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PEACEMAKING THROUGH NONVIOLENCE*

Michael N. Nagler

It is blasphemy to say that non-violence can be practised by individuals and never by nations which are composed of individuals.

M.K. Gandhi

The philosophy and strategy of nonviolence [must] become immediately a subject for study and serious experimentation in every field of human conflict, by no means excluding relations between nations.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Somalia, Rwanda and what was once Yugoslavia reveal the shocking inadequacies of the 'security regime' of our post-cold-war world. One response to these disasters has been to field more UN Peacekeeping operations; more operations were mounted in the four years between 1988-1992 than the previous forty. Yet, as we all know, this development was far from adequate, and in the end has brought the whole idea of UN peacekeeping into question. NATO head John Shalikashvili said early in 1992, "the days of pristine peacekeeping as we have understood it for years are probably over" (Shalikashvili, 1993). His solution was a combined NATO-former Warsaw Pact global police force.

Many argue that instead the time has come for an entirely different *kind* of peacekeeping, based on nonviolence. This is utterly different in kind from classical, armed peacekeeping interventions, no matter who organizes them. Armed peacekeeping, however well-intentioned, tries to use the *means* of ordinary conflict for the *goal* of peace. Nonviolent peacekeeping, however, tries to make peace with peaceful means; and that makes all the difference. One of the cardinal principles of nonviolence is, in Gandhi's words, "means are ends in the making." From this point of view the breakdown of UN peacekeeping was predictable, given the inherent contradiction of the concept. Given this contradiction, moreover, while classical peacekeeping can reduce a conflict (when it works), it cannot lead to longterm peace.

The 'Two Force' Theory

Nonviolent peacemaking is carried out by people committed to positive, constructive means of resolving conflict and beyond that of reconciliation, not only without the use of weapons but in an ideal sense without reliance on coercion of any kind. Having renounced the sanction of harmful force, they are nonetheless far from powerless; this was explained almost a century ago in a famous declaration by Mahatma Gandhi:

Of power there are two kinds. One is obtained by threats of punishment. The other arises from acts of love.

'Love' is not meant here in the sentimental sense, of course, but is meant to identify a perfectly practical but largely ignored fact of political life which Kenneth Boulding called "integrative power" (Boulding, 1989). When Quakers broke the food blockade on Germany and Austria after World War One they were not motivated by emotional love toward individual Germans but by a higher sense of what makes politics work. And in fact, they seem to have been correct. Thirty years later Quaker relief groups, and they only, were allowed to succor, even rescue Jews inside Germany, even at the height of the war. Because they did not use threats of punishment (which we might call Force One) but what Gandhi referred to as 'acts of love' (Force Two) they made an impression on the mindset even of severely dehumanized people--an effect which, had it been understood and built on early enough, might just have made World War Two avoidable.

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that most formal, institutionalized conflict management mechanisms we rely on today, especially on the international scale, are based on Force One, the compelling power of threat--even by those institutions attempting to make peace. It is time, quite simply, to learn how we can make peace through systematic, institutional use of this new power. They are, to repeat, entirely different animals: to limit the force unleashed by fear is good, it is devoutly to be wished, but it is not to be confused with enabling the force that could be engaged by empathy. Most security debates emphasize the *auspices* of power--should it be national, transnational or global? -- while ignoring the much more important question, what *kind* of power we are talking about. In terms of longterm, practical results different kinds of power can lead to opposite results. This is one of the most important distinctions to recognize in peace research -- and life in general.

As an example, from the moment Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait public debate centered on the respective merits of a military attack or economic sanctions. From the Gandhian point of view, however, such sanctions are a form of attack; a milder form, quite possibly in some situations a correct form, but one that is *not different in kind* from the force that sends planes over the air space of another state. In fact, we now know how many innocent children suffered and died, and continue suffering and dying, as a result of this 'alternative' to violence. 'Shall we use force or sanctions?' was a false dichotomy -- pulled punches are not the same as outstretched hands.

Sanctions or military interposition are the two options mentioned in Section VII of the UN Charter, containing the original mandate for UN peacekeeping. Yet even as both the general public and policymakers were debating this false polarity, a small ad-hoc group of international volunteers were doing something entirely different: they camped themselves on the Iraq-Saudi border, as an act of what we now call nonviolent interposition.

In the event, they were evacuated to Baghdad by Iraqi civilians fifteen days into the bombing, whence most of them removed some days later to Amman. Lest we think that this constitutes a poor argument for the effectiveness of such interventions, consider that this group was almost totally untrained (their strategy, for example, was rather poorly suited to what was obviously going to be an aerial attack), isolated, in fact virtually ignored in terms of public support, invisible to the world at large and easily ignored by the relevant policymakers (as a State Department official posted in the Middle East at the time later told me, they were "completely irrelevant"). Yet, while the 'allies' were reorganizing threat power and calling it--cynically, in my view--a "new world order," these volunteers did something more deserving of that exalted term.

