

Book Reviews

Robert Burrowes, *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defence: A Gandhian Approach*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 1996, pp. 367

Military establishments spend a vast amount of effort preparing to resist or wage aggression. They provide supplies of all sorts to their forces, ensure that industry has the capacity to produce military and related goods, and invest in powerful weapons systems to provide a technological edge. All this contributes to military strategy, commonly called "defence strategy."

But defence can also be based on nonviolent means. Compared to military preparations and investments, the amount of effort devoted to nonviolent defence is almost non-existent. There have been numerous nonviolent actions, some of them quite spectacular, such as the Czechoslovak resistance to the Soviet invasion in 1968, the toppling of the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines in 1986, the Palestinian intifada in 1987-1993, and the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989. But these uses of nonviolence were largely spontaneous. Unlike military operations, most nonviolent actions so far have involved relatively little planning of operations, logistics, social infrastructure, and technology. Perhaps this is only to be expected, given that the idea of nonviolent defence is fairly new and given the fact that the practice of nonviolence receives little funding.

Robert Burrowes' book, *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defence: A Gandhian Approach*, is a major contribution to the field. It presents a closely argued and highly principled perspective. Robert's book canvasses a wide range of ideas, beginning with a critique of classical ideas about strategy and culminating in several chapters laying out the strategy of nonviolent defence. The central message of the book is encapsulated in a table on page 209. It states that the political purpose of nonviolent defence is "to create the policy, process, structural, and systemic conditions that will satisfy human needs." This is the general framework. Within this, there are two strategic aims, one each for the defence and for the counter-offensive. For defence, the strategic aim is "to consolidate the power and will of the defending population to resist the aggression." This includes mobilisation of "key social groups" including workers' organisations, women's groups, religious bodies, and ethnic communities. Robert traces the consequences of his general framework through a range of areas, including the time frame of the struggle, communication with the opponent, selection of

nonviolent tactics, secrecy, sabotage, maintaining nonviolent discipline, and making defenders less vulnerable in the face of an extremely ruthless opponent.

Parallel to the strategic aim of defence is the strategic aim of the counter-offensive, namely "to 'alter' the will of the opponent elite to conduct the aggression and to 'undermine' their power to do so." This has three components. First is altering the will of the troops of the opponent elite. In the case of the Palestinian intifada, this would mean winning over Israeli troops or at least weakening their commitment to serve the repression. Throwing rocks at them is less likely to achieve this than engaging them in a dialogue and demonstrating Palestinian commitment. The second component is altering "the will of key social groups who support the opponent elite's act of aggression." For the intifada to be effective, it was necessary to undermine support within Israel for the Israeli occupation. The third component is altering the will of allies of the opponent elite. For the intifada, this means challenging the support given to Israel by the US government.

The author's formulations of the political purpose and strategic aims of nonviolent defence are built on some important theoretical innovations. The strategic aims deal with both power and will, of the defending population and the opponent elite. This is no trivial matter. Only a few authors have dealt seriously with strategy for nonviolent defence. This is why Robert's work occupies a unique position in the literature on this subject.

The author's formulation has two components: will and power. This can be most easily understood in relation to the counter-offensive. One component of this is altering the commitment of opponent troops to their assigned tasks. If their commitment or "will" can be altered, then the opponent cannot succeed, except by bringing in other troops. But even if the troops remain committed to their tasks, they can be nonviolently coerced. This is the factor of "power." For example, in the 1986 "people's power" revolution in the Philippines, some soldiers were won over to the resistance by talking with people opposed to the dictatorship—undermining their will—whereas others were primarily influenced by the massive demonstration—undermining their power.

Another important theoretical innovation concerns the idea of "human needs." It is built into the statement of the political purpose of nonviolent defence: "to create the policy, process, structural, and systemic conditions that will satisfy human needs." Robert cites a number of theorists to argue that these needs may be modified by socialisation but cannot be eradicated. Denial of fundamental human needs leads to social pathologies, including aggression and repression. Therefore conflict is not inevitable, but is the outcome of inappropriate social structures that obstruct the satisfaction of human needs.

