

Excerpt from

STRATEGIC NONVIOLENT DEFENSE IN THEORY:
DENMARK IN PRACTICE

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Toronto, Ontario

October 1978

Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation

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Chapter 2

NONVIOLENT COMMON DEFENSE: THE BIOGRAPHY OF AN IDEA

We have recently dwelt at some length upon the irresistible power of passive resistance, when opposed to oppression, either from home or from abroad, by any population or people, great or small. We contemplated its capacity as a force, which any community or country might employ successfully in repelling and disarming despotism, whatever amount of bayonet power it might have at its command.

--Elihu Burritt, 1852

However small a nation or even a group may be it is able, even as the individual, provided it has one mind as also the will and the grit, to defend its honour and self-respect against a whole world in arms.... That is non-violent defence which neither knows nor accepts defeat at any stage.

--Mohandas K. Gandhi, 1946

...civilian defence is still more of an idea than a proposal... studies of civil resistance are still at a relatively backward stage. It is, after all, less than ten years since serious work in this field began...

--Adam Roberts, 1970

The idea we are considering has taken numerous names since the 1850s, mostly since the 1950s:

- 1) Passive resistance
- 2) Nonresistance
- 3) Nonviolent resistance
- 4) Civil resistance
- 5) Unarmed defense
- 6) Nonviolent defense
- 7) Nonmilitary defense
- 8) Civilian defense
- 9) Civilian resistance
- 10) Nonviolent civilian defense
- 11) Social defense
- 12) Civilian-based defense
- 13) Societal defense
- 14) Post-military defense...etc.¹

An expression I would like to try out is "common defense,"² reinvigorated to mean an effort mounted by an entire polity with the nonviolent means at hand; with defiance and organization; with strategy, principle, and tenacity. Common defense--of everyone, by everyone, for everyone. Common defense--without nuclear weapons, firepower, or any other killing and violence. Common defense--the workaday resistances by an unconquerable free people.

Elihu Burritt³ wrote what may have been the earliest advocacy of non-violent defense as such, in July 1852: a series of short related essays on "passive resistance."⁴ Like Leonardo's helicopter, Burritt's concept was ahead of its time, but it perfectly foreshadowed Gandhi's.⁵ Perhaps the second-earliest case for common defense was made by none other than Bertrand Russell, in an August 1915 article, "War and Non-resistance": a proposal for concerted nonviolent resistance to an invasion (of England) (by Germany). Despite his prescience, Russell had unwisely used the obsolete, self-contradictory word. Like Burritt, he never developed the idea further, despite his non-pacifist anti-war activism.

As for Mohandas K. Gandhi himself: these few remarks cannot do justice to his importance as the pioneer of strategic nonviolence. But it was not until 1931 that even he began to notice the national defense implications of nonviolent resistance.⁶ He did, for example, earnestly recommend a nonviolent defense policy to Switzerland in 1931, Abyssinia in 1935, Czechoslovakia in 1938, and Britain in 1940, as well as to his own Congress Party, which rejected it as early as 1939, and again in 1940. Yet nonviolent defense was only one of many topics, from cows to celibacy, competing for Gandhi's pronouncements, and by no means his highest priority.

Still, Gandhi's anthologies remain a basic source for deriving principles of nonviolent action across a broad range of situations, including defense. The best collection in his two-volume Nonviolence in Peace & War, which rings clearly with his leitmotif "nonviolence of the strong" and its fundamental distinction from passive resistance. His concept of nonviolence, as he wrote in 1946,

is summed up in "die for your honour and freedom" instead of "kill if necessary and be killed in the act." What does a brave soldier do? He kills only if necessary and risks his life in the act. Nonviolence demands greater courage and sacrifice.

In 1934 the first American edition of Richard Gregg's classic The Power of Nonviolence appeared. It was a general treatment that indicated nonviolent resistance could be a "substitute for war," and developed a point-for-point linkage between military strategy and nonviolent strategy. Oddly enough, Gregg fumbled his own insight by failing to construe it in terms of world politics and World War II; the "pacifist program" he set forth in this period was an insipid variety of warmed-over domestic Gandhism.

