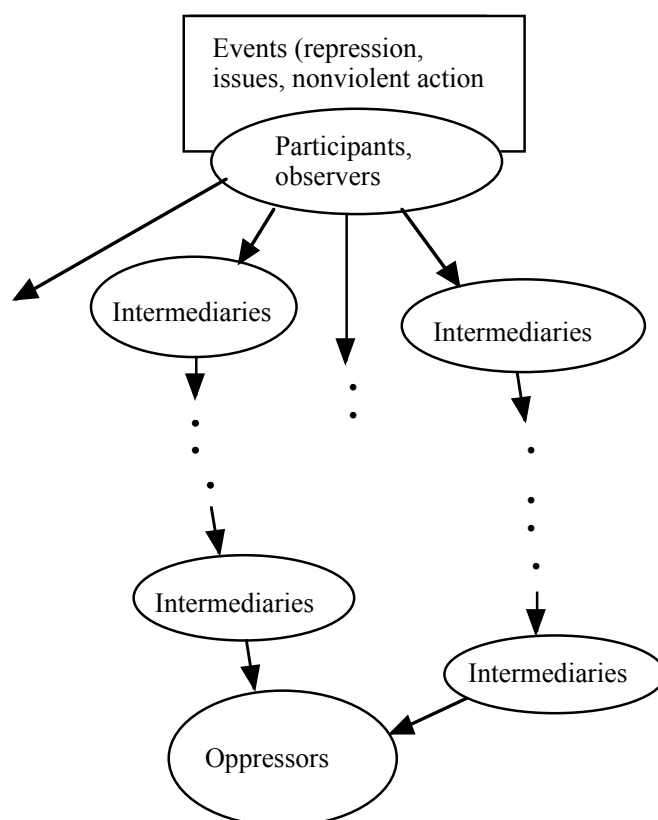


Figure 5.1. The great chain of nonviolence.

Are there enough links to form a great chain? Recent research on "small world theory" shows that in a network, if there are even just a few random connections, then it takes remarkably few links to span the gap between any two parties in the network.⁵⁶ The

⁵⁶ Robert Matthews, "Get connected," *New Scientist*, Vol. 164, 4 December 1999, pp. 24–28. For a more comprehensive and mathematical treatment, see Duncan J. Watts, *Small Worlds: The*

world population can certainly be conceived of as a network of people, of which oppressors and the oppressed are members. Small world theory suggests that in communicating against repression, there are plenty of potential intermediaries to make a fairly short chain, and hence that absence of action is likely to be due to weaknesses in links rather than their unavailability.

This conclusion is further supported by noting that, as well as using existing chains, new ones can be forged. One of the important activities of Amnesty International groups is to write to governments on behalf of prisoners of conscience. This can be interpreted as a strategy to build a communication chain between concerned citizens in one country and oppressors in another. The challenge is to increase the strength of the citizen-oppressor links.

Conclusion

How can communication be used more effectively against repression and oppression in active nonviolent struggles? What can be done, in the face of repression and oppression, when there is a relative absence of action? In this chapter we have canvassed perspectives on nonviolent action and social defense in seeking answers to these questions.

This tour of ideas has revealed the rich history and repertoire of nonviolent action, as well as its potential for improvement. Our case studies in chapters 2 to 4 can be seen as part of a long tradition of nonviolent action, about which much is known but far more is yet to be discovered through both research and further action.

Considering that nonviolent action is above all a struggle for loyalties, it is surprising that communication has such a low profile in theories about it. Gandhi assumed that principled nonviolent action would speak directly to opponents, helping to convert them. Most theorists and activists, though, have taken a

pragmatic approach, using nonviolent action to pressure or coerce opponents, with conversion an optional bonus. Yet in all cases it is essential to build support, both among those subject to attack or oppression and among third parties, and, in building support, the process of communication is vital. Access to information and struggles over meanings are absolutely crucial in nonviolent campaigns but have received relatively little attention. In particular, absence of action has been off the agenda. The great chain of nonviolence as formulated by Galtung provides the most promising foundation for dealing with communication for nonviolence.

Our examination of perspectives on nonviolent action has shown that there is considerable scope for further exploration of the role of communication. We next turn to perspectives on communication to see what they might contribute to an improvement in the effectiveness of nonviolent action.