The Ethics and “Realism” of Nonviolent Action

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Abstract and Keywords

Throughout human history, nonviolent social movements have pursued publicly claimed goals by exerting social, political, economic, psychological, and cultural forms of power against targeted groups or rulers. Voluntarily organizing campaigns that intentionally abstain from violence, or its threat, groups, and societies have pursued their aims through sustained collective action. Noncooperation—the withholding of obedience—is fundamental to such unarmed power, which seeks to obtain correctives when standard institutionalized political processes fail to redress grievances. Strategy and tactics are enacted through a large inventory of discrete nonviolent methods (such as boycotts, delegations, marches, vigils), sequentially applying pressure with ascending potency. Rather than favouring utopian thinking, theoreticians of civil resistance assume that political conflict cannot be eradicated. They also consider that the means determines the end—hence the importance of maintaining nonviolent discipline. During the past century, use of this technique of struggle has succeeded more often than violence.

Keywords: civil resistance, nonviolent resistance, nonviolent struggle, nonviolent movements, nonviolent methods, noncooperation, nonviolent sanctions

FORMS of protest and political pressure now classified as nonviolent action—for example boycotts, civil disobedience, fasting, public processions, rent refusal, strikes, and vigils—have been documented in numerous historical periods and varying cultural and social contexts. A recurring, arguably universal phenomenon, nonviolent struggle has occurred under all forms of social and political systems. No type of regime or government is invulnerable to the challenges of what is increasingly called civil resistance.

As an active method or technique used by civilians for achieving social and political change, while intentionally abstaining from direct physical force, military tactics, or the threat of violence, it can hold potential for benefiting both parties to a conflict, because it does not achieve its goals by wounding or harming the adversary, except in a political sense. Nonviolent struggles sometimes alter the relationships involved in the underlying

dispute; transformation of a conflict is one possible outcome, especially as actual resolution of conflicts is rare and elusive.

Contemporary nonviolent campaigns have better odds for transforming authoritarian domination than in the past, partly because of increasing diffusion of power centres in society and the ability of mass media to bring global attention to localized campaigns. These often occur in asymmetrical conflicts, where the power balance is lopsided (see Chapter 18).

Although nonviolent action has been associated with pacifism, and pacifists have long used the technique, pacifism is not a prerequisite. It has also been used effectively by adherents of nonviolent philosophies and principles. It can best be understood as a means of collective action used by people who are struggling for rights, seeking justice or an end to oppression, or a change in government, and who adopt nonviolent resistance as an effective strategy. Their choice is either because remaining nonviolent will have the most persuasive force and can mobilize a wide range of resisters, or because resort to armed violence is perceived as dangerous against a heavily armed opponent. As nonviolent action lacks inherent political ideology, individuals may view themselves as (p. 274) realists, take stands based on philosophical idealism, or be motivated by personal ethics, faiths, or beliefs, but equally are acting from pragmatism.

Nonviolent resistance functions outside prevailing institutionalized processes of politics, its campaigns tending to materialize when established political bodies have thwarted or refused to redress injustice, infringements, or denial of rights. This is especially true in a democratic or semi-democratic context. In other instances, resisters may be seeking support within parliaments or sections of government. Civil disobedience may carry protest or refusal to obey into the law courts.

The technique is also studied under contentious politics, which includes a continuum of action from violent to nonviolent. Some predominantly nonviolent movements involve borderline use of physical force, for example in occupying buildings. In large movements, nonviolent discipline can be difficult to maintain over time. Significant use of force can undermine the resistance strategy.

Today’s campaigns challenge a widespread view of structural or state-centred agency in determining political change, partly in their recognition of the function of autonomous human agency. Yet nonviolent struggles can fail, as in Burma (1988) and China (1989), leading to massive crackdowns in both countries. Although often ignored or underrated in political theory and international relations, civil resistance is centrally concerned with the origins of power.

Concept of Civil Resistance

Leo Tolstoy’s perception of a link between an ethical stance of nonviolence and the technique of nonviolent action was exceptional at the time. In quoting Éstienne de la Boétie,

who hypothesized in 1552 that any form of rule, no matter how tyrannical, is dependent on popular consent and could be withdrawn (Boétie 1552), Tolstoy influenced Gandhi’s comprehension of noncooperation, which is central to the theory and practice of civil resistance.