Another early specimen of nonviolent defense thinking was that of Jessie Wallace Hughan of the War Resisters League (WRL) in the US. She published a series of articles in March 1939 entitled "If We Should Be Invaded: Facing a Fantastic Hypothesis":⁷ a pamphlet edition, Pacifism and Invasion, was reprinted several times by the WRL. Clear-sighted in some ways, Hughan's pamphlet is a period piece; among other things she declares that foreign invasion would be an opportune time to restore Prohibition.

1939 also marked the publication of a significant volume by Krishnalal Shridharani, War Without Violence: A Study of Gandhi's Method and Its Accomplishments. He suggested that a synthesis of Gandhian militance with Western pacifism ends the pacifist dilemma in the face of aggression and oppression. He also suggested that a nation's defense could be organized with nonviolent strategy, but gave only a few pages of "conjectures" about it. In 1940, Shridharani put the question to Gandhi, and Gandhi's reply was published as an article in the August 17 Liberty magazine, "Can India be Defended? New weapons against the invader! A famous leader presents an amazing plan. Reading time, 6 minutes 5 seconds." This may have been one of the only such popular-media expositions of the nonviolent defense idea, by Gandhi or anyone, in that period.

A. J. Muste was the preeminent American pacifist theoretician and activist till his death in 1967, except for a period in the early 1930s when he led a Trotskyist splinter party. By 1936 he had resumed his pacifist leadership, and helped call attention to Shridharani's book on the Gandhian substitute for war. Even so, Muste's own 1940 book Nonviolence in an Aggressive World only glimpsed the possibilities; it was largely a religious-pacifist commentary on the world situation at the close of 1939. Nonetheless, in later years, Muste steadfastly nurtured the triune precept of unilateral disarmament, plus nonviolent resistance to aggression, plus world economic justice. While he too did not totally elaborate the instruments of nonviolent defense, he advanced the theme in his pamphlet How to Deal with a Dictator (in 1954), and had a strong hand in two Quaker group studies: Speak Truth to Power (in 1955), and In Place of War: A Quaker Inquiry into Nonviolent National Defense (drafted in 1965, published in 1967).⁸

Another of the earliest defenders was Cecil Hinshaw, who in 1950 wrote and lectured on "An Adequate and Moral Program of National Defense." An expanded pamphlet version was published in 1956, Nonviolent Resistance: A Nation's Way to Peace. (Despite its title, Hinshaw for whatever reason reverted to the phrase "passive resistance" in the latter.) Hinshaw was also a co-author of Speak Truth to Power. Like that one, his own two pamphlets were religiously based, yet all three stand the test of time quite well in terms of their political strategic analyses besides.

Two other religiously-based pamphlets were yet to appear, in 1958 and 1959 respectively: Bradford Lytle's National Defense Thru Nonviolent Resistance, and Ralph Bell's Alternative to War. Both included realistic attempts to do some worst-case thinking on the dangers nonviolent defense must cope with. But by then the defender initiative was passing from the domain of religious pacifism into strategic pragmatism.⁹

Keye

When King-Hall launched his broadside in 1957,* Gene Sharp was an editor on the British pacifist weekly Peace News, and he joined King-Hall briefly as a research aid. Subsequently, Sharp carried forward his own long-range studies at Oslo and Oxford on strategy and precedent for nonviolent resistance to totalitarian regimes. In 1964 he convened a landmark research conference at Oxford on what was coming to be called "civilian defense." Among those presenting papers were B. H. Liddell Hart (UK), Major D. J. Goodspeed (Canada), Adam Roberts (UK), Theodor Ebert (FRG), and George Lakey (USA).

Adam Roberts, who emerged as the next major defender after Sharp, edited some conference papers and others into a collection which was the first book completely addressed to the proposition of nonviolent defense. (Even King-Hall's books had been primarily an assault on nuclear deterrence theory.) The anthology was published in Britain in 1967 as The Strategy of Civilian Defence. The 1968 American edition was re-entitled Civilian Resistance as a National Defense: Non-Violent Action against Aggression.¹⁰

The third major defender who came to the fore at Oxford along with Sharp and Roberts was Theodor Ebert. Since the early 1960s he has written numerous works on nonviolence and nonviolent defense, mostly in German, and some in English. Since 1969 he has been editing a German quarterly on both those subjects, Gewaltfreie Aktion.

