

Non-violence versus US Imperialism

JØRGEN JOHANSEN, BRIAN MARTIN, MATT MEYER

Challenges to us imperialism based on armed struggle have been largely unsuccessful. A much more promising strategy is non-violent popular action, which has only begun to be taken seriously for its potential long-term effectiveness. Six case studies – the Vietnam war, nuclear weapons, East Timor, Iraq, Puerto Rico and the so-called Arab Spring – illustrate the potential of popular unarmed resistance to facets of the us imperial system. This approach warrants further development.

The United States (us) today has the world's most powerful military and until recently a successful economic system. The us government is able to impose its will on other peoples of the world far more than any other government. Some see this as a good thing, because of us traditions and practices of representative government and free markets. Others, though, see a dark side to us military, political and economic power – they see it as a modern form of imperialism, of unprecedented scope. Both these views can be justified. The “us empire” has very different qualities from the “us republic”.

Our aim here is not to argue about the nature of imperialism or whether the us fits one definition or another of imperialism or empire, but rather to look at challenges to forms of domination associated with the exploitative us military, economic and political power. That us culture includes a number of good qualities is without doubt, some of them being inspirations for resistance movements around the world. The us struggles for the abolition of slavery, universal voting rights, and civil rights for African-Americans are all important parts of the global struggle against injustice. Authors such as Henry David Thoreau and Martin Luther King, Jr are still essential reading for resisters globally.

Key Features

Three key features of us imperialism are military force, capitalism and ideology. The us military is by far the most powerful in the world, built on nearly half of the world's military spending. Nuclear weapons provide dominance in the global balance of nuclear terror. Advanced chemical, biological, and conventional explosives with sophisticated delivery systems are the most lethal ones available. us non-lethal weapons and surveillance technologies are tools of social control.

From the point of view of us political and military leaders, us military power provides necessary protection of democratic freedoms and the “free world”. From the point of view of many people in the rest of the world, though, us military force is used to protect us interests, including via attacks on countries (Blum 1995, 2000; Buchheit 2008), support for client regimes and protection of us foreign investment.

Then there is the system of capitalism, infiltrating every facet of daily life through jobs and the market, with privatisation and corporate globalisation extending the reign of private property and market relations. Key elements in exploitative capitalism include sophisticated and brutal marketing, monopolistic dominance, private control over public goods such as water, trade controls under the guise of “agreements”, slave-like working conditions, obedient consumers, anti-union policies

For valuable comments on drafts, the authors thank Sharon Callaghan, Erica Chenoweth, Jack DuVall, Janne Flyghed, Yasmin Rittau and Stellan Vinthagen.

Jørgen Johansen (johansen.jorgen@gmail.com) is a freelance academic and activist and editor of *Resistance Studies Magazine*; Brian Martin (bmartin@uow.edu.au) is professor of social sciences at the University of Wollongong, Australia; Matt Meyer (mmmsrnb@igc.org) is an activist, author, and editor, working with Africa World Press and PM Press, and a frequent contributor to WagingNonviolence.org and NewClearVision.com.

and relentless attacks against cooperative forms of organising social life (Jawara and Kwa 2003; Klein 2001, 2007).

Another key element of us imperialism is ideology: the standard package of beliefs about the way the world should be organised. This includes acceptance of hierarchy in the workplace with the system of owners, managers and workers, the encouragement of consumerism and associated acquisitiveness, the acceptance of social inequality as inevitable, and the belief in the necessity of armed force to protect against threats from internal and external enemies. These beliefs are most powerfully inculcated through experiences in day-to-day life and are reinforced through the style and content of mass media and Hollywood productions. This has been so successful that many consumers of products from exploitative workplaces hardly reflect on their place in the chain of profit making, pollution, and modern slavery.

Military dominance, capitalism and hegemonic beliefs are three of the key elements for understanding the place of the us in the world. Should this package be labelled “imperialism”? There are debates about the relevance of the concept of imperialism and also about whether it is appropriate to call the us an empire (Ferguson 2004; Hobsbawm 2009; Todd 2003; Wallerstein 2003). We are not too concerned about the exact label – for our purpose, it would be satisfactory to refer to a us-centred system with imperial elements. Our interest is in ways to challenge the exploitation and repression associated with this system.

We focus here on us imperialism, with the understanding that it is only one of the problems in the world, though one of the more serious and influential. There are other systems of imperialism. Some are subordinate to us imperialism, for example, the Australian government’s domination of small countries in the south Pacific. Others are independent of or antagonistic to us imperialism, such as Chinese government support for other regimes.

Then there are systems of domination other than imperialism. Male collective domination of women is a separate system of oppression, with some links to imperialism but not reducible to it: patriarchy and imperialism are each worthy of attention. Likewise, racial domination, subordination of people with disabilities, and environmental exploitation – to name a few – can be considered systems of oppression that are important in their own right and separate from imperialism, though with some overlaps, synergies and tensions.

We focus on us imperialism in part because of its significant impact on people’s lives and in part to emphasise that people’s resistance is potentially one of the greatest challenges to it. Much of the attention to us imperialism has come from left-wing critics who assume that armed struggle is, in the end, the only way to make an effective challenge. There is a growing amount of evidence to question this assumption.