Dismayed by the term “passive resistance” favoured by English speakers, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in 1906 in South Africa devised *satyagraha*, denoting a relentless search for Truth and implying the end or aim, roughly meaning “nonviolent resistance.” Most terminology in the English-speaking world was coined by Gandhi—including “civil resistance,” “nonviolence” (used by scholars concerning beliefs rather than action), “nonviolent conflict,” “nonviolent sanctions,” and “nonviolent transformation of conflict.”

Gandhi also systematized an alternative to armed insurrections in South Africa (1896–1914), partly by studying newspapers from Bengal, China, England, Ireland, and Africa. Citing the 1905 Russian Revolution to fellow Indians to show that not even the czar could force people to work if they refused to cooperate, he directly challenged presuppositions about the origins of state power. In 1905 he writes, “even the most powerful cannot rule without the co-operation of the ruled” (Gandhi 1905: 8). He thus (p. 275) differentiated a grasp of power and consent theory that has become central for successor movements worldwide.

At Gandhi’s behest, in 1920 the Indian National Congress party adopted noncooperation as its policy for realizing independence. He sought unity on a noncooperation programme: “I admit at once that there is ‘a doubtful proportion of full believers’ in my ‘theory of non-violence’ [. . .] [F]or my movement I do not at all need believers in the theory of non-violence, full or imperfect. It is enough if people carry out the rules of non-violent action” (Gandhi 1957 [1944]: 138).

While profoundly believing in the necessity for human beings to avoid violence in managing what he regarded as an unavoidable human condition of conflict, he believed cowardice to be more abominable than violence—if the only action an individual could take against injustice was violent. This was because the basic choice for Gandhi was action versus inaction, for the reason that failure to act is unlikely to bring change (Mary King 2015: 247). Stressing appeals to the targeted group and seeking results through “conversion” (in hopes that the adversary would accept the nonviolent protagonists’ viewpoint), Gandhi’s voluminous works reveal both contradictions and his pondering of compelling justice through the pressure of public opinion. His national all-India civil disobedience movements in 1920–2, 1930–4 (excepting portions of 1931), and in 1940–2 involved tangible disruption and obstruction.

Of the weaknesses in Gandhi’s standpoint, the most misguided was his belief that if *satyagraha* failed it was because its practitioners had been insufficiently disciplined, even when social realities had prevailed. His notion that the self-suffering of the nonviolent challengers would “melt even the stoniest heart” is a dangerous tenet (Mary King 2015:

297). Conversion is rarely achieved. Disproportionate emphasis on it could result in accepting appalling circumstances because the opponent has not yet been converted.

Martin Luther King, Jr cannot be comprehended apart from his intellectual journey in studying Gandhian civil resistance. Moreover, the movements in the southern United States between the 1955–6 Montgomery bus boycott and passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act manifested Gandhi's theories on nonviolent discipline, moral legitimacy, openness with authorities, pursuit of consequential social justice, and self-reliance. Sudarshan Kapur shows how four decades of 12,000-mile voyages undertaken to India (1919–55) by African American leaders, some of whom met with Gandhi, generated transactional sharing of knowledge (Kapur 1992). Avidly covered in black-owned US newspapers, these interactions are characteristic of a pattern in which movements learn from other mobilizations. Upon their return, the travellers brought to black-led and other institutions selected Gandhian theories that held promise.

King would not travel to India until 1959, but with the start of the Montgomery boycott he became the individual most responsible for interpreting the Gandhian repertoire and persuading black Americans of its efficacy, which was not a foregone conclusion. Lessons were imparted in nocturnal mass meetings in black churches, which also deliberated strategy and prepared for reprisals. King shows ethical-cum-strategic comprehension, as did Gandhi. His authority in interpreting "foreign" material for the biblical ethos of Southern black communities derived from the cultural and faith reserves that (p. 276) for three centuries had resided in black churches, beyond white control. Interpreting Gandhi's ideas into New Testament language familiar to his audience (and a wider American public), he made remote concepts fit accustomed values.

King's study of Gandhi included a 1939 book *War without Violence*—among the few direct sources available to interpret the Indian struggles for Western readers—that passed by hand among African American leaders. It was written by Krishnalal Shridharani, a Brahmin who walked with Gandhi on the 1930 Salt March, and later completed doctoral studies at Columbia University. King often adopted its phraseology verbatim, as in "The means should be the end in process and the ideal in the making" (Shridharani 1962: 281). Shridharani was among a number of Indians who lectured in the United States, bringing Gandhian theories directly into the consciousness of some black communities.