By providing a nonaligned peaceful presence, they remained outside the classical 'polarity' which is really two positions on the same spectrum; while they were at it they organized relief work in Amman, helped counter media distortions back home, and learned a lot. In the words of one participant, the experience "bolstered my belief in the potential impact of practitioners of nonviolence." And they were not entirely alone.

Spontaneous interpositions in conflicts have been used to stop conflicts since the dawn of civilization (the Buddha is said to have stopped a war this way in the sixth century BCE). However the idea of institutionalizing such a technique, of preparing for it ahead of time along more or less parallel but opposite lines to the way states prepare for war, goes back, as do so many innovations in the field, of peace to Mahatma Gandhi, who began referring to his volunteers as an 'army of peace' (*shanti sena*) almost as soon as he saw the effectiveness of nonviolence at first hand in South Africa in 1913. Then in the twenties, back in India, he came out with detailed ideas for regional or neighborhood peace armies and continued to develop the concept until the end of his life. Nothing ever persuaded him that they would not work on a grand scale; in one of his boldest and most misunderstood proposals he advocated that India respond with nonviolent peace brigades to the anticipated Japanese invasion during WWII. He was still advocating some version of organized nonviolent peacekeeping after Independence, for example during the Kashmir dispute, and as Weber points out he was to have left for a meeting to establish the Shanti Sena a few days after his assassination on January 30, 1948 (Weber, 1996, p. 69).

The Mahatma was not given a chance to test this method in large-scale conflicts himself, being imprisoned by the British and unsupported by his own party members during most of this period and on this issue; but by far the most dramatic *shanti sena* the world has so far seen was organized in the thirties in what was then the Northwest Frontier Province of India by the Mahatma's close disciple Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan among the notoriously warlike Pathans whose descendents later would frustrate the overwhelmingly superior force of the Soviet Union by more traditional methods. Nearly 100,000 Pathan warriors--all devout Muslims, by the way--vowed to resist the British without weapons in their hands or violence in their hearts, and kept their vow under unbelievable provocation, adding immeasurably to the freedom struggle by their unsung efforts (Easwaran, 1984; Weber, 1996, pp. 44, 150).

After Gandhi, the idea of nonviolent peacekeeping remained alive in India where a formal Shanti Sena was set up under the leadership of Vinoba Bhave in 1957-- and spread round the world.

The 1980's were an important decade for the development of peace teams. During this period a number of INGO's, the largest of which were the religious-based Witness for Peace and the nominally secular Peace Brigades International, saw action in Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Sri Lanka and less remote regions, like Quebec (PBI). The Gulf War and the carnage which brought thousands of volunteers to former Yugoslavia, moreover, led to more ad hoc operations. On the other extreme, a series of international consultations has been held to bring about a global coordinating body to recruit, train and field nonviolent peace teams, as well as what the Quakers call 'interpretation': to alert and explain the significance of what is happening to the general public. As with Civilian Based Defense, the cousin of nonviolent intervention, a

government or two is flirting with the idea of a nonviolent peacekeeping/peacemaking service alongside conventional defenses.

They have good reason. In a nonviolent spirit, small numbers of people have gone into extremely dangerous areas and sometimes accomplished significant reductions in conflict with almost no personal casualties. Three PBI workers were stabbed in Guatemala and many have received death threats, but the fact is that since the death of one Hugh Bingham in Palestine in 1938 (Weber, 1996, p. 201) only one person, to my knowledge, has been killed while attempting to intervene in an active conflict without the 'protection' of arms, not to mention less dangerous peacekeeping situations. Needless to say, conflict *deescalation* and *nonviolence* slip quite through the net of modern news media; on my own campus a tiny group called Students for Peace prevented an ugly battle between radical students and the ROTC in the 1970's, creating space for constructive dialogue, but neither this nor a much larger incident at the University of Beijing during the Cultural Revolution became 'news.' What unarmed volunteers can accomplish is something we have to extrapolate from the few cases that are known: the FOR team that attempted to contact General Sandino in the jungles of Nicaragua in 1926, the Shanti Sena brigade that resettled refugees on Cyprus or negotiated a settlement to the longstanding Nagaland succession conflict in Northern India, and the civilizns who stopped a civil war, namely in Algiers in 1962 (Keyes, 1982, p. 18). All this has been done, as the yet-to-be-published study of Yeshua Mosher points out, with a "chronic lack of resources, . . . inadequate infrastructure, poor communications, and limited training opportunities," not to mention the near-total cold-shoulder from the mass media and -- a critical shortcoming--"little popular understanding of the dynamics and history of this manifestation of nonviolent action." The historical record, then, has traces of very small, private, underfunded efforts which accomplished remarkable successes with intercommunal, intranational, and even international conflicts.