People’s resistance to imperialism occurs at every point, from workers’ struggles to anti-war activism. The question is, what are the most effective ways both to resist the imperial system and to lay the foundation for a just and equal society?

We argue here that the most potent challenges to us imperialism have involved people’s direct action, without using physical violence. This is commonly called non-violent action, civil resistance, or people power. It involves much more than the usual image of mass rallies or well-choreographed civil disobedience. A host of techniques and strategies can be used, including non-cooperation and setting up alternative political and economic systems.

We first give a general rationale for unarmed popular resistance to us imperialism. We then provide six case studies, each showcasing the successes achieved through the use of non-violent direct action. The key to each of these cases is mobilising mass popular support, hence undermining the military, economic and ideological pillars of imperialism. Several of these case studies involve challenges to us military power and the economic exploitation enabled by this military power. All of them represent a serious dent in beliefs about the inevitability and benevolence of us imperialism.

The Rationale for Popular Unarmed Resistance

The us military has an overwhelming superiority in the use of force, including weapons, intelligence and training in how to kill (Grossman 1995). There is little disagreement that armed resistance to us forces is, at best, an exercise in asymmetric warfare: the raw strength of the us military machinery makes direct engagement a losing proposition. The most effective guerrilla struggles have been ones that rely upon political mobilisation to gain popular support for liberation, so that military assaults create greater support for the resistance – often as a result of civilian casualties (Joseph 1981; Meyer 2012). Even strong adherents of people’s war or foco-ism agree that mass mobilisation is at the focal point of any winning strategy (Ely 2009).

Armed struggle has almost always been carried out in more limited arenas of struggle, with smaller numbers of adherents taking part in the struggle (Howes 2010). First, direct participation in armed engagement is usually predominantly led by fit young men, with women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities less well represented. Second, armed resistance provides a rationale for overbearing us military reaction; armed struggle often solidifies popular support for us policy, especially in the us. Members of the public interpret challenges more according to their most extreme methods than by their formal goals (Abrahms 2006). Rulers highlight violence by opponents to justify their own massive use of force against all opposition, including peaceful activists. Third, armed struggle involves engaging with empire at its strongest point.

The practice of unarmed political resistance (Sharp 1973) avoids direct engagement with the us armed forces. Instead, it acts in ways that make us imperial violence counterproductive, by spotlighting the injustices of empire. Focusing on the overwhelming armed superiority that the imperial power holds, and on the inequities inherent in imperial rule, this practice seeks to turn the empire’s violence against itself. There are several reasons why strategic non-violent action is ideal for making such a challenge. First, it allows and requires

widespread participation: everyone can join a boycott. Second, it does not threaten the lives of civilians or soldiers and hence has greater potential for winning them over. Third, when violence is used against peaceful protesters, this often causes public outrage and ends up being counterproductive for the attackers (Martin 2007).

Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan (2011) carried out an analysis of 323 struggles against repressive regimes or occupations or in favour of secession, systematically comparing armed and unarmed campaigns. Their conclusion is that civil resistance is far more likely to be successful in achieving the aims of the struggle, and that success using civil resistance occurs just as frequently against the most repressive regimes as against softer opponents. The clear message is that non-violent action can be effective against even the harshest opponents. Among the anti-dictator, self-determination and anti-occupation struggles they studied, Chenoweth and Stephan did not separate out those that were anti-imperialist, but it is reasonable to expect that their conclusions apply to this subset of their cases.

Chenoweth and Stephan also found that successful people power movements are more likely to result in stable democratic governments, whereas successful armed struggle is more likely to lead to repressive successor states (see also Johnstad 2010). In summary, civil resistance is more likely to succeed and, when it does succeed, creates better prospects for a stable free society. The keys are widespread mobilisation and campaigners' strategic acumen (see also Karatnycky and Ackerman 2005; Stephan and Chenoweth 2008).

Some critics argue that violence should remain in the activist toolkit and that to remain non-violent is play into the hands of the state (Gelderloos 2007). Others, like Meyers (2000: 1), argue that non-violence "encourages violence by the state and corporations". However, these arguments have been limited to a critique of rigid and absolute pacifism, and have been shown to be narrow at best in their understanding of the diverse meanings and uses of unarmed action (Meyer 2008). They give insufficient consideration to the greater capacity for popular mobilisation using non-violent methods (Martin 2008) and cannot account for the findings that civil resistance has been more successful than armed struggle against repressive opponents.

Here we describe six examples of popular non-violent resistance to elements of the us imperial system. In each of these, military, economic and/or ideological aspects of the system have been restrained and transformed. These and other such struggles have made us imperialism ever more susceptible to popular challenge.

The Vietnam War

Complaints about us war policy in Vietnam started in the early 1960s. As the 1960s went on, university campuses became crucibles of anti-war protest, as students came to protest an unjust war, campus bureaucracy, and a graduation that would make male students eligible for the draft. Because conscription loomed over male students' futures and provided an avenue for direct resistance to war on an individual level, much

student activism was concerned with the draft. Beginning in 1964, students began burning their draft cards as acts of defiance (DeBenedetti and Chatfield 1990; Hall 2012; Howlett and Lieberman 2008). Manuals were written about how to avoid the draft (Shapiro and Striker 1970).

