

## Dilemmas in Promoting Nonviolence

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### ABSTRACT

*Promoting the use of nonviolent action raises a number of seldom-discussed tensions and dilemmas, including the possibility that nonviolence can be used for the wrong cause, the potential for nonviolent action to support violence and vice versa, and the role of advocates for nonviolent action. It is useful to think of nonviolent action as a tool that can be used for different purposes but is, by its nature, easier to use for liberation than oppression.*

MOST PROPONENTS OF NONVIOLENCE assume it is inherently a good thing: it is an alternative to violence to achieve worthwhile goals. Hence, promoting the use of nonviolent action seems unproblematical.

In recent years, these assumptions have been challenged in strident attacks on some proponents of nonviolent action, including Gene Sharp, Peter Ackerman, and Jack DuVall. They are accused of supporting the imperialist goals of the US government through their promotion of nonviolent struggle. These attacks provide an opportunity to reflect on some seldom-raised issues concerning the use and promotion of nonviolence.

My aim here is to address questions concerning the use and promotion of nonviolent action. In the next section, I address the issue of whether nonviolent action can be used for the wrong cause. Then I look at the circumstances in which nonviolent action is an inappropriate method, and what this implies. Following this, I examine the intersections of violence and nonviolence, in particular the dilemmas involved when nonviolent action is used in ways that appear

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to invoke, provoke or support violence. Then I look at the contrast between being involved in nonviolent action versus advocating it or training others to use it, and some of the potential problems arising from promoting nonviolence. Next, I present the idea of nonviolent action as a non-neutral tool, showing how this helps explain what occurs in debates over nonviolence. Finally, I look briefly at the dispute between critics and supporters of nonviolence in the light of the preceding discussion.

### **Principled and pragmatic nonviolence**

Before beginning the examination of dilemmas of nonviolence, it is important to distinguish between principled and pragmatic nonviolence, two traditions within nonviolence thinking and action.<sup>1</sup> Principled nonviolence is the Gandhian approach: nonviolence is a way of life, encompassing personal behaviour, thoughts and social arrangements as well as methods used in struggles with others. In the principled approach, the decision not to use physical force is made on ethical grounds: it is considered wrong to hurt or kill others. Though the refusal to use violence is primary, there are still practical decisions to be made about which methods of nonviolent action will be more effective.

In contrast, the reason for using pragmatic nonviolent action is because it is more effective than violence. Gene Sharp is the key scholar of pragmatic nonviolent action, focusing on methods and dynamics of action without implications for personal lifestyle or how people should live.<sup>2</sup> Pragmatic nonviolent action is used against specific problems such as war, genocide and oppression. Many activists, for example environmentalists and feminists who choose nonviolent methods without any awareness of nonviolence theory, can be categorised as being in the pragmatic tradition.

Some liberation movements have used violence and then made a decision to focus on nonviolent action, for example in East Timor against the Indonesian occupation<sup>3</sup> and in South Africa against apartheid.<sup>4</sup> These are examples of adoption of nonviolence for pragmatic reasons: if violence had been effective, the movements most likely would have persisted with it. Those committed to principled nonviolence would never have joined the armed struggle in the first place. Pragmatic practitioners are more likely to see the value of Sharp's analysis, because it is oriented to how to achieve results without any requirement for commitment to a particular value system.

In practice, there is an overlap between these two approaches. Principled practitioners often develop a shrewd understanding of how to be effective; Gandhi was a model in this respect.<sup>5</sup> It might be said

that principled practitioners can be pragmatic within the boundaries set by their refusal to use violence. On the other hand, quite a few activists within largely pragmatic social movements are committed to nonviolence but do not advertise their personal beliefs to avoid alienating fellow activists. Nonetheless, their individual commitments help shape their approach to nonviolent action.

Many critics of nonviolence are unaware of the distinction between principled and pragmatic, assuming that pragmatic activists hold principled positions typical of pacifists of the 1930s. However, Gandhi does not speak for all nonviolent activists, many of whom are unfamiliar with his beliefs or campaigns.

In the following, I mainly focus on pragmatic nonviolence, raising principled nonviolence when relevant. The points I raise are not primarily about orientations to nonviolence — principled versus pragmatic — but rather about dilemmas in promoting nonviolence, whatever the orientation. It so happens that most of those encountering the dilemmas are in the pragmatic tradition.

#### **Nonviolence for the wrong cause?**

Activists normally assume what they do is for a good cause, and nonviolent activists are no different. Many issues seem straightforward. In opposing workplace exploitation, workers have used strikes, work-to-rule, factory occupations and many other methods of nonviolent action. In opposing environmental destruction, activists have used rallies, blockades and tree-sits, among other methods. In opposing the war system, peace activists have used rallies, boycotts, tax refusal, and sabotage of military equipment, among other methods. In these and other campaigns, participants have used many of the methods of nonviolent action enumerated by Sharp and others. There are also many examples of nonviolent campaigns used to topple repressive governments.<sup>6</sup>

Nonviolent activists have a parallel set of campaigns for positive goals — Gandhi's constructive programme — such as developing skills and organisations for community self-reliance. It is often easy to agree on what is a worthy cause.

Nevertheless, on some issues there is less consensus. A prime example is abortion. Many feminists use nonviolent methods to support the availability of abortion as women's right to choose, but there are also opponents of abortion who use methods of nonviolent action such as picketing and boycotts. Not all supporters and opponents of abortion can be neatly pigeon-holed in terms of their beliefs. Few participants in struggles over abortion are pacifists, opposing violence in other domains such as war, but there are some, and they do not all

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line up on one side. Some oppose all war but support abortion as part of their feminist beliefs; others oppose all violence and consider abortion to be violence against unborn children.

Another split occurs in relation to nonviolent action against popular left-wing governments. For example, in the case of Venezuela, some nonviolent activists are critical of the opposition to President Chavez as part of a right-wing agenda to oppose socialism and promote neoliberalism. Others focus on oppressive aspects of the Chavez government. There are multiple sites for nonviolence, including in grassroots movements for or against the government.

Can nonviolent action be used for a bad purpose? Some nonviolence advocates answer “no” by definition: if oppressors use protests, boycotts or fasts, they say this isn’t really nonviolence.<sup>7</sup> From this perspective, the concept of nonviolence includes two attributes: absence of physical violence and promotion of a better world. There may be other attributes too, for example popular participation. My point here is that this perspective includes both the method and the goal in the concept of nonviolence.