Compared to other works dealing with the subject, *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defence* is distinctive in its sustained Gandhian approach. The most common approach in the field relies on a pragmatic conception of nonviolence, namely that nonviolent methods are more effective than violent methods. The Gandhian approach has been presented before us many times, not least by Gandhi himself, but they have been seldom applied to the strategic problems of defence. Gandhi's approach included personal nonviolence as a way of life, constructive work, and the use of nonviolence against direct and structural violence. His approach to conflict included a belief that means cannot be separated from ends (good goals do not justify bad methods), a belief in the unity of all life, and a willingness to suffer for one's beliefs.

Approaches to nonviolence can be divided along two axes: "principled versus pragmatic" and "revolutionary versus reformist." Gandhi's nonviolence was principled and revolutionary. Many other writers on nonviolent defence, such as Gene Sharp, are better described as pragmatic and reformist. They justify nonviolence on the basis of its consequences—the pragmatic approach—and they see nonviolent defence primarily as a way to defend society as it exists—the reformist approach. Robert strongly criticises non-Gandhian approaches. He criticises Sharp's approach of civilian-based defence for being based on a faulty strategic theory (the indirect approach of B.H. Liddell-Hart, subject of a critique earlier in the book), for relying on a conception of a society oriented to elites, and for failing to focus on satisfying human needs.

Robert's approach is principled and revolutionary, and perhaps his sort of principled nonviolence is inevitably revolutionary. Although the title of the book uses the word "defence," this is not national defence the way most people think of it. It is more akin to nonviolent revolution.

While distinguishing his position from non-Gandhian nonviolence theorists, the author of the book devotes plenty of space challenging arguments often advanced in favour of violence. His most caustic comment comes when he addresses the problem of severe repression. Thus he says: "It [violence] cannot resolve conflict or satisfy human needs. And whenever it has been used in the service of major political goals, it has led to suffering and death, often on a massive scale. Critics of nonviolence often overlook these points" (p. 239).

I have only tried to give just an idea of the thrust of the book because it is impossible in a review to give an outline of all its arguments.

The origins of the book in a doctoral thesis are apparent in its logical progression and surveys of the literature in the early chapters. These chapters cover areas that are intellectually important, such as Clausewitz's conceptions of strategy, and will be of interest to those who want to savour all the thinking that lies behind nonviolent defence strategy. The early chapters serve the purpose of clearing the intellectual ground, by

summarising important areas of thinking and showing their value and, common limitations for the purpose of developing a Gandhian approach to nonviolent defence. These chapters are written quite clearly. Nevertheless many readers may want to skip the preliminaries and go straight to the substance of the book. I found the later chapters more engaging partly because they are more practical and partly because they give more examples from nonviolent struggles such as Gandhi's campaigns, the intifada, the Chinese pro-democracy movement, and struggles in South Africa and Burma.

The Strategy of Nonviolent Defence is impressive in many ways but it does not answer all the questions. For example, when the author criticises the pragmatic and reformist approach to nonviolence, his argument seems to be that the pragmatic approach is less effective than the Gandhian approach, or that principled nonviolence is more effective in the long term. But Robert never clearly spells out any set of criteria for comparing the Gandhian and non-Gandhian approaches to nonviolence. Mostly he only gives abstract statements about Gandhi's approach.

Along the same lines, he also makes a distinction between the Gandhian view of the unity of ends and means and the non-Gandhian view that ends and means are separate. But is this distinction really so crisp? Surely, in most cases the means influence the ends but do not determine them. What are the conditions and implications of linkages between means and ends? As noted before, Robert's framework is built on human needs theory. This theory is certainly not accepted by all scholars, especially given the popularity of post-structuralism with its rejection or neglect of attempts to link human behaviour to biology. Although Robert has made human needs theory a central plank of his framework, I suspect that it would be possible to derive most of his conclusions using different assumptions about human nature. It would be undesirable to build such a comprehensive intellectual edifice that could be toppled by some new scientific findings concerning "human needs."

The human needs perspective begins to look shaky when it becomes necessary to talk of numerous "distorting" factors that obstruct satisfying the human needs of an opponent. For example, as Robert notes, members of the Israeli government may have a distorted view of their own needs due to propaganda, religion, ideology, role defence, culture, and their behaviour may be influenced by things such as non-rational emotions and perceptions that are distorted in various ways. If biological "needs" can be socially "distorted" in so many ways, then it may be more useful to focus on the social construction of needs. If some human needs are mainly or entirely socially constructed, Robert's strategic theory is still relevant. While attempting to alter the opponent's will by satisfying needs, another option would be to transform those needs or, in other words, to socially

construct them in a different fashion. This opens up a further terrain for nonviolent struggle.