King differs from Gandhi in his primary (though by no means sole) focus on using nonviolent methods to change a repressive colonial system, whereas King sought recognition of constitutionally guaranteed rights for African Americans, including federal intervention against vigilantes and terror groups. Thus King importantly contributes to the strand of political theory that justifies coercive nonviolent action and civil disobedience within a democracy, in the tradition from Thoreau to Rawls. King in 1958 credits Gandhi with reconciling his ministry with political action. "[I]n theological school I thought the only way we could solve our problem of segregation was an armed revolt [. . .] Then I read [Gandhi, who] lifts love from individual relationships to the place of social transformation" (King, in Mary King 2002: 211). Historically, King can be criticized for his

inability to translate approaches from the South to northern cities, to address entrenched economic injustices.

Gene Sharp is the progenitor of nonviolent strategic action, sometimes considered a subfield. His 1973 three-volume *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (called the *Politics*, or the Trilogy) is the most important theoretical analysis since Gandhi. His extensive historical analysis and immersion in orthodox political and sociological theory establishes power as the basis of nonviolent resistance and a means of engagement in conflicts. The *Politics* signified a leap in the spread of knowledge on nonviolent struggle, which achieves its political objectives by altering power configurations among groups or persons. Sharp’s arrangement of 198 nonviolent methods into three fundamental categories—protest and persuasion, noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention—meant, because new methods continually develop, a virtually inexhaustible repertoire of actions became accessible to exert specific forms of power, applying ascending pressure.

Persuaded that nonviolent action demands shrewder strategy and tactics than military engagement, Sharp’s analysis of dynamics of struggle and ways to weaken the bulwarks upholding an opponent’s powers builds upon mechanisms of change analysed by theoretician-practitioner George Lakey (Lakey 1968). Accepting the scarcity of the first mechanism, *conversion*, Sharp identifies the second, *accommodation*, as most commonly experienced, occurring with nearly all labour strikes. In the third mechanism, *nonviolent coercion*, with increasing compression from arranged methods and large numbers of resisters permeating the social and political order, the adversary may (p. 277) remain in position but no longer control the situation—unless the challengers agree. Little happens without the resisters’ approval. When political defiance prompts collapse of a governing power, with no one left to surrender, the resulting mechanism is *nonviolent disintegration*, as in 2000 in Serbia, when Otpor! (Resistance!) left Slobodan Milošević with merely enough power to resign (Sharp 2005: 45–7).

Though definitively contrasting Gandhi and Sharp would be misleading, two genealogies may be nonetheless discerned. Sharp began with intensive study of Gandhi, and is strongly committed to nonviolent action despite overwhelmingly pragmatic emphases, especially in later works. A principled/pragmatic dichotomy would be overly reductionist, yet to a degree has some validity because, unlike Gandhi and King, Sharp does not base himself ultimately on religious principles. Differentiation between activist and scholarly descents has some authenticity, albeit veering toward over-simplification, because Sharp advocates civil resistance in specific contexts and consultations with leaders. Having set out to provide a systematic and academically sound theory, grounded in history, and related to Western sociological and political theory, and although later scholars of nonviolent struggle continue to depend on Gandhi, in academic studies Sharp has become the main starting point.

Sharp’s six decades of scholarship illuminate the possibility that civil resistance might over time substantially replace deadly conflict, if organized for specific purposes and practised with study, preparation, and strategic analysis. Weighing civil resistance as an

alternative to armed force, while maintaining the validity of policing and defence, Adam Roberts acknowledges “progressive substitution” as an option and identifies Sharp as having done most to develop this tradition of political thought into comprehensible theory, “giving it a high degree of credibility, because he combined it with an analysis of political power, including that of dictatorial and totalitarian regimes” (Roberts 2009: 9). Sharp’s most significant contribution to international political theory may thus be his illumination of nonviolent sanctions as having potential for incrementally substituting for violent struggle.

Power Politics and Nonviolent Struggle

While sufficiently efficient repression can crush a campaign, portions of the military and security services have also defected and changed sides, as happened in Iran in December 1978. During the last phase of the Iranian Revolution, the clamour for the Shah to go was such that members of the military sympathized with the nonviolent demonstrators, refused orders, fired on officers, and deserted (Abrahamian 2009: 173–5). The 1987 Palestinian intifada produced the 1991 Madrid international peace talks, where for the first time since the 1948 war Israeli and Palestinian negotiators convened, although they failed to secure a recognized homeland for the Palestinians.