This definition of nonviolence works for many purposes but it leads to difficulties when applied to vexing cases such as abortion and popular left-wing governments. If, down the track, nonviolence advocates change their assessment of an issue — for example from support to opposition to a government — this implies that an action can change from being nonviolent to not-nonviolent or vice versa. This approach begs the question of what nonviolence means in contested confrontations.

Other nonviolence advocates say that methods of nonviolent action are tools that can be used by both sides in struggles. In a clash between protesters and police, the police can use nonviolent methods such as sitting down to block movement by the protesters. Powerful corporations can withdraw their investments — a capital strike — as a tool against governments trying to impose regulations to protect workers or the environment. Sharp gives several examples of what he calls “counter-nonviolent action,” including police in India during the 1930 salt satyagraha who blocked protesters by sitting down in their way and segregationists in the United States who closed down restaurants targeted by civil rights activists, commenting that a significant shift from repression to counter-nonviolent action, so that both sides engage in a conflict by using nonviolent action, “would have the deepest social and political implications and ramifications.”<sup>8</sup>

Activists might not like to admit that their opponents can use nonviolent action, but to do so makes it easier to talk about dilemmas. It means that in a struggle, either side can use methods of nonviolent

action and there is no guarantee that nonviolent action is used for a good cause.<sup>9</sup> The implication is simple and straightforward. Activists need to make two judgements, about methods and goals. The methods need to be appropriate (for principled or pragmatic reasons) and the goal needs to be worthy.

This might be unpalatable to some nonviolent activists who assume their cause is automatically worthy and do not like to accept that their opponents could use nonviolence, because that to their minds would mean accepting that the opponents' cause was (also) just.

These dilemmas will not go away. Indeed, as the power of nonviolence becomes more widely recognised, more groups will start adopting the language and the methods of nonviolence and the dilemma of nonviolence for the wrong cause may well become more common.

### **Nonviolence the most suitable method?**

The violence-versus-nonviolence debate tends to dominate discussions about the appropriateness of nonviolence. But there are other issues. It is helpful to go back to the definition of nonviolent action, from a pragmatic perspective. There are three boundaries.

The first and most familiar boundary is between violence and nonviolence: nonviolent action does not involve physical force against opponents, thereby ruling out beatings, shootings, bombings and imprisonment. It also rules out methods backed by violence, such as economic sanctions backed by military force.<sup>10</sup>

A second boundary is between conventional action and nonviolent action. Nonviolent action involves going beyond widely accepted methods of political action. In systems of representative government, the routine actions of voting, lobbying and writing letters to government officials do not normally count as nonviolent action.

A third boundary is between action and discourse.<sup>11</sup> Speaking and writing, when they are conventional activities, do not constitute nonviolent action.<sup>12</sup> Routine forms of communication, such as discussions with neighbours or advertisements, seldom count as nonviolent action; fraternisation with enemy soldiers or petitions in a repressive regime certainly do. The boundary is blurry. Even in societies with formal protection of free speech, speaking out can sometimes be risky, for example when workers challenge employers, and such discourse better fits within the domain of nonviolent action.<sup>13</sup>

Most of the debate about whether to use nonviolent action relates to the first boundary, between violence and nonviolence. But there are also choices to be made in relation to the other two boundaries, and sometimes nonviolent action is not the best approach.

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Suppose your neighbourhood school introduced a policy of severe penalties for speaking in class. Students and parents might think this policy is unfair and applied capriciously. To oppose the policy, they might organise and institute a campaign of ostracism of teachers, noncooperation with all school policies, and fasts outside the school entrance. These are powerful methods of nonviolent action, but are they necessary? It might be easier to first seek a meeting with school officials and negotiate a solution. This issue here is whether the move to strong forms of nonviolent action was premature.

Gandhi initiated dialogue with opponents as a first step in his campaigns. Only after this approach failed did he escalate to methods such as noncooperation. From the approach of principled nonviolence, dialogue is part of the process of nonviolent struggle. However, this begs the question of how to make judgements about which methods are most appropriate.

Community organisers do a lot of work to promote social change, typically in poor or exploited neighbourhoods.<sup>14</sup> They assess problems and opportunities, canvass door-to-door to meet community members, organise meetings, help find and develop local leaders, and advise about campaigns. Some of this sort of work might be considered laying the groundwork for nonviolent action, the first of the stages in Sharp's dynamics of nonviolent action,<sup>15</sup> but it does not necessarily culminate in nonviolent action of a conventional sort.

A community organiser has to make decisions about the best ways to work within a neighbourhood. Organisers might be familiar with methods such as rallies and rent strikes, but using methods of nonviolent action is not a goal in itself. For a good organiser, the choice of method is secondary to local empowerment. One of the skills learned by organisers is what methods are most appropriate in particular circumstances. Their repertoire spans the boundary between conventional and nonviolent action.

Does it really matter all that much whether the methods used are called dialogue, organising, conventional action or nonviolent action? After all, none of these involves violence. Isn't the main thing the choice of what to do?

Indeed, the dilemma for nonviolent activists is what to do, as it is for reflective practitioners in all walks of life. Principled nonviolent activists have to decide what to do within an overall framework of living a nonviolent life. Pragmatic nonviolent activists have to choose what methods to use and how to combine them into effective campaigns.

**Nonviolence to support violence — and vice versa**

For nonviolence practitioners, mixing in a bit of violence is risky. If even a few participants in a peaceful protest throw rocks or assault police, this can easily change the public perception of the protest, with observers incorrectly inferring that protesters are pursuing destruction rather than social change.<sup>16</sup> Use of violence tends to reduce popular participation in struggles and lower the chances of causing splits in the oppressor's loyalty structure.<sup>17</sup> The media often focus on a few incidents of violence, ignoring the rest of what happened. Minor protester violence can provide police with justification for their own violence, often much more severe.

For this reason, nonviolent activists carefully prepare themselves to avoid being violent. Gene Sharp in his dynamics of nonviolent action, an empirically derived sequence of stages for nonviolence campaigns, lists one as "solidarity and discipline to fight repression."<sup>18</sup> A key process, political jiu-jitsu, occurs when authorities use violence against peaceful protesters: this is seen as unjust and can greatly increase support for the protesters.<sup>19</sup> Without nonviolent discipline, political jiu-jitsu may not occur and the campaign may become unstuck.