Whereas Sharp, Roberts, and Ebert have been the most persistent, various other writers have also contributed to the current body of defender thinking, among them Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack, Johan Galtung, George Lakey, William Robert Miller, Arne Naess, Theodore Olson, and Mulford Q. Sibley. To cite a few of them:

Johan Galtung is the prolific and much-traveled Norwegian sociologist and peace researcher, who has also lectured widely--as well as to Norway's defense establishment--on what he calls "non-military defense." His recently published presentation on this theme was somewhat ornate, but did press a notable distinction more peculiar to European thinking on civilian resistance than the Anglo-American version (e.g., Sharp, Roberts, myself): namely, the difference between "exploitation defense" against pre-existing "structural violence," and "occupation defense" against classic invasion. It is only the latter which this dissertation addresses.

George Lakey since the early 1960s has combined an activist as well as academic approach to nonviolent action. His 1962 M.A. thesis clarified the "sociological mechanisms" thereof by suggesting three types of successful outcome: coercion, conversion, or persuasion.¹¹ He was a co-author of In Place of War, and while his 1973 book Strategy for a Living Revolution deals with nonviolent defense only in passing, it provides a five-point model for nonviolent struggle which was useful in this study to describe the Danish resistance organizations.

In August 1965, Theodore Olson helped conduct a pioneering nonviolent defense "war game" training exercise set in a Quaker summer camp on Grindstone Island, Ontario, and co-authored a lengthy analysis of it entitled Thirty-One Hours.¹² The scenario he had written involved civil war in Canada and US

* In 1957 Sir Stephen King-Hall called for a Royal Commission study on the potentiality of a civilian nonviolent defense posture for Britain (with its allies if possible), and the abandonment of all its nuclear weapons as useless, along with most of its conventional forces.

intervention; Canadian authorities were said to have been alarmed at the realism of its assumptions. Olson and the instigators of the experiment, as well as its critics, were appalled at the lack of discipline shown by the islanders against the "invaders" during the two-day exercise. So underdeveloped has been the state of the art that in the ensuing thirteen years the experiment has never been repeated. Olson has done only one other paper on nonviolent defense, a short and little-known piece, but influential in this study.

One of the frustrations of the nonviolent defense field is that some very capable persons such as the preceding three have made significant contributions to its theory, but then have directed their energy elsewhere for one reason or another, leaving Gene Sharp to hold the fort, and keep on building it.¹³

Thus, Gene Sharp has been the dean of the defenders by virtue of relentless scholarship; he has written a long list of articles, pamphlets, papers, and books on nonviolent action theory since his M.A. thesis on the subject in 1950. As mentioned, in 1973 his massive and long-awaited treatise, The Politics of Non-violent Action, was finally published. This book is the "mother ship" of non-violent action theory, and the mother lode of footnotes thereto. It elaborates 198 separate methods of nonviolent action, as well as the step-by-step dynamics involved. Its central focus is the "voluntary servitude" concept of political power, first put forth in 1550 by the young French philosopher Etienne de la Boetie (1530-1563). Sharp's theorem is that political power rests on obedience, that obedience is not inevitable, and that the strategic task of sustained nonviolent action is to deprive would-be or actual dictatorships of the consent which makes them possible.¹⁴

Sharp is also the most assiduous lexicographer in the field. His definitions often lack elegance, but inform this study unless otherwise noted. One of his main distinctions is to restrict the term "nonviolence" to a moral norm, while making "nonviolent action" the most heavy-duty generic term of them all. The latter includes acts of commission, omission, or both. It includes acts of protest, noncooperation, or intervention.

"Violence," to paraphrase Sharp, includes the threat or act of harming persons by any means of confinement, physical injury, or death. "Damage" or "destruction" is done to property, not people. "Violence" or "killing" is done to people, not property.

So far I have been tracing nonviolent common defense as the biography of an idea, the formation of a body of thought and theory. At this writing its development has been slower than anticipated, especially when the 1970s are compared to the 1960s. Yet the momentum continues to gather, however imperceptibly at times. The doctrines of UN peacekeeping, nearly pronounced dead between 1967 and 1973, instantly had to be revived for a new set of emergencies. Likewise might be the fate of the nonviolent defense idea. Though it is "out of intellectual fashion," Adam Roberts noted in 1975, "non-violent action goes no happening. If it is kicked out of the front door, it comes in through the back door."

