

Civilian Defense – from Discussion to Action?

NILS PETTER GLEDITCH

International Peace Research Institute, Oslo

An examination of the discussion of non-military defense (or nonviolent defense or civilian defense) over the years might make one very pessimistic about mankind's rate of progress. This pessimism finds its best expression in Adam Roberts' contribution to this issue. In the twenty years or so of serious, concrete discussion of nonviolent defense alternatives, very little headway has been made. Governments have commissioned studies – but none have proceeded to the stage of implementation. Discussion in the nonviolent movement has centered around the same concepts, the same fragments of theory, and even the same case studies – with the one important addition of the resistance in Czechoslovakia ten years ago. Perhaps, as Roberts argues, the proponents of nonviolent methods have not analyzed in sufficient depth what they mean themselves – so how can they expect to convince others? Perhaps some of the assumptions were wrong? Perhaps peacetime defense structures are so rigid that they are almost impossible to change 'in conditions of near stability'.

On the other hand, nonviolence is all around us. As Hylke Tromp points out, most conflicts are in fact solved without violence. In some societies, nonviolent means of conflict resolution are so well established that it is the occasional outbreak of violence that stands out as deviant. In many industrialized countries, the labor movement and its counterpart have learned to act out their conflicts of interest in a complex web of norms and institutions. The occasional scuffle between worker and

strike-breaker, between police and picket-line, are but ripples on a vast surface. In families, schools, neighborhoods, and organizations, groups and individuals learn to avoid violence while not sacrificing their rights. Even at the international level, a case can be made for the growth of non-violence. True, according to some indicators, war has been on the increase over the past century. But non-warlike transactions have increased in far greater quantity. A supranational infrastructure not known to any previous generation engages in daily conflict-solving between nations through legal means, bargaining, and other mostly nonviolent activities. All this is a non-violence without the drama of a fast, a sit-down in front of a tank, or a mass vigil. But all this activity is essential to make societies function without engaging in self-destructive activities.

It is true that no country has proclaimed a nonviolent national defense. No country has even been prepared to form a non-violent branch of its defense forces. At the same time, as Håkan Wiberg notes, 'one may find a number of measures occurring in handbooks on civilian defense techniques in various sectors of total defense planning'. In the Scandinavian countries, for instance, the necessity of strong military preparedness is not the only lesson learned from the German invasion of Denmark and Norway in April 1940. Another, less heralded lesson is the necessity of civilian planning for resistance against occupation. Quisling's bizarre coup d'état in Norway in April 1940 conducted under the German umbrella but with-

out arms and with the full cooperation of the Norwegian state broadcasting system, could not be repeated today regardless of the military strength of an invader. Military invasion may reduce a country to ruins, but civil administration and private organizations will not necessarily collapse in total confusion when faced with military superiority.

Unfortunately, in countries which have made preparations for civilian resistance to occupation, these preparations have been conducted like traditional military pursuits and surrounded with appropriate military secrecy. The creative energy of the non-violent movement is not tapped. The enormous potential of widespread popular resistance is not mobilized because, it is felt, only the leaders can be trusted to know how the people are to defend themselves. No systematic training in civilian resistance is given at the grass-roots level. Nevertheless the seed has been sown and may take root. But perhaps we shall need another European-Atlantic war in order fully to learn the lesson.

The recent debate about the neutron war-head points to the increasing dissatisfaction among the military with many of their traditional, and rather indiscriminate weapons. Not knowing where else to turn, they attempt to develop more specialized weapons, nuclear and conventional, to meet the needs of particular challenges. In Galtung's paper (interestingly, also the oldest paper summarized for this special issue) nerve gases and neutron bombs are mentioned as 'ideal weapons' for the defense of *territory*: such weapons kill or paralyze human beings without destroying the basis of the defense effort. Correspondingly, the specialization of means of 'warfare' points to local home guards and nonviolent defense as ideally suited to defend a population's life-style, even after territorial defeat. One wonders if military and civilian war planners may not have seen a glimpse of this in some of their planning for 'civilian preparedness' – although no doubt they would hotly deny that the nonviolent movement could have provided part of the inspiration for such an idea.