
NONVIOLENT DETERRENCE

Brian Martin

The Western Alliance model for deterrence theory is based on nuclear deterrence. The usual picture is that nuclear attack is deterred by the threat of nuclear retaliation. But this cannot be the whole picture. After all, there are lots of countries which do not have nuclear weapons, are not in a nuclear alliance and are not attacked. How, then, would countries such as Peru, Burma, Switzerland or Mali, or more recently New Zealand, ever escape being attacked by nuclear weapons? One answer is that there would be probably little to be gained by such an attack. Why not? An incredibly important factor is the world outrage that would be turned against the attacker.

World outrage, hostile public opinion, political and economic backlash: these are different facets of a deterrence factor that is decidedly nonviolent. It is grounded less in the threat of violence than in moral concerns. Why has this factor been downplayed so much in standard deterrence theory? One reason is that deterrence theory is modelled on individual psychology: countries are treated as if they are single individuals who feel hostility, sympathy, fear or outrage as unified emotions. In reality, of course, countries are not unified. One of the greatest threats to any government is internal opposition. The massive use of force against an unarmed or weakly armed opponent is likely to trigger this opposition.

Apparent weakness or defencelessness, paradoxically, can be a source of security. Babies are not murdered very often, even though they are unable to offer any physical defence. If aggression is innate in humans, as claimed by some ethologists, murdering babies should be commonplace. Yet in most cultures it is seen as the height of cruelty and irresponsibility. The reason is precisely that babies have no capacity for physical defence: they are both innocent and incapable of major physical aggression.

Contrast this with the shooting and killing of a person armed with lethal weapons. The outrage is much less and, indeed, many will think the person deserved it. Deterrence is a self-fulfilling prophecy: the capacity to inflict violence generates the threat which makes it necessary. To achieve nonviolent deterrence at the international level, these basic ideas need to be developed much further, building on what already occurs in practice. Before dealing with nonviolent deterrence, some background on social defence is useful.

SOCIAL DEFENCE

Social defence is an alternative to military defence. It is based on nonviolent methods such as rallies, strikes, boycotts, nonviolent sabotage and a range of other methods.¹ No country has yet introduced social defence. So the precise ways

in which it would operate remain to be developed and tested. As a substitute, some historical examples are considered.

In 1923, the French and Belgian governments occupied the Ruhr. The German government, unable to offer military resistance, encouraged various forms of nonviolent resistance, mainly systematic noncooperation by industrial workers, civil servants, employers and many others. The severe repression by the occupiers turned out to be politically expensive and they eventually withdrew.

In August 1968, military forces from the Soviet Union and other eastern bloc countries invaded Czechoslovakia in order to crush the reform movement there. No military resistance was offered. Instead, a spontaneous nonviolent resistance developed. This included protests, attempts to win over Soviet soldiers, disruption of Soviet movements on trains and convening of the Czechoslovak Community Party Congress in defiance of the invaders. The Soviet government had hoped to install a puppet government in Czechoslovakia in a few days or weeks, but this was not achieved for eight months.

These two examples are suggestive of the power of nonviolent action, but neither is really an example of a well-developed social defence. Such a defence would involve:

- * training the population in a variety of nonviolent techniques
- * preparing communication channels which cannot be easily disrupted or taken over;
- * preparing arguments, leaflets, messages and foreign-language speaking abilities in order to win over enemy soldiers;
- * designing industrial processes so they can be shut down by workers if desired;
- * developing local self-reliance in food, energy and transport (for example using local gardens, passive solar design and bicycles) so that it is harder to force the population to submit;
- * sharpening skills in computer programming, electronic communication and operation of machinery so that enemy materiel and communications can be disrupted in nonviolent ways;
- * developing and practising methods of decision-making in an emergency, in order to respond to different types of threats.

Social defence developed along these lines would make a population difficult to conquer and also would reduce the point of any attack in the first place. Because the population could disable major industry, the economic gain from a takeover would be minimised. The resistance could persist because of self-reliance in food and basic goods.

Most importantly, the continuing attempts to win over enemy troops would pose a political threat to the invading government. This is what happened in Czechoslovakia: Soviet troops had to be rotated out of Czechoslovakia in a matter of days and troops from the far east (whose language was not known to Czechoslovaks) brought in. The reason why the troops became unreliable (for the

Soviet government) is simple. They had been told they were in Czechoslovakia to prevent a return to capitalism. When they found out the truth, they became sympathetic to the resistance.²

Social defence is fundamentally different from military defence in several ways. The most obvious is reliance only on nonviolent methods. A consequence of this is the lack of any offensive capacity, at least in the sense of threatening the lives of other people. Nonviolent attack, as discussed later, is possible.

An important feature of social defence is the potential involvement of the whole population in the resistance. Military defence normally is something carried out by professionals, usually young, able-bodied men. In social defence everyone, including women, children and the aged, can participate. This might be by posting up slogans, joining rallies, distributing food and clothing, or passing messages by hand or telephone. A consequence of widespread participation in social defence is that it can only work when there is widespread support for the resistance. Military attack can and does occur when only political or military leaders support it; social defence without popular support will inevitably fail. One other consequence of using nonviolent methods is that the loss of life is likely to be much smaller. People can still die, because the aggressors are not committed to nonviolence. But nonviolence tends to reduce the intensity of violence from the other side. Liberation struggles carried out nonviolently, as in India and Iran, generally have had a much lower loss of life than those using guerrilla warfare, as in Algeria and China.