(p. 278) Credible assessment of civil resistance needs to evaluate the role of other elements of power, including legitimate functions of armed force in human society, recognizing the variability of interactions between traditional forms of power and that of nonviolent movements. While not equivalent to or an alternative for the armed forces, it is important to recognize intricate relationships between power politics and nonviolent struggle.

Political realism identifies international relations with power politics, proposing that states are self-interested and (by some interpretations) aggressive in taking action, regulating perhaps all state action, and where the end need not be congruent with the means (see Chapter 48). Theoreticians of civil resistance generally argue that the means tend to determine the end result achieved—hence the importance of maintaining nonviolent discipline.

In Eastern Europe and the Baltic states during the 1980s and 1990s, arguments for fighting without violence were made on both ethical and practical grounds, as revealed in immense outpourings of forbidden *samizdat* (Russian for “self-published,” as opposed to state-published). Often typed on onion-skin paper onto ten carbon copies, *samizdat* circulated the ideas that led to the national nonviolent revolutions of the former Eastern bloc. Academicians, authors, artists, clergy, journalists, scientists, and scholar organizers brought a civil society into being in their imaginations and writings. With coldly pragmatic reasoning, they viewed any violence as giving pretexts for suppression by the Soviet-backed communist party states. As disclosed in *samizdat*, untold committees and popular

fronts *wanted* to use ethical means in order to stand in contrast to the ruthlessness and duplicity of the systems under which they had survived (Mary King 2009).

Writing in 1978, playwright turned Czech President Václav Havel alludes to a paradox: the dissident movements of the Soviet bloc "do not shy away from the idea of violent political overthrow because the idea seems too radical, but on the contrary, because it does not seem radical enough" (Havel 1989: 93). With communist party states ready to employ armed force to preserve stability, Eastern Europeans sought a practical way to avoid what happened in leaps toward freedom that were crushed in East Germany (1953), Hungary (1956), and Prague (1968). In 1977, Charter 77 appeared, openly signed by 243 citizens, including its progenitor, Havel, calling for the Czechoslovakian regime to honour all international agreements, including the Helsinki Accords, that it (and the Soviet Union) had agreed to uphold in 1975. The theory underlying Havel's "living in Truth" speaks to those who regard themselves as powerless under totalitarianism, asserting that they possess a form of power and can act upon it. Rather than living within a lie—mutely functioning while surrounded by corruption, injustice, and official falsehoods, and reinforcing unjust structures through their silence—they can refuse to cooperate with oppressive systems and speak Truth. His theory became the leitmotif for what would be called the Velvet Revolution and for other nonviolent revolutions in the Eastern bloc, as civil resistance became a definable factor in ending communist rule in a number of countries in 1989–91 and thus the Cold War.

Anti-utopian stances of political realism have elements compatible with civil resistance, including concern for possibilities of regression. Rather than favouring utopian (p. 279) thinking, nonviolent theoreticians tend to assume that political conflict cannot be eradicated. Gandhi perceived solutions as likely to last until they unravelled again. King's own purchase on "realism" led him in 1966 to say that "for practical as well as moral reasons, nonviolence offers the only road to freedom for my people. Anyone leading a violent conflict must be willing to make a similar assessment regarding the possible casualties to a minority population confronting a well-armed, wealthy majority with a fanatical right wing that is capable of exterminating the entire black population" (King 1986: 55).

A major contemporary political theoretician swaying analysts of civil resistance is Hannah Arendt, whose discriminations of power, authority, and violence are influential. She views power not as command and obedience, where the few coerce the many, but occurring when people willingly come together to take action on common purposes. Challenging a conception of power as domination, enacted with violence as its strongest force and the arbiter of politics, she views power as the capacity to act with cooperation (see Chapter 15). "Force" should thus be reserved to speak of the energies exerted by social movements. Authority, like legitimacy, manifests itself in obedience without persuasion or compulsion. With violence characterized by use of instruments, violence and power cannot be equated: "Power and violence are opposites; where one rules absolutely, the other is absent. [. . . it] is incorrect to think of the opposite of violence as nonviolence, and to speak of nonviolent power is actually redundant. Violence can destroy power; it is incapable of creating it" (Arendt 1969: 56). She points to Denmark's noncooperation with the Nazis,

resulting in the October 1943 night-time ferrying of most of the nation's Jews to Sweden, as representing "the enormous power potential inherent in nonviolent action and in resistance to an opponent possessing vastly superior means of violence" (Arendt 1994: 171).