Similarly, proponents of nonviolent defence — also called civilian-based defence or social defence — as an alternative to military defence typically argue that mixing armed and nonviolent methods is difficult.<sup>20</sup> Armed resistance can undermine the effectiveness of nonviolence.

Despite the tensions involved in mixing violence and nonviolent action, there are plenty of examples where this has occurred. Resistance to the Nazi occupation included both partisan warfare and nonviolent action.<sup>21</sup> Resistance in East Timor to the Indonesian occupation included both armed struggle and nonviolent protest.<sup>22</sup> In the Philippines, resistance to dictator Ferdinand Marcos included both an armed communist insurgency in the provinces and, most prominently in 1986, people power in Manila.<sup>23</sup> In South Africa, violence and nonviolent action were used at different times in the struggle against apartheid.<sup>24</sup>

Violence often weakens the effectiveness of nonviolent action, but this is a tendency rather than a rule. If there is overwhelming support for the cause of the campaigners, a bit of violence may not make much difference. Another factor is separation: in the cases of East Timor and the Philippines, armed resistance was in the countryside and nonviolent resistance in urban areas. In South Africa, nonviolent resistance in the anti-apartheid struggle was the preferred approach in different periods than violence. (Whether armed struggles or other



violence actually assisted nonviolent efforts in these or other cases remains to be determined.)

Whereas violence often undermines nonviolent action, there are plenty of cases in which nonviolent action has assisted violent action. In nearly every war, both sides use methods such as rallies, diplomatic protests, boycotts and withdrawal of investment. Indeed, it is hard to think of a conflict involving violence without any nonviolent action.<sup>25</sup>

There is another connection between violence and nonviolence that has received less attention: sometimes nonviolent activists rely on systems of violence to achieve their goals. In the US civil rights campaigns, the primary confrontation was between supporters of desegregation, committed to nonviolence, and white defenders of segregation, including police and vigilantes who used violence. The campaigns fit the standard model of nonviolent dynamics, with violent attacks on protesters leading to public outrage, undermining support for racist policies.

But there was another important factor: the US federal government. Spurred into action by national public opinion, it intervened in southern states to defend civil rights protesters, prevent white assaults and bring perpetrators to justice. To be sure, there were many shortcomings and complexities in the federal role, which was far from purely lawful or humanitarian, but the key point here is that the success of the protesters was assisted by intervention by a more powerful armed party. (It can be argued that the civil rights movement would have succeeded even without federal intervention.<sup>26</sup>)

What does this say about the power of nonviolent action? Does it mean nonviolent action depends on violence?

Certainly not: there are plenty of nonviolent campaigns that succeeded without backing from any armed parties. For example, numerous repressive regimes have been toppled with little or no internal or external armed assistance.<sup>27</sup>

Nonviolent action certainly can succeed against violent opponents. But does that mean activists should reject support from governments or other groups with the capacity to use force? This question has not received much attention.<sup>28</sup> Yet it is relevant in a large number of cases of struggles against corporations or local governments. Few corporations have a significant capacity for violence on their own: they rely, if necessary, on police or private security forces to defend their interests. But police do not necessarily support corporations.

In 1998, the Australian stevedoring firm Patrick, with the covert support of the Australian federal government, dismissed its entire



workforce and brought in labourers trained in Dubai. The Maritime Union of Australia organised protests at ports, supported by community members. Patrick hired security guards to keep workers off the docks, but these balaclava-wearing enforcers alienated public opinion and hurt Patrick's cause. Meanwhile — and this is the point here — the local police did not act to break up the protests. The government would have preferred this, but the police were concerned that their own reputation would be tarnished if they attacked protesters, who included families and friends of the workers.<sup>29</sup> In this case, the protesters received tacit support for their actions.

At the other end of the spectrum is when nonviolent action is used to support an organisation backed by force. This occurs whenever nonviolent action is used to resist a coup — prominent cases are the 1920 Kapp Putsch in Germany, the 1961 Algerian Generals' revolt and the 1991 Soviet coup — or to defend against an invasion, as in Germany in 1923 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. The key in these and other cases is legitimacy: people take action on behalf of a system or state of affairs that they want to defend against takeover.

It is certainly possible in such cases for nonviolent action to be taken on behalf of the wrong cause, however that may be judged. In 1968, the Czechoslovak army did not resist the Warsaw Pact invasion, which would have been futile anyway. Those who opposed the liberalisation movement in Czechoslovakia at the time would judge that the popular resistance to the Soviet-led invasion was misguided.

This leads to a related issue: nonviolent action in a situation when it assists an agenda supported by organisations backed by force. Nonviolent action against the Chavez government in Venezuela is an example: it assists the agenda of the US government, at least under George W. Bush's administration. So what? Such connections are routine, indeed almost inevitable. The resistance to the Nazis aided the military campaign by the Allies and the Czechoslovak resistance to the 1968 invasion could be said to have assisted the capitalist cold war agenda.

As soon as struggles are placed in a one-dimensional framework, with the choice being to either support or oppose the good guys, then nonviolent action can be chastised for supporting the wrong cause. Usually, though, the matter is more complex. The Czechoslovak resistance in 1968 was part of a wider struggle over the direction for state socialism and led to splits in communist parties in many countries.

In summary, nonviolent action can indeed be used to support systems of violence and vice versa. The use of nonviolent action can

readily be justified in many such situations; in others there are great complexities and contrary positions, with no easy answer. It is important to be open about the issues involved. Given that nonviolent action is participatory and difficult to use for oppression, the default position should be that nonviolent action is legitimate, with the onus of proof on those who say otherwise — especially governments that criticise nonviolent movements.<sup>30</sup>

### **Participation versus giving assistance**

It is one thing to participate in nonviolent action, another to give assistance with it. For participants, politics is in the doing: one's support for a cause is implicit in actions taken for it.

Much of the debate about nonviolence and imperialism — discussed later — is concerned with giving assistance with nonviolence. Assistance in this context typically means information and training, for example explaining Sharp's consent theory of power, telling about strategies in previous campaigns, helping prepare an analysis of players and options, running role-plays of actions, recommending articles, books and videos, and offering guidance about strategies and actions. What happens when assistance is given to the wrong side? Are there things to be avoided?