One of the blind spots in standard deterrence theory is the military coup. Military strength developed to defend and deter can readily be used against a country's own population. Standard military methods are the source of this problem, not the solution. Hence the whole issue is usually ignored. Social defence, by contrast, provides an ideal way to deter and resist military coups. The range of nonviolent methods that can be used against an invading enemy can just as easily be used against indigenous usurpers.

Some of the most revealing historical examples of nonviolent action are against coups. The Kapp Putsch in Germany in 1920 was quickly toppled by a general strike and widespread refusal of the population to obey the coup leaders. In 1961, a revolt by Algerian generals threatened to lead to an invasion of France. Widespread popular resistance, including blocking of airport runways and recalcitrance by many soldiers in Algeria (who simply stayed in their barracks) quickly quelled the uprising. In 1981 a coup attempt in Spain was aborted in the face of popular opposition and an appeal by the King.

Even without prior preparation, nonviolent methods have often been effective against military coups and occasionally against invasions. With extensive preparation, it might be expected that social defence would be far more effective. After all, no one today expects a spontaneous violent resistance to win against a well-trained and equipped army. A fair comparison of nonviolent and violent methods would require similar fractions of time and national income to be devoted to the approach and

also similar transformations of popular thinking and social structures. At the moment, violent methods have monopolised thinking and have shaped policies on industry, transport and foreign affairs. Until nonviolent approaches have had a chance to shape societies to a similar degree, they should not be dismissed as ineffective.

Arguably, nonviolent resistance has already shown a considerable deterrent value. The resistance in Czechoslovakia failed, in the end, to thwart the immediate aims of the Soviet rulers. But the political fallout far outweighed the short-term benefits to the Soviet leadership. Outrage over the invasion (aided by the lack of violence by the resistance) split communist parties around the world and severely weakened the influence of the Soviet Communist Party over the world communist movement. In Poland in 1981, Solidarity pushed reform much further than in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Yet there was no Soviet invasion. The experience of 1968, and the obvious capacity of the Polish workers for nonviolent resistance (apparent throughout the 1980s), suggests that any overt foreign intervention would have been highly counterproductive.

SOCIAL ATTACK

Despite the de facto deterrent effect of nonviolent resistance, there has been relatively little attention given to deterrence by students of social defence. The main focus has been on resisting an attack. Indeed, there has almost been an assumption that the resistance only begins after the invaders have arrived. What is needed is a full theory and practice of nonviolent "attack". This means a capacity to carry nonviolent struggle to the home ground of a potential or actual aggressor.

As mentioned before, one of the blind spots of standard deterrence theory is the potential existence of internal opposition to a government. A rigid focus on social defence as pure defence continues this blindness. A focus on social attack overcomes it. With social attack, the main aim is to mobilise sympathy and support from people in countries other than where the aggression is taking place, especially people living in the aggressor country. Communications with these people can occur by telephone, computer connections, personal visits, mail or shortwave radio. Significantly, external communications are often cut off after coups or invasions, as in the invasion of East Timor by Indonesian forces in 1975, the coup in Poland in 1981 and the coup in Fiji in 1987. A pre-planned system of communications would be hard to interrupt. In particular, widespread use of short-wave radios would make it almost impossible to cut off all communications.

In addition to the mere existence of communication channels, there would need to be well-thought out and rehearsed strategies for explaining events, mobilising support in an effective way and coordinating action. People in other countries could help by persuading others, holding public meetings and initiating boycotts, strikes and bans on handling certain goods.

Nonviolent methods have been used in the case of many coups and invasions in other countries. For example, effective action against the coups in Fiji in 1987 was taken by citizen groups and

trade unions outside Fiji.³ But usually there has been little coordination of such foreign action to support planned and sustained programmes of nonviolent resistance at home. The combination of social defence and social attack would amount to a formidable capacity for nonviolent deterrence.

One common objection to nonviolent methods is that they will not work against a ruthless opponent such as Hitler or Stalin. This objection remains to be proved. There was some nonviolent resistance to Hitler and Stalin, and some of it was successful. More important, however, was the lack of any resistance, most significantly by other governments which had the resources to try to undermine these regimes. Against a ruthless regime, some nonviolent methods become less appropriate and others more appropriate. Simply lining up to be shot is inappropriate. More effective are subtle forms of seeming cooperation involving poor work, making 'mistakes' and 'losing things'. The parable of the Good Soldier Schweik, who seemed to try his best and invariably messed everything up, is relevant here.⁴

Absolutely vital to any ruthless regime is the loyalty of the subjects. Contrary to popular opinion, the Nazis did not have full support. The failure of the Allies to recognise or use the opposition to Hitler reflects their orientation to military rather than nonviolent methods.⁵

CONCLUSION

Nonviolent methods have been used in struggles for many hundreds of years. Military theory has long been captured by the idea that the only response to violence is violence. The modern version of this one-dimensional view of the world is deterrence theory.

It is only in the past few decades that more than a handful of people have started reinterpreting social dynamics using concepts of nonviolent struggle. A definitive account is Gene Sharp's mammoth The Politics of Nonviolent Action.⁶ Amazingly, there is not a single remotely comparable volume which argues the case for violent methods.

Violence has largely been exempted from critical scrutiny, presumably because dominant social structures have been backed up by violence. A study of the dynamics of nonviolent action quickly reveals basic flaws in deterrence theory and also provides an alternative approach. So far the development of social defence and social attack has been limited. They have been systematically developed in the writings of theorists but only sporadically applied in practical circumstances. More study of nonviolent methods will be helpful, but most important is more day-to-day action and experience.

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