The Strategy of Nonviolent Defence lays out the elements of a Gandhian approach to nonviolent strategy. For those who subscribe to a Gandhian approach and who are concerned about nonviolent defence, this is the place to develop one's understanding of strategy. But there is one important thing missing. The book says little about the practical task of building a movement to bring about nonviolent defence. It is more in the nature of an advanced text for leaders in a nonviolent defence system, who are concerned about planning, education, communication, and tactics. But at the moment there are relatively few groups around the world who are interested in nonviolent defence. How are they to build widespread support for it? How can they foster commitment to the nonviolent discipline that is necessary for success? In particular, how can activists get others to support nonviolent defence and a Gandhian perspective in particular?

The few pages of the conclusion to the book give some hints about making the change to nonviolent defence. Robert says an appeal to elites will not work and that a suitable approach will include local nonviolent campaigns, building of nonviolent communities, reflecting on and learning from experiences, nonviolence education, nonviolence networks, and personal change. But he elaborates only on personal change. There is little guidance for action at the level of groups.

This is not a criticism of this book, since it does not pretend to be a manual for building a nonviolent defence movement. It is perhaps not possible to write such a manual now either. Without knowing the social foundation for a nonviolent defence movement, it is difficult to say how it should proceed. This would be like writing about how to go about building a workers' movement or a feminist movement before these movements got going. It is perhaps not possible to write about nonviolent defence strategy because there have been major nonviolent struggles from which to draw insights. But there have not yet been major movements, even unsuccessful ones, to implement nonviolent defence, even though groups promoting nonviolent defence have been active in a number of countries.

So here is a substantial book giving guidance on how to run nonviolent defence against aggression, sitting on shelves and waiting to be read. Two things are needed to bring it off the shelves and into active use. The first is a major constituency for nonviolent defence, as just described. The second is more accessible, popular, easy-to-read, digestible treatments. Robert writes clearly but nevertheless many nonviolent activists will find the book heavy-going.

A good way to deal with this difficulty is for groups to read and discuss the book, relating it to their own experiences and plans. One section or chapter could be dealt with at a time, perhaps starting with later chapters. This approach to the book is quite compatible with its theme.

Strategic insights need to be collectively developed and applied. It is no use relying on one or two individuals to give directions on a campaign. A successful nonviolent defence must be built on widespread commitment, and this should include a practical grasp of strategy and the principles and reasoning behind it. Groups of activists are in the best position to "translate" theory into something that has popular appeal and meaning in people's lives. That is surely part of a Gandhian approach to nonviolent defence strategy.

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Rajen Harshé, *Twentieth-Century Imperialism: Shifting Contours and Changing Conceptions*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 276

Imperialism has been a significant dimension of world history since the advent of capitalism. There is no dearth of literature on the subject and yet it continues to be thought-provoking probably because of its elusive nature. Hence it is perfectly appropriate to argue that the conceptual package of imperialism loses its viability unless adapted to the rapidly changing global socio-economic and political milieu. In this sense, Rajen Harshé's *Twentieth-Century Imperialism* is most commendable for its endeavour to capture the phenomenon in its entirety. In fact, the subtitle of the book clearly directs our attention to the changing nature of imperialism by underlining the importance of grasping what he calls "the shifting contours and changing conceptions" of imperialism. Notwithstanding debates on the phenomenon itself, the scholars, irrespective of ideology, have always sought to identify the unique features of imperialism by relating it to the period and locations. Not only have these attempts enriched the analysis by highlighting the complexities of various kinds, they have also contributed immensely to the literature by incorporating new theories and arguments.

Divided into six substantial chapters, the book strives to provide "fresh perspectives and insights into the various phases and aspects of imperialism" (p. 11). Furthermore, the study is also geared to illustrate the explanatory potentials as well as limitations of the relevant theories and concepts. Hence each chapter has both theoretical and empirical content, though Chapter 1 (pp. 19-55) is completely devoted to a critique of the so-called "radical school." Epistemologically, the identifying marks of the radical school are slightly misleading since the author has not spelt out the distinctive features of this group of thinkers. It is not therefore clear how the ideas of Lenin, Mao, Hobson, and Nkrumah can possibly be discussed