Much assistance with nonviolence is provided within the ranks of participants. Some of this is via instruction, for example when experienced activists run workshops for newcomers. Probably even more learning occurs informally in the course of organising and campaigning. This is a standard feature of education within social movements. No one has questioned this.

Critics of nonviolence have focussed on assistance given by outsiders, namely those not directly involved in campaigns. Actually, there's a long history of this. Nonviolent activists regularly travel and share their knowledge and skills with others. This is largely how nonviolence training has been globalised. Often this is done on a personal, informal basis. Sometimes it is highly organised, such as with the group Training for Change, based in Philadelphia.

There are several potential pitfalls. What if the quality of assistance is poor? There are no diplomas in nonviolent action and no licensing of practitioners. Trainers rely on their reputation among peers. Should evaluation of nonviolence advisers be formalised? This issue has received little attention.

A different problem arises in giving detailed strategic and tactical advice. Jack DuVall of the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC) divides assistance into three types: (1) general information and education about nonviolent action and strategy; (2) strategy

facilitation, which involves helping groups develop and assess options and plans for action without recommending particular ones; (3) prescribing strategy and tactics. He says most organisations giving assistance about strategic nonviolent action concentrate on type 1, aiming to transfer knowledge. ICNC refuses to offer type 3 assistance because it is unethical — it involves making choices for others who take the risks — and ineffective, because outsiders don't understand the local situation well enough.<sup>31</sup>

Another pitfall is giving advice to potentially hostile parties. Helping police understand nonviolent action might seem like a good idea if it helps them respond to activists in a more informed and sensible fashion, rather than treating them as a mortal threat to be bludgeoned into submission. On the other hand, police might use their understanding of nonviolent methods to develop more effective techniques of control. What can be done to ensure suitable use of nonviolence knowledge?

One answer is that worrying about hostile use of general understanding of nonviolence is beside the point, because there is so much information publicly available. There is extensive material on the web; books are readily purchased. Proponents of nonviolence do not hide their methods.

Jørgen Johansen and I wrote an article about making protests effective: it is published in *Gandhi Marg* and available on the web.<sup>32</sup> Jørgen asks, "Do we support all activists and movements that find our article useful in their struggles?" Of course not. He then asks, "Are meetings and seminars so very different from publishing texts or producing and distributing videos?" He also notes that the opposite of being helpful by making materials publicly available is to go underground, restricting distribution of information — something hardly ever encountered in the nonviolence field.<sup>33</sup>

The most contentious issue is giving detailed guidance to activists in specific campaigns. The most likely dilemma arises from not knowing the motivations or agendas of those seeking advice. If a nonviolence trainer receives a request from a community group for a workshop, is it reasonable to offer assistance? Or is a lot of digging necessary to ensure it isn't a front group for some unsavoury corporation or government agency?

It is worth drawing an analogy to whistleblowing.<sup>34</sup> Whistleblower groups are regularly approached by individuals seeking help. Some sound like legitimate whistleblowers but others do not. However, undertaking a detailed analysis of the claims and bona fides of individuals is beyond the capacity of volunteer groups. Furthermore, excessive scrutiny can be harmful to genuine

whistleblowers who have been subject to repeated rejection and devaluation. In Whistleblowers Australia, an organisation made up primarily of whistleblowers and with no paid staff, the policy is not to advocate on behalf of individuals. What is offered is information, contacts and advice.

Most of those who approach Whistleblowers Australia for assistance are legitimate, but there are some who simply have a personal grievance. A few are delusional or criminals. What seems to have worked well is to offer all comers the same access to information and advice. Those who are not whistleblowers usually leave before long because they don't receive what they are looking for.<sup>35</sup>

There is no evidence that any of those seeking advice about whistleblowing are actually bosses wanting to know how to be more effective in harassing or getting rid of whistleblowers. If they showed up at a meeting and heard story after story from individuals trying to do the right thing and suffering enormously as a result of reprisals, they might well begin looking at the issues in a different way.

Roy Baumeister examined the perceptions of perpetrators of actions — such as assaults, murders and massacres — causing huge suffering in victims.<sup>36</sup> He found that perpetrators seldom thought of themselves as having done something terrible. Typically, they minimised the consequences for victims, justified their actions by blaming victims, forgot about the whole affair quickly and sometimes thought of themselves as the real victims. Baumeister's conclusion is that the common stereotype of calculating, callous perpetrators is wrong. Perpetrators think of themselves as doing the right thing or being justified.

Accordingly, employers who take reprisals against whistleblowers are likely to think what they are doing is legitimate. They think the employee has done the wrong thing — they wouldn't use the term whistleblowing — and that every action taken in relation to the employee is justified. This conclusion is compatible with the few studies of the thinking of employers in this situation.<sup>37</sup>

The same seems likely to apply to offering advice about nonviolent action. First, most of those who seek assistance for using nonviolent action see themselves as struggling against a powerful opponent, in particular an opponent able to use violence. If advice is offered to all comers, those running hierarchical organisations with the capacity to use violence, such as police chiefs, military commanders or corporate leaders, are unlikely to want to spread the word to the rank and file, namely to educate and train their own organisation members in the

use of nonviolent action. After all, knowing how to withdraw consent might be used against the hierarchy.

In a few cases, those seeking information about nonviolent action want to know how to deal with an opponent using it. But is this likely to have terrible consequences? Remember that those who exercise violence seldom see themselves as cold, calculating perpetrators of evil. Rather, they see their own cause as just or justified.

No doubt some seek to find out about nonviolent action in order to oppose it or use it for a bad cause. So what? Does this, by itself, discredit nonviolent action?