In late July 1965, President Lyndon Johnson ordered the number of young men to be drafted per month to go from 17,000 to 35,000, and on 31 August signed a law making it a crime to burn a draft card.

The movement included well-known people. Senator Edward M Kennedy objected to the Selective Service Act of 1967 and argued against the bill in support of conscientious objectors.

In 1967, the world heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali refused to be conscripted into the us military, based on his religious beliefs and opposition to the Vietnam war. He was arrested, found guilty on draft evasion charges, and stripped of his boxing title. He was not imprisoned, but did not fight again for nearly four years while his appeal worked its way up to the Supreme Court, where it was successful.

In 1969, presidents of student bodies at 253 universities wrote to the White House to say that they personally planned to refuse induction into the military, joining the half million others who would do so during the course of the war (Baskir and Strauss 1978: 68).

It became clear that the war had less and less support. The younger generation convinced their parents that this war could not be justified. Many were willing to go to jail or into exile in order not to be part of the "war machinery". No candidate for president and few candidates for Congress could be elected if they did not oppose the war in Vietnam. The mass mobilisations, non-violent civil disobediences, and moratoria to end the war grew in size and breadth over the course of a few short years.

The Pentagon could have continued its military campaigns against Vietnam and south-east Asia for many years beyond 1973, ever-escalating its use of weaponry. Though Vietnamese military action undoubtedly played a significant role, one key strategy signalled their own approach to winning the fight against the giant us military apparatus: popular engagement with both us soldiers and the essentially non-violent us anti-war movement (Dellinger 1975; Hunt 1999). As the war intensified, so did resistance tactics – including property destruction through breaking into draft offices and burning or pouring blood on files relating to the war. A few us anti-war activists, most famously the Weather Underground, initiated a series of late-night bombings of symbols of the war, to challenge its continuation and "bring the war home". While some credit these actions with causing greater government repression and discrediting or limiting the movement, even the staunchest of former Weather members and supporters understand that the need now, as before, is to "take the greatest care to respect life and minimise violence as we struggle to end violence" (Gilbert 2012). The caricatures of crazy, gun-toting revolutionaries, like those of anti-war activists spitting on returning veterans, have largely been the fabrication of reactionary, pro-war media.

The truth about the Vietnam war is that it became politically untenable to continue sending troops, getting more and more body-bags in return. Domestic opposition to us policy in Vietnam made it impossible for the us government to continue its imperial war.

Nuclear Aspirations

During the second world war, the us military poured enormous resources into developing nuclear weapons and then in August 1945 used them on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki even though the military rationale for this was questionable (Alperovitz 1966). Nuclear weapons have held a central place in us military preparedness ever since; nuclear power has developed along similar lines, with similar aspirations for the proliferation of weaponry (Bunn 2007).

During the cold war, the Soviet government developed and tested nuclear weapons. The nuclear arms race led to the production and deployment of tens of thousands of weapons on both sides, plus hundreds by several other countries.

On numerous occasions, us political and military leaders contemplated using nuclear weapons, for example, during the Vietnam war and the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, but always held back (Burr and Kimball 2006; Kauzlarich and Kramer 1998). The usual explanation is nuclear deterrence: us decision-makers were afraid of the Soviet nuclear arsenal and vice versa. But there is another, complementary, explanation: popular deterrence.

Lawrence Wittner (1993-2003), in his comprehensive history of protest movements against nuclear weapons, draws on internal government documents to show that the key factor restraining nuclear developments has been mobilised popular opinion. When there was little protest, nuclear arms races accelerated; when there was much vocal protest, arms races abated.

More generally, government leaders know that there would be a huge public backlash should they use nuclear weapons. The annual protest actions on Hiroshima Day reveal how long-lasting popular concern can be. There are numerous actions against nuclear weapons production, transport and deployment, for example, Ploughshares direct actions in which protesters are willing to risk months or years in prison to make a moral statement (Herngren 1993), the women's action at the us nuclear base at Greenham Common in Britain (Hopkins 1984) and the campaign against the neutron bomb (Auger 1966; Wittner 2009). The many actions and protests against us nuclear missiles in West Germany during the 1970s and 1980s were crucial for creating a strong opposition against these deployments. These sorts of actions have, over the decades, comprehensively stigmatised nuclear weapons in the public eye. Furthermore, the direct action campaigns of the late 1970s largely curtailed the us nuclear power industry, through use of affinity group-based activities and intensive trainings in non-violence (Epstein 1993; Sheehan and Bachman 2009).

us military strategists have tried to overcome these public attitudes by developing miniature nuclear devices that are scarcely more powerful than the largest conventional weapons such as fuel-air explosives. But protesters and the public continue to see a qualitative difference between nuclear and non-nuclear

weapons and power, and continue to call for resistance (Schell 2007). This has been a crucial factor in restraining the use of the nuclear arsenal in support of us imperialism.