In Sri Lanka, Guatemala and Haiti workers with PBI and other groups provided a shield of little more than their presence that not only protected individuals who would certainly have been killed but made it possible for forces of peace and justice to consolidate and expand--the first thing repressive regimes try to prevent. And they have done remarkably well at protecting local communities. When Ernesto Cardenal was Minister of Culture in the Sandinista government, I had occasion to ask him during a visit to Berkeley whether he thought the faith-based groups operating in his country were helping. Cardenal, himself far from dedicated to nonviolence, told me with considerable passion that "We need more of these groups and we need them quickly. Wherever they have been there has been no violence." Later his translator repeated that statement for the gathering, but unconsciously 'cleaned it up,' saying "there has been *almost* no violence." Furious at this distortion (with which all nonviolence advocates are familiar), Cardenal practically pounded the table: "I said *absolutely* no violence.

Nonviolent peacemaking is an idea whose time has come; but it is no longer just an idea. It is an idea with a track record.

Where Do We Go from Here?

The UN is in a sense the ideal place to begin building a world peace guard (as one such international effort was called). Its modest resources, and public visibility, are vastly greater than those of all the world's volunteer peace team organizations past and present put together. What's more, the UN has experienced at first hand the frustration of attempting to make peace by weapons. But up to now, the world's premier peacemaking body has feared to tread into this area of making peace with peaceful means. Vinoba Bhave offered to recruit a peace army of 50,000 volunteers for service in the Bangladesh war, but the UN was not in a position to take him up on it, on this or subsequent occasions. Since those days, however, things have improved slightly. PBI has been given NGO status by the international body, and one agency of its own, UN Volunteers, has been working with a leading volunteer organization, Peaceworkers, to identify and train nonviolent personnel to help their teams in Burundi or the Caucasus. But the UN is as yet far from organizing and conducting unarmed, nonviolent peacemaking and peacekeeping operations based on the experience of nongovernmental agencies in this dramatically different activity. Nor have the member states begun to ask for it.

History contains few examples of large bureaucracies making bold leaps of imagination, and the fact is that the similarities between classical UN peacekeeping and any form of shanti sena activity based on active nonviolence is superficial. In the meantime, brave men and women are going to go into intense conflict situations to make peace, if necessary by interposing themselves between hostile forces, whether or not the UN or an independent global body comes forward to support them. Therefore many activists now feel that the best strategy is to proceed on their own, encouraging but not necessarily expecting the UN to adopt their discoveries.

If I were the Secretary General, I would scrap classical peacekeeping tomorrow, giving all UN soldiers the option of being retrained for nonviolent peacekeeping and peacemaking. In the real world, however, what I recommend is *transarmament*; to phase in some nonviolent peacemaking operations and phase out armed peacekeeping progressively as the former prove their effectiveness. One precaution is necessary for this scenario to work: nonviolence is incredibly robust in the face of external resistance--it is amazing how much punishment and threat a person inspired by principles can face--but it is very sensitive to internal contradiction. Armed peacekeeping, however desirable in comparison to known alternatives, is a contradiction. You cannot really mix Force Two with Force One, by trying to employ classical and nonviolent peacekeeping *in the same operation*. When, in December, 1992, international volunteers got to Sarajevo, the UN protection force (UNPROFOR) offered to escort them through 'sniper's alley' in a column between tanks. The volunteers had cooperated with UNPROFOR in various ways, but declined this protection. I feel that they did exactly the right thing by drawing that line (and incidentally they suffered no casualties at all).

I see four tasks ahead to develop nonviolent intervention as a global force:

1. Identify the people who know how peace armies work, experientially or theoretically. They could be brought together for a conference, say at the UN University in Costa Rica or a suitable progressive peace institution like the University of HI, Manoa or Meiji Gakuin. The task of such a conference would be to identify the needs that must be met to develop and institutionalize nonviolent peacemaking.

2. Recruit, organize and train volunteers. All recruitment must be individual and voluntary. Military training does not attract the same people or bring out of them the same human potential as those enjoy who go into a situation with empathy and courage as their only protection. So the two crucial differences between what we might call classical peacekeeping and nonviolent peacekeeping are, first that nonviolent peacekeepers are unarmed and second that they want to be. This, to paraphrase Gandhiji again, makes all the difference. It implies a different kind of human relationship and creates an entirely different climate of possibility.