Some activists are willing to train “opponents,” namely people whose goals they oppose, in how to use nonviolent action. Jørgen Johansen, an experienced activist in War Resisters’ International, says he has done this and gives several reasons. One is that he believes tools influence the user: using nonviolent action may help transform the activists. Another is that he is sympathetic with the Gandhian view that activists need to be open to the viewpoint of opponents, noting that sometimes views have changed about particular issues: activists don’t always have the right answer. Another reason is that he would rather face opponents who use nonviolent action than those who use violence. He wants more people to become nonviolent activists, even if he disagrees with their goals and even if nonviolent action is more effective for them than violence. He says “If neo-Nazis turned to nonviolent action we would probably have a better situation in many parts of the world. But whose task is it to convince them or give them training? I don’t have a good answer.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Nonviolence as a non-neutral tool**

In thinking about these dilemmas, it is helpful to think of nonviolence — in particular, the methods of nonviolent action — as tools. A tool is anything that can be used to help perform a task. Hammers, rifles, bridges and computers are tools. They are artefacts, constructed by humans. There is a large body of thought and writing about technology that can be applied to methods of nonviolent action.<sup>39</sup>

Many people believe technologies are neutral because they can be used for different purposes: a computer can be used by military forces or by a peace group. But any particular technology is always *easier* to use for some purposes than others. In that sense, technologies are non-neutral. A hammer is helpful for pounding nails, less helpful for digging holes and positively harmful for brain surgery. Similarly for every other technology: some uses are easier than others. Some software is designed to calculate missile trajectories; it is not so helpful

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for running CD players.

I'm using simple examples here because the belief in the neutrality of technology is so widespread and pervasive.<sup>40</sup> The best examples of non-neutral technologies are weapons: aircraft carriers, cruise missiles and land mines are useful for military purposes but not for much else. Grenades can be used as paperweights or museum exhibits but mostly they are used for killing and destroying.

Some technologies are flexible, being able to be adapted for many different purposes. Paper and computer code are examples. Others are more specialised, such as shoes, trains and weaponised anthrax.

Tools, because they are non-neutral, can be said to be political, in the sense of being implicated in the exercise of power. It is possible to talk of the politics of technology, namely the design and use of technology to serve some groups and purposes more than others.<sup>41</sup>

If a tool is non-neutral, how can its politics be assessed? In other words, how is it possible to determine what the tool is most useful for? One way is to look at the origin of the technology, namely who developed it and for what purpose. Bazookas, for example, are designed and produced for military forces, so it is not surprising that is their main use. However, origins do not determine the trajectory of a technology. The most famous case is the Internet, which had its origins in military research for assuring resilient communication in the aftermath of a nuclear attack.<sup>42</sup> Yet the Internet, a highly flexible technology, has shown many uses beyond its origins.

Another way to assess technologies is through their characteristics. Communication technologies, for example, can be categorised as centralised or network in form. Mass media such as broadcast television are centralised whereas telephone and email are network forms of communication.

A third way to assess technologies is according to who uses them and for what purpose. Many weapons, most obviously nuclear weapons, are used only by militaries for military purposes. iPods are mainly used by individuals for listening to music.

Just as technologies can be assessed as non-neutral tools, so can a range of other things, for example money, meditation, meeting procedures and teaching methods. Methods of nonviolent action can be analysed as tools.

First consider the origins of methods of nonviolent action. Most of them seem to have been developed by action groups or social movements for pursuing goals. Militaries are not known for having

researched or developed methods of nonviolent action.

Next consider the characteristics of nonviolent action. By definition, they avoid inflicting physical harm. Most of them are participatory: they can be used by large numbers of people. Few require specialised skills or highly expensive resources. Most methods of nonviolent action could be classified as tools for the people: they are widely accessible and not easily monopolised. They are relatively benign. They can be used to inflict economic cost and psychological pain, but not to kill or maim. They are non-competitive: more people can use them without reducing the value to any user.

Third, consider who uses nonviolent action. Going by writings on nonviolent action, the main users are groups challenging repression, oppression, exploitation and the like.

From the perspective of principled nonviolence, it hardly makes sense to speak of nonviolence by oppressors. From the perspective of pragmatic nonviolence, there seem to be few examples of police or armies using nonviolent action. This may be a matter of selective attention. The Ku Klux Klan, for example, used rallies, though not in the spirit of nonviolence: participants hid their identities from outsiders. Members of the Klan also could be said to have boycotted black businesses. Again, this was not in the spirit of nonviolence, in that there was no intent at fostering dialogue and reaching a cooperative resolution of differences. Such examples need more attention from scholars to determine the significance of using methods of nonviolent action in ways divorced from the usual purposes of nonviolence.<sup>43</sup>

The conclusion from this brief examination is that nonviolent action is a largely benign tool in the world today, as indicated by its origins, characteristics and primary users. Therefore, spreading nonviolent action is likely to be beneficial, though there remains the possibility that techniques could be used for unwelcome purposes.

It is often said that tools shape the way the user sees the world. For someone with a hammer, everything looks like a nail. For someone with a gun, everything looks like a target. For someone trained in neoclassical economics, everything looks like a market. For someone with skills in nonviolent action ... what exactly does the world look like? It's hard to make a generalisation, but for many activists the world looks like a place where injustice can be tackled. Having a box of nonviolence tools is likely to lead to a perspective that emphasises empowerment rather than acquiescence or domination.

There is one complication here: what if someone has two tools? For someone with a hammer and a bar of soap, there are two ways of seeing problems. Imagine a military force able to impose



lethal force but also to organise rallies, vigils and sit-ins. Is there a risk that nonviolent techniques might be subordinated to military goals? This is a possible risk from spreading nonviolence skills to all and sundry, including those with damaging agendas. So far, this risk seems to have been very small. Furthermore, it is counterbalanced by the possibility that soldiers trained in nonviolence techniques might decide to use them for their own purposes, for example to refuse orders.

Analysing classic or contemporary nonviolent struggles — whether the 1930 salt march in India under Gandhi's leadership or the current Burmese pro-democracy movement — does not directly shed light on the question of whether nonviolent methods are benign tools, because nonviolent action in such struggles has been used for causes widely considered to be good. If methods of nonviolent action are neutral tools, then it should be relatively easy to find examples in which they have been used for harmful purposes, for example to subordinate a population. The absence of such examples suggests that methods of nonviolent action are indeed non-neutral tools: they are far easier to use for empowerment and liberation than for oppression.

### **Anti-imperialist critics of nonviolence**

In recent years, a few opponents of US imperialism have criticised a number of US proponents of nonviolent action. Specific targets include Gene Sharp, the world's leading nonviolence scholar; the Albert Einstein Institution (AEI) that Sharp established; Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, co-authors of the book *A Force More Powerful* and related materials; and the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC) that Ackerman established and for which DuVall works.