Indonesia and East Timor

Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman (1979) in *The Political Economy of Human Rights*, their classic analysis of us imperialism, described a vast system of authoritarian client states that they characterised as sub-fascism. The us government propped up numerous third world regimes that kept their populations subjugated.

One of the key client states was Indonesia. In 1965, left-wing president Sukarno was overthrown in a military operation involving genocidal violence throughout Indonesia (Cribb 1990), in what Chomsky and Herman called "constructive terror" because it served the interests of us capital and foreign policy. The new president, Suharto, maintained a repressive rule that was receptive to international capital and us military operations.

In 1974, after the collapse of Portugal's fascist government, popular movements in former Portuguese colonies asserted their independence. One of them was in East Timor, located on half an island in the Indonesian archipelago. In 1975, Indonesian military forces invaded and occupied East Timor (Budiardjo and Liong 1984). Chomsky and Herman gave this case special attention.

Fretilin, the leading movement in East Timor, used arms to resist the occupation but, in the face of superior Indonesian forces, soon was forced to retreat to mountain areas. The armed struggle had a disastrous effect on the population through killings and starvation, with a significant proportion of the civilian population dying over the next decade.

In the late 1980s, Fretilin reconsidered its strategies, pulled back from armed attack and shifted to civilian resistance in urban areas (Fukuda 2000). The turning point was on 12 November 1991, when Indonesian troops opened fire on peaceful protesters in a funeral march in the capital Dili, just as they were entering Santa Cruz cemetery. The massacre was witnessed and recorded by western journalists. They managed to smuggle photos and videos out of the country. The story of the massacre galvanised the international support movement for East Timorese Independence, laying the groundwork for independence a decade later (Nevins 2005).

The Indonesian military's killing of hundreds of peaceful protesters in Dili did more for the independence movement than a decade of armed struggle. That is because the armed phase of the resistance was seen internationally as a struggle between two competing armed groups, despite the huge disproportion in their capabilities and in lives lost. The Dili massacre, on the other hand, aroused international condemnation precisely because, as a case of violence versus non-violence, it was seen as unjust.

The struggle in East Timor was a prelude to political change in Indonesia in 1998. Following the economic downturn of the Asian financial crisis, popular protest surged. When soldiers used force to crack down on student protesters, this only increased the level of protest. There was some rioting, but there was no armed challenge to the government. The popular pressure was enough

to cause Suharto to resign, and free elections followed (Aspinall et al 1999). Civil resistance was the key to transforming Indonesia from a “subfascist” client state to a society with a more vibrant and independent public sphere.

The Invasion of Iraq

In 2002, President George W Bush and other us political leaders began publicly preparing the ground for an invasion of Iraq. The reasons were complex and included Saddam Hussein’s defiance of us government demands, Iraqi oil and the strategic role of Iraq in west Asia. Bush, us Vice President Dick Cheney and others manipulated public opinion by falsely claiming that the Iraqi government possessed or was developing nuclear weapons and that Saddam Hussein was linked to Al Qaida and was responsible for the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Rampton and Stauber 2003).

In response to these war preparations, people around the world protested, including in massive demonstrations on 15 February 2003, with perhaps 10 million participants worldwide, the largest anti-war protest in history. Despite the massive opposition, the invasion proceeded the next month.

Many peace activists think that because the invasion went ahead, therefore they failed and protest was not enough. This perspective has an element of truth, but it misses something important: the protests put a serious constraint on us imperial designs and indeed were a major setback for us neo-liberal military visions for the future. It also misses that fact that, like with the Vietnam war and the anti-nuclear movements, it is official us

government policy to deny that demonstrations make any difference – though presidential memoirs and declassified documents prove that numbers are always counted and large demonstrations have always prevented greater warfare (Wittner 1993-2003).

The protests both triggered and reflected massive disillusionment with us plans for military conquest. Following the invasion, public support for us policy declined around the world (Pew Global Attitudes Project 2003).

It is important to remember that in 2003, the us government was still basking in international sympathy and support in the aftermath of 9/11: the us was seen as the victim of an outrageous attack. As a consequence, the October 2001 invasion of Afghanistan had widespread popular support, despite the fact that most of the 9/11 attackers were from Saudi Arabia and that the bombing of Afghanistan caused significant civilian casualties (Herold 2012).

If the invasion of Iraq had proceeded with little popular opposition, it is quite possible that Bush, Cheney and crew might have proceeded to further invasions, such as of Syria and Iran. Indeed, for years there has been a concerted effort to demonise the Iranian government and lay the groundwork for undermining it. The huge protests against the invasion of Iraq gave a taste of the likely response to further imperial adventures in west Asia.