Some nonviolent protagonists have been invigorated in their political thinking by thirty-three prison notebooks, penned by the twentieth-century Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Written during eleven years spent in Mussolini's fascist prisons, the notebooks are open to debatable interpretations from ambiguities meant to elude censors. Gramsci's appeal lies in his suggestions that consent mainly pertains to civil society, which he views both as an arena where ideological hegemony would consolidate in the interests of the ruling classes and, importantly, where oppositional intellectuals and social groups could articulate new ideas and develop organizational forms including popular democratic struggles. Gramsci's concept of *egemonia* (hegemony) sees intellectual and moral leadership as exercised mainly in civil society. After Israel's 1967 military occupation of the remaining lands allocated for the Palestinians by the UN, Palestinian activist intellectuals who questioned the persisting confidence in armed struggle found Gramsci's analyses potentiating. Contributing to the 1987 intifada, they absorbed his view that rather than seizing power with violence, power should be built through organizing independent groups in civil society, which can then leverage empowerment into office (Mary King 2007: 103). Gramsci defines intellectuals as those whose purpose is to "organize, administer, educate, or lead others" (Gramsci 2000: 340), evoking the skilled, disciplined organizer scholars who populate contemporary nonviolent struggles. (p. 280) Indeed, civil society is usually the domain from which civil resistance emerges—where dispersed, self-governing, free-standing centres of power can build networks that also help to withstand reprisals.

Civil Resistance under Ruthless Antagonists

Skeptics ask whether civil resistance can achieve designated goals when facing utterly brutal opponents. Yet disciplined resisters using nonviolent methods in the face of retaliations can create an asymmetrical conflict situation that may benefit them, the "paradox of repression," sometimes leading to greater mobilization. On rare occasions nonviolent protagonists can delegitimize adversaries who have responded with harsh reprisals, through dynamics called "political jiu-jitsu" and "backfire." In the first instance, as nonviolent challengers reject reciprocation of their adversary's violence, within the opponents' ranks the sight of unarmed people refusing to respond to aggression can cause security troops to refuse to obey orders, or to defect towards the nonviolent group (Sharp 2005: 47; Mary King 2002: xv–xvii). In the second dynamic, backfire, events perceived to be unjust can generate public outrage against those seen as responsible (Hess and Martin 2006: 249–67).

Civil resistance can be harder to quell than guerrilla warfare. Captain Sir Basil Liddell Hart interrogated German generals after the Second World War, seeking their evidence on different types of resistance they had encountered in Nazi-occupied countries. They confirmed that "violent forms of resistance had not been very effective and troublesome

to them,” while nonviolent resistance as practised in Denmark, Holland, and Norway, and to a lesser extent France and Belgium, showed effectiveness. “Other forms of resistance baffled them—and all the more in proportion as the methods were subtle and concealed.” Liddell Hart notes: “It was a relief to them when resistance became violent, and when nonviolent forms were mixed with guerrilla action, thus making it easier to combine drastic suppressive action against both at the same time” (1968: 205).

Resistance of some kind is almost always possible, even under highly repressive regimes, although it may need concealment, for example as with *samizdat*, memorializing “calendar events,” changing street names, destroying road signs, and symbolically laying wreaths. Writing about the Latin American military regimes of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay that spread collective fear and systematically used state terror to dismantle civil institutions in the 1970s and 1980s, Manuel Antonio Garretón distinguishes between the phases of military bellicosity, when resisters concentrate on physical survival and perhaps make links to international figures and institutions, and later stages, when greater organization, marshalling of resources, and mobilizing against terror and disappearances are possible (Garretón 1992: 13–23). After decades of killings by guerrillas and paramilitaries in Colombia’s counterinsurgency war, during the 1970s–90s (p. 281) dozens of autonomous self-governing peace communities were run by peasant civilians. Using noncooperation and disruption against state and non-state repressive actors, they blockaded paramilitaries from advancing (Masullo Jiménez 2015).