According to the usual critique of US imperialism, the US government, to promote US corporate or strategic interests, has regularly used invasions, such as Cuba in 1898, Panama in 1991 and Iraq in 2003, covert subversion of governments, such as Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1956 and Chile in 1973, and financing local militias such as the Contras in Nicaragua in the 1980s and the mujahidin in Afghanistan after 1979.<sup>44</sup> But in the post-Cold-War era, so some critics say, blatant intervention became more problematic, arousing greater popular opposition, so a more subtle imperialist intervention was needed.<sup>45</sup>

Nonviolent grassroots movements played central roles in the collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe in 1989<sup>46</sup> and in subsequent struggles against authoritarian rulers, such as Indonesia in 1998, Serbia in 2000 and Ukraine in 2004. The model of armed

struggle under the leadership of a party seemed to have been superseded by people power.

Furthermore, the US government agencies were providing funding to some of the people-power movements. This, to a few critics, seemed to be the smoking gun. US government funding to them implies nonviolence is part of an imperialist project. Prominent US promoters of nonviolent action then became a new face of oppression, accused of being pawns of US imperialism, perhaps evening willing pawns.

For example, Jonathan Mowat wrote in 2005 about the US government having developed methods for what he called a “postmodern coup” using methods of nonviolent action, with techniques tried out in the Philippines against President Marcos in 1986, in China in “the Tiananmen Square destabilization in 1989” and in Czechoslovakia in 1989 and then more recently, with new communication technologies, in places like Serbia and Ukraine. Mowat identifies Ackerman and DuVall as key figures in this new mode of US foreign intervention, and comments that “The creation and deployment of coups of any kind requires agents on the ground. The main handler of these coups on the ‘street side’ has been the Albert Einstein Institution.”<sup>47</sup>

Another attack came from George Ciccariello-Maher, who wrote “Masquerading under the banner of ‘nonviolent action,’ the AEI has come to play a central role in a new generation of warfare, one which has incorporated the heroic examples of past nonviolent resistance into a strategy of obfuscation and misdirection that does the work of empire.”<sup>48</sup>

As well as attacks on specific individuals and organisations promoting nonviolence, a few writers have attacked nonviolence more generally, most notably Native American activist and scholar Ward Churchill and anarchist Peter Gelderloos.<sup>49</sup>

This anti-imperialist critique of nonviolence is quite a turnaround. Only a few decades ago, anti-imperialists, especially Marxists, ignored nonviolent action as irrelevant. Those who took any notice typically scorned nonviolence as ineffectual and utopian.

One of those responding to critics of the AEI was Stephen Zunes, professor of politics at the University of San Francisco, well known among nonviolence scholars for his writings in the field<sup>50</sup> and more widely known as a political commentator and activist, especially on Middle East affairs.<sup>51</sup> Zunes pointed out that Sharp is a theorist and AEI a poorly funded independent organisation that has provided training in strategic thinking on a non-partisan basis. He also responded to particular allegations about intervention in Venezuela.<sup>52</sup> The critics of nonviolence in turn replied.<sup>53</sup>

Here, I won't pursue the details of this sprawling and sometimes Byzantine debate, but instead comment on how the critics' arguments relate to the dilemmas outlined in earlier sections.

The first dilemma is the possibility of using nonviolence for the wrong cause. That is exactly what the critics allege occurred. However, the critics have a one-dimensional method of assessing causes: they oppose any movement that appears to assist the imperialist agenda of the US government, as they see it. Supporters of nonviolence can agree that it is important to assess the worthiness of the cause, but need to make their own judgements based on a careful assessment.

The second dilemma is whether nonviolent action is the most suitable method for bringing about change. The critics do not address this explicitly because they oppose any action — violence, nonviolent action or conventional political action — against their favoured governments or movements. Supporters of nonviolence, on the other hand, should remain alert to the possibility that sometimes dialogue or conventional social action may be a better choice than nonviolent action.

The third dilemma concerns relationships between violence and nonviolent action. The critics, when they address this explicitly, have no problem mixing violent and nonviolent methods.<sup>54</sup> Most supporters of nonviolent action are aware that nonviolent action is more effective when not accompanied by violence. They also need to be aware that nonviolent action can sometimes support systems based on violence, and vice versa, and address the complications involved.

The fourth dilemma relates to giving assistance in using nonviolent methods. Critics see giving assistance, at least to causes they oppose, as highly objectionable. There are indeed some pitfalls, but in general there is a low risk in promoting nonviolence, because the likely benefits of developing understanding and capacity to achieve goals without using violence outweigh the possibility of damage due to assisting the wrong cause. Jørgen Johansen, for example, thinks nonviolence training for those he disagrees with often has more advantages than disadvantages.

The idea that methods of nonviolent action are non-neutral tools — namely, tools far easier to use for beneficial than harmful purposes — is helpful in understanding the divergence in viewpoints between critics and supporters of nonviolence. For the anti-imperialist critics, anything that appears to support imperialist agendas is to be opposed: they do not strongly differentiate between methods, so nonviolent action is just as objectionable as violence; the key factor for them is

what cause is being supported. Supporters of nonviolent action, on the other hand, generally believe that nonviolent action is a more suitable tool for waging conflict and that the world would be a better place if all conflicts were pursued using nonviolent action rather than violence.

There is a conundrum at the heart of the argument that nonviolence has become a tool of imperialism: if nonviolent action is so effective, why don't the critics encourage even wider adoption of nonviolent action by those they support, such as the Venezuela government? To put it another way: anti-imperialist critics of nonviolence previously claimed that the only counter to serious state violence was violence by resisters. That, after all, is why they advocated armed struggle or, when left movements captured state power, a strong people's military force. Now, if they claim the US government is using nonviolent action as a powerful tool, why don't they take up the same tool themselves and advocate nonviolent struggle against imperialists? And why don't they acknowledge the role of nonviolence in anti-imperialist struggles?<sup>55</sup>

From a nonviolence perspective, the stance of the anti-imperialist critics is seriously flawed, including by the absence of any proof that nonviolent movements are pawns of the US government or any explanation of why millions of people would risk their lives on behalf of a foreign power.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, the debate with anti-imperialist critics can be useful for highlighting some challenging dilemmas in using and promoting nonviolent action, though at the same time it can be a distraction from some of the more subtle challenges facing nonviolence supporters.<sup>57</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Proponents of nonviolence have come under attack for supporting bad causes, in particular US imperialism. Though few of the claims of the critics stand up to scrutiny and many lack any evidence, the attacks offer a useful opportunity to reflect on the possible misapplication of methods of nonviolent action.