Resistance to Colonialism in Puerto Rico

One of the earliest us acts of empire-building took place in 1898, at the end of the Spanish-American war, when us marines landed on the shores of San Juan, Puerto Rico to take

EPW Research Foundation (A UNIT OF SAMEEKSHA TRUST)

www.epwrf.in

www.epwrfits.in
India Time Series

Online Data Base Services: India Time Series

The EPW Research Foundation has introduced an online database service christened as the ‘India Time Series’, (www.epwrfits.in) as a part of the project funded by the **University Grants Commission (UGC)** and executed by the EPW-EPWRF and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

This service is for the benefit particularly of students, research scholars, professionals and the academic community, both in India and abroad. The service envisages dissemination of data in 13 modules displaying time series on a wide range of macro-economic and financial sector variables in a user friendly manner convenient for research and analytical work.

EPWRF has so far released twelve modules since early 2011-12: (i) Financial Markets; (ii) Banking Statistics; (iii) Domestic Product of States of India; (iv) Price Indices; (v) Agricultural Statistics; (vi) Power Sector; (vii) Industrial Production; (viii) Finances of State Governments; (ix) Combined Government Finances; (x) National Accounts Statistics; (xi) Annual Survey of Industries; and (xii) External Sector. Finances of Government of India module will be released soon.

The demo version can be accessed by free registration. The existing members already registered with us and accessing member services at www.epwrf.in will require no fresh registration. To gain full access, very affordable subscription rates are available on our website.

For any further details or clarifications, please contact :

The Director,
EPW Research Foundation,
C-212, Akurli Industrial Estate, Akurli Road, Kandivli (East), Mumbai- 400 101.
(phone: 91-22-2885 4995/4996) or mail: epwrf@vsnl.com

over this island territory which had just signed a treaty of autonomy with Spain less than six months earlier. Though acts of the us Congress ratified Puerto Rico as a part of the “mainland”, there was always resistance to us colonialism, often linked to anti-military mobilisation (Lopez 1999).

The Nationalist Party’s first major campaigns involved support for a successful strike by sugar cane workers in 1934 and a non-violent parade in 1937, fired upon by Puerto Rican police and members of the National Guard in what came to be known as the Ponce Massacre. Student strikes at the University of Puerto Rico and non-cooperation campaigns amongst the general population have met every major attempt of us corporate privatisation of Puerto Rican services or suggestion of increased imperial control, from the late 1960s to the current period (Nieves Falcón 2002). Since the United Nations Decolonisation Committee first recognised Puerto Rico as a non-self-governing territory in 1972, non-violent demonstrations involving the Puerto Rican population (including Puerto Ricans living in the us) have been a common feature of periodic calls for referendum, votes, and United Nations reviews – including several widespread anti-electoral stay-at-home efforts (FAE 1989; Torres and Velázquez 1998).

The struggle for an end to us Navy occupation and use of the Puerto Rican islands of Culebra (1939-1975) and Vieques (1941-2003) became symbolic of the larger struggle against colonialism and imperialism. From the human blockades staged by scores of displaced fishermen to permanent encampments built on land controlled by the navy, to massive occupation of the navy firing range, the decades of protest included some of the most creative uses of civilian resistance techniques. As a growing number of Puerto Ricans demonstrated willingness to put their bodies in the way of the bomb testing and navy operations, more intentional and intensified non-violence trainings were conducted. By 2003, the campaign had spanned across the entire spectrum of Puerto Rican social, religious, and political society (from left to right and beyond), and the us navy was forced into a complete withdrawal, amidst ongoing calls for us government clean-up and reparations.

The Vieques demilitarisation campaign won its demands shortly following and in the context of another anti-imperialist victory within the larger Puerto Rican movement. Widespread educational efforts and door-to-door organising characterised more than 10 years of work on behalf of 14 jailed Puerto Ricans widely recognised internationally as political prisoners. Despite the fact that the political prisoners were part of armed clandestine organisations growing out of the militancy of the 1970s – many of whom, upon capture in the early 1980s, declared themselves combatant prisoners of war – the movement for their freedom grew closer in form and ideology to non-violent campaigns as it developed. Well-planned civil disobedience actions in front of the White House and Pentagon throughout the 1990s drew on solidarity and collaboration with the War Resisters League and Catholic Worker movements, and educational efforts and study tours (held in conjunction with the Vieques campaign) were formulated with the assistance of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (1992). By

1999, a dozen Nobel recipients had signed on to the Call for Amnesty, including Coretta Scott King and Archbishop Desmond Tutu – both mentioned by president Clinton when he announced a clemency offer to many of the Puerto Rican prisoners later that same year.

The struggle for an end of us colonial rule over Puerto Rico is not yet complete. But the us government desires for unchecked economic exploitation matched with unlimited political containment and repression has not been possible; us military plans, using Puerto Rico as a base of aggression against the rest of Latin American, have been largely rolled back. With coordinated mass mobilisations across many decades and diverse issues, the Puerto Rican anti-imperial momentum has been carried forward utilising many tactics, the vast majority of which were unarmed. In addition, as the decolonisation movements have gained increasing strength reaching greater numbers of the Puerto Rican population, the explicit use of non-violent actions and strategies has grown. Moving from one victory to the next, many Puerto Rican leaders originally convinced of the necessity of armed struggle have now shifted emphasis, recognising the efficacy of non-violence against empire (Meyer 1999; WRI 2002).