Can nonviolent strategies counter violent extremism and be effective against warlordism or fanatical Islamic revivalist foes? Possibly the highest risk from violent retaliation against such perpetrators of horrific acts is that any resort to large-scale violence in the public space marginalizes a potential role for civilian populations that have a capability for civilian defence, and upon whom both tyrants and occupiers ultimately rely for their own sustenance and legitimacy. Although any proposed strategies could be criticized as ineffectual, the alternative—armed military campaigns—has according to Maciej Bartkowski fared worse historically than its nonviolent counterpart in the record of dislodging cruel regimes and reducing the costs endured by populations, or in building (and rebuilding) political and socioeconomic environments after brute conflicts have ended. Bartkowski’s suggestions for strategies against guerrillas include transnational assistance, but generally can be enacted by local people. Containment allows fanatical leaders to rule, eventually revealing lost legitimacy in the eyes of inhabitants. Grassroots noncooperation with hidden or unseen acts of both subtle and overt disobedience can produce slowdowns, inefficiencies, and underground solidarity networks. Permanent protest migration can be effected by residents who do not wish to join extremists or an armed opposition, but also do not intend to remain in situ accepting exploitation (Bartkowski 2016).

Ends and Means: Does Civil Resistance Promote Democratic Outcomes?

Movements of nonviolent resistance have been historically generative in the creation, extension, and defence of democracy, since the late eighteenth century playing a key role in the progress from monarchy to democracy in the West. Once democratic forms of government have been established, methods such as civil disobedience, draft or tax resistance, mass rallies, and strikes have continuing roles in opposing domestic injustice and unjust wars. Such actions can be condemned as posing potential threats to democratically elected governments, yet Michael Randle argues, in examining connections between popular empowerment and democratic values, “that does not mean it has no place at all in a democratic state”; it depends on the type of civil disobedience and “the circumstances in which it is being used” (Randle 1994: 181). Another context in which nonviolent sanctions promote democracy is in semi-authoritarian regimes that allow some degree of opposition and hold regular elections, even while using intimidation and fraud to ensure that no challenger wins. Since 1986, when such tactics were used in the Philippines, coining the term “people power” and resulting in the subsequent ousting of Marcos, “electoral revolutions” have increased, including in former Soviet states. (p. 282) April Carter argues that “the focus on demanding a fair electoral process and respect for constitutional norms, as well as on replacing authoritarian governments by opposition parties, is more congruent with nonviolent than violent methods of popular resistance” (Carter 2012: 176). The most dramatic way in which mass nonviolent action has been used to introduce democracy is through the collapsing of dictatorships, military regimes, or repressive one-party states, as happened in many nation-states in Latin America and Asia during the 1970s–80s, and in the eastern European and Baltic states in 1989–91. These “velvet revolutions,” adopting the term noted with Havel, were almost entirely nonviolent (the exception being Romania), and resulted in new democratic constitutions and multiparty democracies.

Quantitative research by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan shows nonviolent campaigns succeeding more than twice as often as armed struggles when seeking to remove presiding national leaders or achieve territorial independence, even in repressive nondemocracies. In studying 323 nonviolent and violent movements between 1900 and 2006, they found that nonviolent campaigns succeeded 53 per cent of the time versus 26 per cent for violent insurrections. They conclude that “moral, physical, informational and commitment barriers to participation are much lower for nonviolent resistance than for violent insurgency,” mainly attributable to movements’ abilities to recruit significantly larger numbers of participants than armed insurrections, with nonviolent campaigns on average four times larger than violent struggles or guerrilla warfare—and hence more instrumental in modifying power within an adversary regime. Although they found that state repression and structural factors can reduce a civil resistance campaign’s prospects for success by nearly 35 per cent, they discerned no structural conditions determinative of movement outcomes. They showed that countries experiencing popular nonviolent struggles are more likely to emerge from acute conflicts as democratic and as sustaining human rights and democracy, once established, compared to violent insurgencies: “On

the whole, nonviolent resistance campaigns are more effective in getting results and, once they have succeeded, more likely to establish democratic regimes with a lower probability of relapse into civil war” (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011: 10, 68, 10).

Even so, the 2010–12 Arab Awakening starkly reminds that as a corrective for failing political systems, civil resistance is not a replacement for constitutional democracy. Nonviolent campaigns initially helped to disintegrate authoritarian governments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, yet these collapsed autocracies resulted in catastrophes: regression to authoritarian rule in Egypt, multiple wars in Syria, anarchy in Libya and Yemen, and counter-revolution aided by Saudi intervention in Bahrain.