There are several possibilities. Nonviolence can be used to support the wrong goal. Sometimes nonviolent action may not be the most appropriate method: conventional methods might be more effective. Finally, nonviolent methods can sometimes be used to support systems backed by violence, though paradoxically with beneficial outcomes.

It is helpful to think of nonviolent methods as tools, in particular as non-neutral tools. Tools are easier to use for some purposes than others; methods of nonviolent action are more suited for popular action against repression and oppression than for supporting them.

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However, choosing methods from the nonviolence toolbox does not guarantee that one's cause is just. It remains important for activists and advocates to look at purposes, alternatives and context.

Violent methods can also be thought of as non-neutral tools, far easier to use for repression and destruction than for liberation. From this perspective, the burden of proof rests with the critics of nonviolence who, so far, have failed to undertake a parallel critique of violence as a tool for social change.

As nonviolence becomes more widely understood and used, dilemmas are likely to become more salient. There will be more issues in which both sides use nonviolent action, with the temptation to blame nonviolence for misuses by some of its practitioners. These dilemmas should be welcomed as signs that nonviolence is being mainstreamed. That may be the opportunity for a further stage in the evolution of nonviolence.

### Acknowledgements

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### Notes and References

1. The distinction between the two approaches to nonviolence was initially articulated by Judith Stiehm, "Nonviolence is Two," *Sociological Inquiry* 38 (Winter 1968): 23–30, who used the expressions "conscientious nonviolence" and "pragmatic nonviolence." Since then, "principled" and "pragmatic" have become the standard labels: see for example Robert J. Burrowes, *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defense: A Gandhian Approach* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996): 112–115; Thomas Weber, "Nonviolence Is Who? Gene Sharp and Gandhi," *Peace & Change*, 28 (April 2003): 250–270. Other terms for pragmatic nonviolence are strategic nonviolence or the reformist use of nonviolent action.  
These terms are for making a distinction. To refer to principled nonviolence does not mean that users of the pragmatic approach are necessarily unprincipled — they may simply have a different set of principles — and to refer to pragmatic or strategic nonviolence does not mean that adherents of the principled approach are necessarily impractical or unstrategic.
2. Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973). See also Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 2005).
3. Chisako M. Fukuda, "Peace through Nonviolent Action: The East

- Timorese Resistance Movement's Strategy for Engagement," *Pacifica Review* 12 (February 2000): 17–31.
4. Stephen Zunes, "The Role of Non-violent Action in the Downfall of Apartheid," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 37, 1 (1999): 137–169.
5. Gene Sharp, *Gandhi as a Political Strategist* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1979).
6. For example, Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*.
7. It is plausible that such advocates are more likely to be in the tradition of principled nonviolence, but I know of no studies about this.
8. Sharp, *Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 693–695, quote at 694.
9. Who decides what is a good cause? Participants? Observers? Is it likely or even possible for a participatory nonviolent movement to be a source of major abuses? I thank Jack DuVall (personal communication, 4 December 2008) for raising these questions, which deserve extended discussion.
10. The economic sanctions against Iraq from 1991 to 2003 are an example. See Geoff Simons, *The Scourging of Iraq: Sanctions, Law and Natural Justice*, 2d ed. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).
11. Brian Martin and Wendy Varney, "Nonviolence and Communication," *Journal of Peace Research* 40, 2 (March 2003): 213–232.
12. Sharp, *Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 119, says "Normally, written or oral statements, whether by an individual, group or institution, are simply verbal expressions of opinion, dissent or intention, and not acts of nonviolent protest and persuasion" as he defined them.
13. I thank Howard Ryan (personal communication, 24 February 2009) for helpful comments on this point.
14. Saul D. Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals* (New York: Random House, 1971); Robert Fisher, *Let the People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America* (Boston: Twayne, 1984).
15. Sharp, *Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 451–520.
16. Max Abrahms, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work," *International Security* 31, 2 (Fall 2006): 42–78.
17. I thank Jack DuVall (personal communication, 4 December 2008) for these points.
18. Sharp, *Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 573–655.
19. *Ibid.*, 657–703.
20. See for example Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack, *War Without Weapons: Non-Violence in National Defence* (London: Frances Pinter, 1974), 140–147.
21. Werner Rings, *Life with the Enemy: Collaboration and Resistance in Hitler's Europe 1939–1945*, translated by J. Maxwell Brownjohn (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982); Jacques Semelin, *Unarmed against Hitler: Civilian Resistance in Europe, 1939–1943* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993).



22. Fukuda, "Peace through Nonviolent Action."
23. Monina Allarye Mercado, ed., *People Power: An Eyewitness History: The Philippine Revolution of 1986* (Philadelphia: Library Company of Philadelphia, 1987).
24. Leo Kuper, *Passive Resistance in South Africa* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1960); Zunes, "The Role of Non-violent Action in the Downfall of Apartheid."
25. I thank Jørgen Johansen (personal communication, 26 November 2008) for emphasising this point.
26. I thank Jack DuVall (personal communication, 4 December 2008) for this point.
27. See for example Patricia Parkman, *Insurrectionary Civic Strikes in Latin America 1931–1961* (Cambridge, MA: Albert Einstein Institution, 1990); Stephen Zunes, "Unarmed Insurrections against Authoritarian Governments in the Third World: A New Kind of Revolution," *Third World Quarterly* 15, 3 (2004): 403–426.
28. For a useful discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of foreign support for campaigns, see Maria J. Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, "Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Political Conflict," *International Security*, 33, 1 (2008): 7–44.
29. David Baker, *Batons and Blockades: Policing Industrial Disputes in Australasia* (Melbourne: Circa, 2005).
30. Jack DuVall (personal communication, 4 December 2008) commented that "There is a general effort now underway, actively promoted by the Russian, Chinese and Iranian governments, to discredit organized civil resistance as an American-sponsored plot to ignite 'color revolutions.' The Russian government resents its loss of influence over Ukraine and Georgia, and is protective of its influence over Belarus and most of the Central Asian republics. The Chinese leadership resents the bad media it gets about Tibet and worries about all the various protests on its own streets and factory floors. The Iranian regime is obsessed with identifying or apprehending each and every student or women's rights protester who manages to maintain a popular blog. So it is not surprising that they blame any protests directed at their clients or policies on alleged American or other external sponsorship, because that's convenient in trying to deny that the protesters have legitimate grievances."
31. Jack DuVall, personal communication, 4 December 2008.
32. Jørgen Johansen and Brian Martin, "Sending the Protest Message," *Gandhi Marg* 29, 4 (January–March 2008): 503–519.
33. Jørgen Johansen, personal communication, 26 November 2008.
34. Brian Martin, "Whistleblowing and Nonviolence," *Peace & Change* 24, 1 (January 1999): 15–28.
35. Brian Martin, *The Whistleblower's Handbook: How to Be an Effective Resister* (Charlbury, UK: Jon Carpenter, 1999), 136–143.
36. Roy F. Baumeister, *Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty* (New York: Freeman, 1997).