The Not-Just Arab Spring

The government in Washington boasts it actively promotes democracy and freedom across the globe. But “democracy export” is only for “unfriendly” regimes. Little or no government support is offered for most opposition movements in “friendly” dictatorships like Chile (in the 1980s), Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Most western governments are ready to support democracy only when friendly or acceptable groups are voted into power; others are labelled “terrorists” even when they win free and fair elections, such as in Algeria in 1990 and Palestine in 2006 (Johansen 2011). Like the unarmed civilian resistance movement in Chile which forced out dictator Augusto Pinochet (installed after the Central Intelligence Agency-supported 1973 coup against democratically elected socialist President Salvador Allende), resistance to empire does not always deal blows directly against the us structures themselves, but against the puppets, clients, and allies of the us government who do its bidding in strategic regions.

This is part of the background to the so-called Arab Spring (Cook 2012; Gardner 2011; Sowers and Toensing 2012). In late 2010 and early 2011, when ordinary people in Western Sahara, Sudan, Somalia, Cameroon, Nigeria, Cote D’Ivoire, the Gambia, and most famously Tunisia and Egypt escalated demonstrations, strikes and vigils against their own governments, they were well aware that this was also against the elite in Washington, which for years had supported these regimes with money, military equipment, intelligence, and beneficial trade deals (Aswany 2011; Filiu 2011; Gardner 2011).

Western powers, and the us government especially, had long spoken about the “need for stability”, a code for supporting dictatorships. In 2009, the Obama administration pumped in \$1.7 billion as annual support to the Mubarak regime. As the anti-Mubarak protests gained increasing sympathy inside

Egypt and worldwide, elements within the us administration gradually moderated their support for the regime (Zunes 2012).

The origins of these uprisings were genuinely domestic and based on experiences from Arab history. It is no secret that academics and activists from western states, the us included, had contributed with non-violence trainings, making manuals available in Arabic, and giving seminars on non-violent strategies. But the claims from left and right of the political spectrum that these revolutions took place because of or based upon these trainings and seminars is an Eurocentric/Orientalist notion which implies no agency, consciousness, initiative or leadership on the parts of the Tunisians, Egyptians, and others involved.

Recruitment, mobilisation and organising were vital to the success of these movements. With modern means of communication they were able to get sufficient protesters together to make it hard for the state to ignore them. They had the patience, strength and courage to stay in the streets for weeks. The value of avoiding armed resistance, even when protesters were attacked with brutal force, was understood and followed so every act of violence from the police or military generated greater support for the opposition. After some time, quite dramatically, even parts of police and the military changed their loyalties for a time, and joined the opposition. The protesters were able to bring their countries to near standstills, forcing Washington policymakers to do an about-face and scramble for newly approved figureheads to help manage their neo-liberal agendas.

Conclusions

us military technology and training are so advanced that armed resistance is increasingly futile. Despite significant training, years of study and experience, and untold human, fiscal, and natural resources devoted to armed struggle, armed movements have been repeatedly unable to provide a sustained challenge to us military and economic power. For 70 years, communist states and insurgent armed movements did prove to be a powerful short-term challenge to world capitalism. By 1989 however, as eastern European communist governments collapsed in a process where people power played a major role (Randle 1991), how to best take on the centres of imperial power became a central strategic question.

To tackle an opponent on its strongest point is illogical at best; foco-ist attempts to inspire mass participation have met with less than enthusiastic response. Urban guerrillas stand as little chance of ongoing success against missiles, global surveillance, drones and soldiers prepared for battle with the latest training techniques as did cavalry making a charge against machine guns in the first world war. Furthermore, armed opposition provides an easy pretext for counter-attack, and often leads to increased militarism throughout society.

An alternative way to challenge us imperial might is through civil resistance: masses of people using a variety of techniques of protest, non-cooperation and intervention. The six case studies illustrate how popular unarmed resistance can help restrain arms races, challenge authoritarian client states, undermine the political capacity for military interventions and change political agendas. These case studies do not prove that us imperial power can be contained by unarmed resistance, but do give an indication that people power offers a potent challenge whose full capacity has yet to be fully developed.

Ideally, an alternative to imperialism should reflect, through its methods and processes, the goal to be achieved, namely, a more democratic, egalitarian, and just society, without domination and exploitation. Far more than armed struggle, popular unarmed resistance, with techniques such as rallies, occupations, boycotts and setting up parallel social institutions, enables widespread participation and internal democracy. Interestingly, civil resistance can be considered to be an unarmed version of guerrilla warfare (Boserup and Mack 1974). Rather than using arms, the challengers use a variety of other techniques that undermine the will and power of the opponent (Burrowes 1996).

The idea of revolution is often associated with armed uprising against a dominant power, but this is only one model. Civil resistance offers a different model of revolution, involving popular unarmed mobilisation and a more gradual process of undermining the legitimacy and operations of the prevailing system (Lakey 1985; Martin 1993). Armed struggle has been tried and repeatedly failed; it is time for an equivalent effort to be directed towards non-violent approaches. It is time now for people power to be used against the us imperial project.