As suggested already, not only are military peacekeeping operations in many respects a useful model, they could very often involve the same people. Courage is courage--you just have to learn to point it in a different direction. Ordinary combat veterans, too, are an already partly trained manpower pool; there is a lot of misplaced idealism there to be tapped. However, it must be admitted that *how* to train people for *nonviolence* is not widely understood. Gandhi had the advantage of being able to train lifelong volunteers in special communities, with about fifteen years in between major campaigns. Much more has to be learned about how he did this.

3. Select an intervention, and go to work. At the moment small bands of volunteers are rushing off to help wherever they feel most pain, but it would benefit history much more in the long run if they would pull together and concentrate on one place where disaster can be decisively halted.

4. Tell the world. An important and vastly overlooked corollary to peacemaking operations themselves is educating the general public. UNESCO, with its Culture of Peace project, could take on the historic task of documenting and explaining how nonviolence peacebuilding has worked and how it should be further developed. It is the UNESCO Charter, after all, that says war begins in the 'minds of men;' UNESCO could directly undertake education that can give men and women another mindset -- a different culture. But even without such backing, there is a huge job of work to do, which could begin in a major success such as I fully believe could happen. Virtually the entire history of peace brigades has been ignored, from the beginnings in the mind of the master, Gandhiji, to the abortive idealism of Maude Royden down to the qualified successes of Witness for Peace, Christian Peacemaker Teams, PBI, Peacemakers, and many others. At the time of this writing a superb history of Shanti Sena and peace teams, rich with lessons for the future, has appeared (Weber, 1996) and two more promising books are in the wings. It is not clear how much the general public, still utterly ignorant of what peace teams are and how they work, will be affected by these books. It's not clear how you remake a culture, but it's clear we have to try.

Conclusion

It may be useful to point out four major advantages of nonviolent peacekeeping, though this may already be obvious to some of us.

Cost. Classical peacekeeping is cheaper than war, but nonviolent peacekeeping is cheaper still. You get much more non-bang for the buck. It requires even less equipment, it is done by idealistic volunteers who love their work, and it is remarkably efficient. The volunteers in

Nicaragua in 1983 who apparently pacified Jalapa, a war zone on the Honduran border, for as long as they remained, constituted a 'brigade' of ten people.

Political viability. UN peacekeeping has been hampered by the understandable fear of a standing army that would look like a world police force (not to mention an excuse for some Security Council nations' power plays). Most people and states would have no such problem with a standing *peace* army. The prospect of being invaded by well-intentioned and highly skilled peacemakers, mostly young idealistic people, is terrifying only to tyrants, and then only if they understand the power it entails.

Effectiveness. Murrack Goulding, recently called the world's peacekeeper-in-chief, has rightly said, "The United Nations can cajole, argue, bluster . . . but it cannot compel" (*Economist* 1992, p. 57). Nonviolent peacekeeping would turn this weakness into its greatest strength. Nonviolence is that form of power specifically designed to operate in situations where you cannot--or rather, do not wish to compel. Persuasion, not coercion is the modality of the Second Force.

Classical peacekeeping has prevented or limited some conflicts, but it has not, and cannot change the direction of international relations. It cannot do this because it relies, ultimately, on the same force peaceless interactions exploit, albeit attempting to apply them to another purpose. But nonviolent peacemaking suffers from no such handicap. There would be some false starts, some errors and some casualties, but once it became clear that there is a way to make peace without the sanction of force (i.e., Force One) the world would have found a new direction towards enduring peace.

Peace research has taught us never to underestimate the effectiveness of right means coupled with right ends. What Alain Richard of PBI has referred to as the 'contagion' of peace that often allowed his team to win over intransigent opposition and prevail over seemingly impossible odds is confined to a small scale only because we have not mounted it on a larger one.

There are questions within the peace movement itself about nonviolent intervention; not that it's too dangerous -- most peace activists have seen through that delusion -- but that interference may not be the right thing to do. For reasons I hope to elaborate elsewhere, I am among those who feel that in an extreme emergency, when a Burundi or an Afghanistan is blowing up, you have to use whatever nonviolent power is available. The alternative is to do nothing or bring in military force. During a MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour just before Christmas an American Catholic nun, discussing our intervention in Somalia said, "In a season when we long so for peace and to comfort the afflicted . . . wouldn't it be wonderful if we had at the same time a force that provided agrarian help, economic help? Why not have grandmothers along to hold the abandoned, orphaned children? . . . We don't plan for peace, and we don't have a program for peace. We only have a program for war."

Nonviolence has a program for peace.

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