

Introduction to Gene Keyes, "Heavy casualties and nonviolent defense"

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What can be done about the threat of attack from military forces? This is a crucial question, since wars and military repression have resulted in millions of deaths this century. One solution for a country is to have its own military forces to be used for defence. This sounds good, except that one country's defensive army may be considered a dangerous threat by rulers of another country. The result is military races and, all too often, wars.

But is there any alternative to military defence? Some researchers and activists think that the answer may be nonviolent defence, which means defence by the people using nonviolent methods such as petitions, rallies, strikes, boycotts, sit-ins, fraternisation, alternative institutions, and perhaps sabotage of property. With a complete system of nonviolent defence, there would be no military forces at all. Nor would defence be something run by a small, professional body. Instead, all members of the population would be encouraged to participate. Nonviolent defence is also known as social defence, civilian defence and civilian-based defence.

The idea of a nonviolent alternative to military defence developed gradually, drawing on the ideas of pacifists and experiences in campaigns led by Gandhi in South Africa and India. Many of the early advocates of nonviolent alternatives had a religious orientation. But since the 1950s, leading Western researchers on nonviolent defence — including Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack, Theodor Ebert, Johan Galtung, Stephen King-Hall, Johan Niezing, Adam Roberts and Gene Sharp¹ — have taken a more pragmatic direction, arguing that nonviolent action is a more effective method than violence.

Part of the argument is that in an age of weapons of mass destructions, including nuclear weapons, all-out war between highly industrialised societies has become counterproductive for any rational purpose. Also relevant is the role of military forces in repression within countries. Militaries in today's world are more often a threat to their own people than a protection against attack from the outside. Finally, the attention to nonviolent defence reflects increased understanding and experience with the methods of nonviolent action.²

Although knowledge about nonviolent defence has increased greatly in the past several decades, there is still much to be learned. Historical examples of nonviolent action do provide some insight, but a

serious programme of nonviolent defence requires a great deal of planning, preparation and training.

No country in the world has yet even begun a conversion to nonviolent defence. The reason seems simple: governments, militaries and arms manufacturers have strong vested interests in the military system. Furthermore, most people, through education, the media and cultural traditions, believe there is no alternative to military defence. Since hardly any money is devoted to developing alternatives, scepticism about nonviolent defence becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Nevertheless, interest in nonviolent defence has continued to grow. There are supporters in countries around the world and a continuing production of articles.³

Because the proponents of nonviolent defence regularly encounter scepticism from those who first hear of it, there has been a tendency to adopt a position of advocacy. This means that there have been relatively few tough critical assessments from within the ranks of those treating it as a serious option.⁴

The following article by Gene Keyes is an exception to this pattern. Keyes has carried out some insightful and innovative studies of nonviolent defence.⁵ In examining the issue of heavy casualties, Keyes draws on writings by many of the key figures in the early development of ideas about nonviolent defence. In confronting this issue, he does nonviolent defence a service. All too often, the difficult issues and moral dilemmas are swept under the carpet. After all, that is the usual pattern in discussions about military methods, in which the gory details are hidden from public consumption.⁶ It might be argued that if nonviolent defence is to gain public acceptance, then it has to be utterly honest and realistic — unlike military defence. Judge for yourself — after reading Gene Keyes' article.

NOTES

1 Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack, *War Without Weapons: Non-violence in National Defence* (Frances Pinter, London, 1974); Johan Galtung, *Peace, War and Defense: Essays in Peace Research, Volume Two* (Christian Ejlert, Copenhagen, 1976); Gustaaf Geeraerts (ed.), *Possibilities of Civilian Defence in Western Europe* (Swets and Zeitlinger, Amsterdam, 1977); Stephen King-Hall, *Defence in the Nuclear Age* (Victor Gollancz, London, 1958); Johan Niezing, *Sociale Verdediging als Logisch Alternatief* (Van Gorcum, Assen, Netherlands, 1987); Adam Roberts (ed.), *The Strategy of Civilian Defence: Non-violent Resistance to Aggression* (Faber and Faber, London, 1967); Adam Roberts, 'Civil resistance to military coups', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 12, 1975, pp.19-36; Gene Sharp, *Making Europe Unconquerable: The Potential of Civilian-based Deterrence and Defense* (Ballinger, Cambridge, Mass., 1985).

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

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- 3 See the newsletter *Civilian-Based Defense: News & Opinion* (PO Box 31616, Omaha NE 68131-0916, USA).
 - 4 An exception is Alex P. Schmid, with Ellen Berends and Luuk 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).
 - 5 Gene Keyes, 'Strategic nonviolent defense: the construct of an option', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, June 1981, pp. 125-151; Gene Keyes, 'Force without firepower: a doctrine of unarmed military service', *CoEvolution Quarterly*, No. 34, Summer 1982, pp. 4-25.
 - 6 Paul Fussell, 'The real war 1939-1945', *Atlantic Monthly*, August 1989, pp. 32-40.