REFERENCES

- Abrahms, Max (2006): "Why Terrorism Does Not Work", *International Security*, 31(2): 42-78.
- Alperovitz, Gar (1966): *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam, the Use of the Atomic Bomb and the American Confrontation with Soviet Power* (London: Secker and Warburg).
- Aspinall, Edward, Herb Feith and Gerry van Klinken, ed. (1999): *The Last Days of President Suharto* (Melbourne: Monash Asia Institute, Monash University).
- Aswany, Alaa Al (2011): *On the State of Egypt: What Caused the Revolution* (Edinburgh: Canongate).
- Auger, Vincent A (1996): *The Dynamics of Foreign Policy Analysis: The Carter Administration and the Neutron Bomb* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield).
- Baskir, Lawrence M and William A Strauss (1978): *Chance and Circumstance: The Draft, the War, and the Vietnam Generation* (New York: Knopf).
- Blum, William (1995): *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions since World War II* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press).
- (2000): *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press).
- Boserup, Anders and Andrew Mack (1974): *War without Weapons: Non-violence in National Defense* (London: Frances Pinter).
- Buchheit, Paul, ed. (2008): *American Wars: Illusions and Realities* (Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press).
- Budiardjo, Carmel and Liem Soei Liong (1984): *The War against East Timor* (London: Zed Books).
- Bunn, Matthew (2007): "Proliferation Resistance (and Terror Resistance) of Nuclear Energy Systems", Managing the Atom Project, Harvard University, http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/bunn_proliferation_resistance_lecture.pdf
- Burr, William and Jeffrey Kimball, ed. (2006): "Nixon White House Considered Nuclear Options against North Vietnam, Declassified Documents Reveal: Nuclear Weapons, the Vietnam War, and the 'Nuclear Taboo'", National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No 195, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB195/index.htm>
- Burrowes, Robert J (1996): *The Strategy of Non-violent Defense: A Gandhian Approach* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press).
- Chenoweth, Erica and Maria J Stephan (2011): *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Action* (New York: Columbia University Press).