37. Robert Jackall, *Moral Mazes: The World of Corporate Managers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
38. Jørgen Johansen, personal communication, 26 November 2008.
39. See for example Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman, eds., *The Social Shaping of Technology: How the Refrigerator Got its Hum* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985).
40. Langdon Winner, *Autonomous Technology: Technics-out-of-Control as a Theme in Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977); Merritt Roe Smith and Leo Marx, eds., *Does Technology Drive History? The Dilemma of Technological Determinism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).
41. David Elliott and Ruth Elliott, *The Control of Technology* (London: Wykeham, 1976); Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1973); Richard E. Sclove, *Democracy and Technology* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995); Langdon Winner, *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).
42. Janet Abbate, *Inventing the Internet* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).
43. Arthur I. Waskow, *From Race Riot to Sit-in, 1919 and the 1960s: A Study in the Connections between Conflict and Violence* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 279–280, gives examples of what he calls “creative disorder” — close to pragmatic nonviolent action — by segregationists, for example evicting black tenants who tried to register to vote, cutting off bank credit and refusing sales of tools. Waskow argues that segregationists used these methods because they felt themselves to be outsiders. His general argument is that creative disorder starts off as a challenge to the system and later becomes the norm and is accepted as freedom.
44. William Blum, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions since World War II* (London: Zed, 2003). I thank Jørgen Johansen for suggesting this reference.
45. William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
46. Michael Randle, *People Power: The Building of a New European Home* (Stroud: Hawthorn, 1991); Adam Roberts, *Civil Resistance in the East European and Soviet Revolutions* (Cambridge, MA: Albert Einstein Institution, 1991).
47. Jonathan Mowat, “The New Gladio in Action? Ukrainian Postmodern Coup Completes Testing of New Template,” *Online Journal*, 19 March 2005, [http://onlinejournal.org/Special\\_Reports/031905Mowat-1/031905mowat-1.html](http://onlinejournal.org/Special_Reports/031905Mowat-1/031905mowat-1.html).
48. George Ciccariello-Maher, “AEI and Venezuela: Einstein Turns in his Grave,” *Counterpunch*, 16 April 2008, <http://www.counterpunch.org/maher04162008.html>. See also Michael Barker, “A Force More Powerful: Promoting ‘Democracy’ through Civil Disobedience,” *State of Nature*, Winter 2007, <http://>

- www.stateofnature.org/forceMorePowerful.html; Eva Golinger, "USAID in Bolivia and Venezuela: The Silent Subversion," *venezuelanalysis.com: Venezuela News, View, and Analysis*, 12 September 2007, <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/2600/>.
49. Ward Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology: Reflections on the Role of Armed Struggle in North America* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2007); Peter Gelderloos, *How Nonviolence Protects the State* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007). For a detailed response to Gelderloos, see Brian Martin, "How Nonviolence is Misrepresented," *Gandhi Marg* 30, 2 (July-September 2008): 235–257.
  50. Zunes, "Unarmed Insurrections against Authoritarian Governments in the Third World"; Zunes, "The Role of Non-violent Action in the Downfall of Apartheid"; Stephen Zunes, Lester R. Kurtz, and Sarah Beth Asher, eds., *Nonviolent Social Movements: A Geographical Perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).
  51. Stephen Zunes, *Tinderbox: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Roots of Terrorism* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2003).
  52. Stephen Zunes, "Sharp attack unwarranted," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, <http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/5327/>, 27 June 2008; see also Stephen Zunes, "Nonviolent action and pro-democracy struggles," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, <http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/4923/>, 24 January 2008.
  53. George Ciccariello-Maher and Eva Golinger, "Making Excuses for Empire: Reply to Defenders of the AEI," *Venezuelanalysis.com*, 4 August 2008, <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/print/3690/>; Michael Barker, "Sharp Reflection Warranted: Nonviolence in the Service of Imperialism," *Swans Commentary*, 30 June 2008, <http://www.swans.com/library/art14/barker01.html>.
  54. A principal argument made by Peter Gelderloos in *How Nonviolence Protects the State* is that activists can be more effective if they do not restrict themselves to nonviolence.
  55. Jack DuVall writes that there have been many "past and active nonviolent struggles directed against governments backed or financed by the U.S. government. Leaders and activists in the nonviolent campaigns today in Western Sahara, West Papua, Egypt, and Palestine against the occupiers or regimes in those countries have been absorbing and applying what they've learned about strategic nonviolent action (and we've helped teach some of those activists). The critics of assistance to activists who are Venezuelan, Tibetan, Burmese or Iranian have been silent about the assistance given to those other campaigns (e.g. Egypt, Palestine) perhaps because Americans aiding activists in such struggles doesn't fit into their paradigm that teaching nonviolent action is a form of Western imperialist intervention." (personal communication, 4 December 2008). See also International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, "Refutation of Stephen Gowans' article, 'The US attempted color revolution in Iran: the role and aims of US democracy promotion in the attempted color revolution in Iran,'" 7 July 2009, <http://>

[www.nonviolent-conflict.org/gowans\\_article.shtml](http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/gowans_article.shtml).

56. I thank Hardy Merriman — of the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict — for these points. He says “the burden of proof should be on those making the assertion that recent nonviolent movements are fronts for Western powers. They never provide such proof” (personal communication, 6 December 2008).
57. Nonviolence scholar Ralph Summy (personal communication, 2 December 2008) thinks it would be wiser to ignore ill-informed and unfounded criticism and instead to focus on promoting nonviolence.

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