The first of the Arab nonviolent revolutions, Tunisia in December 2010, experienced the greatest socio-political change and least bloodshed. Yet as social-media reports from Tunisia sped throughout the Arab world, they could not in their brevity reveal the preparedness of Tunisian civil society organizations or An-Nahda, an Islamist political party that unlike others in the region had democratic maturity. Imitator movements materialized in the contagion of Arab rebellion, without apprehending the decades-long Tunisian trajectory that had (however imperfectly) allowed civil society associations, (p. 283) labour unions, multi-party politics, and women’s and human rights to develop. After the autocrat’s departure, An-Nahda exemplified the essential democratic prerequisite of political parties in accepting electoral results. Defeated in 2014 legislative elections, it conceded. Only Tunisia had civil society organizations relatively resilient enough to ensure that its beleaguered new democracy would survive repeated challenges, as recognized by the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to a quartet of four such groups. Elsewhere, along with fragile civil societies went limited preconditions and planning for achievable goals, lack of a designated strategy group, and a lack of preparation for overhauling pre-existing governing bodies so as to redeem the purposes of the popular enlistment. As most of the Arab campaigns experienced reassertions of autocracies, failures in deliberation and planning for the new order also revealed themselves, along with negligible transnational support for the new democracies.

The protagonists of the Arab Awakening faced two particular obstructions: cruel repression by the targeted regimes, and deficiencies of conditions and institutional capacitation for peaceful transitions to pluralistic constitutional governance. The tragic outcomes reopen a long-standing debate on methods versus conditions, in which the literature of civil resistance emphasizes the significance of skill with nonviolent methods. A clarifying difference between the nonviolent revolutions of the former Eastern bloc and those of the Arab world is that the peoples of Eastern Europe and the Baltic states retained residual memories of their own constitutional democracies from before the Second World War. Also, by the late 1980s, as the Iron Curtain weakened, Eastern Europeans gained awareness of Western democracies, as Radio Free Europe offered opposition leaders and pro-democracy commentators airtime. Civil resistance can disintegrate a regime, but without critical prerequisites and specific planning (even if underground) it may have great diffi-

culty in guiding the formidable generative task of building new political institutions and constitutional protections.

Nonviolent campaigns thus share with realists a concern for the development or reform of institutions. As William A. Galston puts it, “institutions provide arenas within which abstract concepts of principles and aims [. . .] are worked up into concrete conceptions”; they “help define the community’s purposes, rather than simply putting prior understandings into effect” (Galston 2010: 393). Nonviolent struggles can hold pre-existing institutions to the purposes of the mobilization—rather than merely handing over authority to them. An area for future focus is how to build institutions for the future that reflect a cogent understanding of the popular quest, and to do so while still deeply engaged, before other immediate aims have been achieved.

Conclusion

For civil resistance to be developed competently and strategically in the future so that it can function in ways hitherto served by armed forces, its proficiency must enlarge. This would mean extending capacity and applicability, and replacing reliance on defence (p. 284) contingents gradually and for targeted purposes, so that a viable substitute can reduce reliance on armed services as a reasonable alternative.

New forms of violent insurgencies should be expected in the future; whatever the merits of nonviolent action, it cannot remove violence. Yet militarized civil conflicts no longer represent the principal choice for groups unable to redress wrongs through standard politics. Civil resistance, rather than armed insurrections, has become the preferred form of self-reliant political action, even though regimes and adversaries are in some cases outmanoeuvring nonviolent campaigns. The centrality of noncooperation—with related dynamics including defections, political jiu-jitsu, and backfire—will remain crucial for planners of nonviolent campaigns.

In 1958, Commander Sir Stephen King-Hall observed differences in the acceptance of military occupation by populations: “in the past [. . .] if a state were invaded and occupied, this event marked the end of the war,” with no option apart from capitulation to “annexation of the conquered territory.” He discerned a new factor in which the “so-called civilian population may not be disposed to accept the defeat” (King-Hall 1958: 181). His perception predictively augurs widening applications for civil resistance, as groups and societies increasingly refuse to accept forms of oppression tolerated in the past, while simultaneously rejecting violence as their means of action. Increasingly, interactions of the historic technique of nonviolent action with realist politics will enhance the ability of average people to fight effectively on democratization, the environment, gender equity, human rights, institutional reform, and the eradication of new attempts at subjugation.

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