- Chomsky, Noam and Edward S Herman (1979): *The Political Economy of Human Rights*, 2 Volumes (Montreal: Black Rose Books).
- Cook, Steven A (2012): *The Struggle for Egypt: From Nasser to Tahrir Square* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Cooney, Robert and Helen Michalowski, ed. (1977): *The Power of the People: Active Nonviolence in the United States* (Culver City, CA: The Power of the People Publishing Project).
- Cribb, Robert, ed. (1990): *The Indonesian Killings 1965-1966* (Melbourne: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University).
- DeBenedetti, Charles and Charles Chatfield (1990): *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press).
- Dellinger, Dave (1975): *More Power Than We Know: The People's Movement towards Democracy* (New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books).
- Ely, Mike (2009): "Focoism vs Peoples War: Problems of Exaggerated Universality", Kasama Project, <http://kasamaproject.org/2009/10/14/focoism-vs-peoples-war-problems-of-exaggerated-universality>
- Epstein, Barbara (1993): *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press).
- Ferguson, Niall (2004): *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin).
- Filiu, Jean Pierre (2011): *The Arab Revolution: Ten Lessons from the Democratic Uprising* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Fellowship of Reconciliation Task Force on Latin America and the Caribbean (1992): *Puerto Rico: The Cost of Colonialism* (Nyack, NY: Fellowship of Reconciliation).
- Frente Anti-Electoral-FAE (1989): *El Boicot al Plebiscito y el Problema de la Democracia* (San Juan: Trinchera – FAE), año 1, núm. 2.
- Fukuda, Chisako M (2000): "Peace through Non-violent Action: The East Timorese Resistance Movement's Strategy for Engagement", *Pacifica Review*, 12 (February): 17-31.
- Gardner, Lloyd C (2011): *The Road to Tahrir Square: Egypt and the United States from the Rise of Nasser to the Fall of Mubarak* (New York: New Press).
- Gelderloos, Peter (2007): *How Nonviolence Protects the State* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press).
- Gilbert, David (2012): *Love and Struggle: My Life in SDS, the Weather Underground, and Beyond* (San Francisco: PM Press).
- Grossman, Dave (1995): *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown).
- Hall, Simon (2012): *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement* (New York: Routledge).
- Herngren, Per (1993): *Path of Resistance: The Practice of Civil Disobedience* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers).
- Herold, Marc (2012): "The Obama/Pentagon War Narrative, the Real War and Where Afghan Civilian Deaths Do Matter", *Revista de Paz y Conflictos*, 5: 44-65.
- Hobsbawm, Eric (2009): *On Empire: America, War, and Global Supremacy* (New York: Pantheon).
- Hopkins, Sarah (1984): *Greenham Common: Women at the Wire* (London: Women's Press).
- Howes, Dustin E (2010): *Towards a Credible Pacifism: Violence and the Possibilities of Politics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press).
- Howlett, Charles F and Robbie Lieberman (2008): *A History of the American Peace Movement: From Colonial Times to the Present* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press).
- Hunt, Andrew E (1999): *The Turning: A History of Vietnam Veterans against the War* (New York: New York University Press).
- Jawara, Fatoumata and Aileen Kwa (2003): *Behind the Scenes at the WTO: The Real World of International Trade Negotiations* (London: Zed).
- Johansen, Jørgen (2011): "Supporting Revolutions", *Independent World Report*, 6: 6-8; <http://www.independentworldreport.com/2011/04/supporting-revolutions/>
- Johnstad, Petter Grahl (2010): "Nonviolent Democratization: A Sensitivity Analysis of How Transition Mode and Violence Impact the Durability of Democracy", *Peace and Change*, 35(3), July: 464-82.
- Joseph, Paul (1981): *Cracks in the Empire: State Politics in the Vietnam War* (Boston: South End Press).
- Karatnyck, Adrian and Peter Ackerman (2005): *How Freedom Is Won: From Civic Resistance to Durable Democracy* (New York: Freedom House).
- Kauzlarich, David and Ronald C Kramer (1998): *Crimes of the American Nuclear State: At Home and Abroad* (Boston: Northeastern University Press).
- Klein, Naomi (2001): *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs* (London: Flamingo).
- (2007): *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books).
- Lakey, George (1985): *Powerful Peacemaking: A Strategy for a Living Revolution* (Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers).
- Lopez, Alfredo (1999): *Doña Licha's Island: Modern Colonialism in Puerto Rico* (Boston: South End Press).
- Lynd, Staughton (1966): *Nonviolence in America: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill).
- Martin, Brian (1993): *Social Defence, Social Change* (London: Freedom Press).
- (2007): *Justice Ignited: The Dynamics of Backfire* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield).
- (2008): "How Nonviolence Is Misrepresented", *Gandhi Marg*, 30(2), July-September: 235-57.
- McCaffrey, Katherine T (2002): *Military Power and Popular Protest: The US Navy in Vieques, Puerto Rico* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press).
- Meyer, Matt (1999): "The Ones Left Behind", *The Broken Rifle*, 44, December (London: War Resisters' International), <http://wri-irg.org/node/2032>
- (2008): "Negating Nonviolence: A Review Essay", *WIN Magazine*, Winter.
- (2012): "Liberation Myths: Resistance Strategies in Mozambique's Independence Struggle" in Maciej Bartkowski (ed.), *Rediscovering Non-violent History: Civil Resistance in Liberation Struggles and Nation-Making* (in press).
- Meyers, William (2000): *Nonviolence and Its Violent Consequences* (Gualala, CA: III Publishing), <http://www.iiipublishing.com/nonviolence.pdf>
- Ne vins, Joseph (2005): *A Not-So-Distant Horror: Mass Violence in East Timor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).
- Nieves Falcón, Luis (2002): *Violación de los Derechos Humanos en Puerto Rico por los Estados Unidos* (San Juan: Ediciones Puerto).
- Pew Global Attitudes Project (2003): *Views of a Changing World* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press), June.
- Rampton, Sheldon and John Stauber (2003): *Weapons of Mass Deception: The Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq* (New York: Tarcher/Penguin).
- Randle, Michael (1991): *People Power: The Building of a New European Home* (Stroud, UK: Hawthorn).
- Schell, Jonathan (2007): "The Spirit of June 12", *The Nation*, 2 July.
- Shapiro, Andrew O and John M Striker (1970): *Mastering the Draft: a Comprehensive Guide for Solving Draft Problems* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown).
- Sharp, Gene (1973): *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent).
- Sheehan, Joanne and Eric Bachman (2009): "Seabrook-Wyhl-Marcokolsheim: Transnational Links in a Chain of Campaigns" in Howard Clark et al (ed.), *Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns* (London: War Resisters' International), pp 96-98.
- Sowers, Jeannie Lynn and Christopher J Toensing (2012): *The Journey to Tahrir: Revolution, Protest, and Social Change in Egypt, 1999-2011* (London: Verso).
- Stephan, Maria J and Erica Chenoweth (2008): "Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Action", *International Security*, 33(1): 7-44.
- Todd, Emmanuel (2003): *After the Empire: The Breakdown of the American Order*, translated from the French by C. Jon Delogu (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Torres, Andrés and José E Velázquez, ed. (1998): *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press).
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (2003): *The Decline of American Power: The US in a Chaotic World* (New York: New Press).
- Wittner, Lawrence S (1993-2003): *The Struggle against the Bomb*, 3 Volumes (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).
- (2009): *Confronting the Bomb: A Short History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).
- WRI Triennial Reports (2002): "Grassroots Efforts and Nonviolent Strategies", *The Broken Rifle*, 57, December (London: War Resisters' International), <http://wri-irg.org/es/node/2457>
- Zunes, Stephen (2012): "The United States and Pro-Democracy Revolutions in the Middle East" in Charles Webel and Jørgen Johansen (ed.), *Peace and Conflict Studies: A Reader* (London: Routledge), pp 227-33.

Permission for Reproduction of Articles Published in EPW

No article published in EPW or part thereof should be reproduced in any form without prior permission of the author(s).

A soft/hard copy of the author(s)'s approval should be sent to EPW.

In cases where the email address of the author has not been published along with the articles, EPW can be contacted for help.