The 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia had provided a sudden laboratory case of civilian defense, and a momentary growth spurt in theory. The spontaneous civil resistance that was mounted was a wonder to behold, but could only last a short time without long-range advance planning and training. The Prague Spring--and winter--did generate a spate of books and articles, including titles by Roberts, Ebert, and others. The Czechoslovak trauma also marked the beginning of official glimmers of interest in civilian resistance. In 1970, Roberts prepared a study commissioned by the Defense Research Institute of the Swedish government, entitled Sweden's Security: A Study of Total Defence, and the Possible Role of Civil Resistance, and then a followthrough work for the same body in 1976, The Technique of Civil Resistance. The Foreign Affairs Department of the Danish government requested a study by Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack. Their ensuing theoretic work, War without Weapons: Nonviolence in National Defense was published in Danish, German, and English.¹⁵ Since April 1977 an interdepartmental Advisory Committee of the Dutch government has been developing a research program on social defense, with Sharp, Roberts, Ebert, and Galtung as consultants.

Other research conferences on nonviolent defense have been held in Europe; among the recent ones were those at Uppsala in 1972, Brussels in 1976, and Oslo in 1978. After Brussels, an International Working Group on Social Defence was established, with a secretariat in Berlin under Lutz Mex, though its newsletter as yet is highly improvisational. Gustaaf Geeraerts edited the Brussels papers into the most recent book on the subject, Possibilities of Civilian Defence in Western Europe. This overpriced volume contains examples of a malaise afflicting certain defenders who have gone into the shoals of left-wing dialectics; Egbert Jahn for one derides nonviolent defense of the state as given and argues instead for its nonviolent overthrow.¹⁶ Other articles are of more interest, such as a condensation of Roberts' work on Sweden.

Summing up, it can be said that the concept of nonviolent common defense has been extremely slow to develop in the twelve decades since Elinor Burritt first singled out the proposition. It has been unduly slow to develop in the past two decades since King-Hall broke the thought barrier separating military strategy and moral nonviolence. It has continued being all too slow to develop even in the past decade despite the coherence and identity the field had gained in the 1960s.

Meanwhile, King-Hall's clarion has received negligible response, favorable or otherwise, from mainstream strategists, who at least ought to be grappling with the ideas he raised, rather than the methodological dissents of a Rapoport or a Green. With the 1973 debut of Gene Sharp's "Big Bertha," and its long-term reverberations, we may hope that the basis now exists for developing and debating a studied alternative to the nuclear malignancy of orthodox strategy.

NOTES

¹In 1964, Sharp, Roberts, and Ebert had hoped that "civilian defense" would become the standard usage, but it was promptly confused with bomb shelters and the like. "Nonresistance"--as used by Bertrand Russell in 1915--should be crossed out immediately. It was a semantic blunder of nineteenth-century pacifists that was corrected by 1930. But it still clouds the minds of misinformed critics, though it is an archaism whose only current usage is for a certain style of Mennonite pacifism.

²Samuel Huntington's use of this term in a book title was simply a literary allusion (to the US constitution); the subject of the book is in the subtitle.

³Burrill was a multi-lingual, self-educated blacksmith, abolitionist, and publicist for humanitarian causes, as well as a staunch pacifist who, unlike some colleagues, did not make an exception for the Civil War.

⁴Note that we are discussing the idea of nonviolent defense, not the much broader fields of nonviolent action and pacifism.

⁵Gandhi in turn may have noted the success of the Finns, who from 1898 to 1905 had waged an internationally supported campaign of passive resistance against Czarist encroachments. Gandhi's first nonviolent action campaign was launched in September 1906 for Indian minority rights in South Africa. At first he too used the term "passive resistance," but by 1907 had come to feel that in its contemporary connotation it had no backbone of principled nonviolence. "Passive resistance" elsewhere was often used out of weakness, and as a stalking horse for violence. He coined the word "satyagraha" (truth-force, or soul-force) in 1908, but retained "passive resistance" for the time being in 1909 when he wrote his first pamphlet on nonviolence, Hind Swaraj.

⁶I have compiled a chronological annotated listing of forty-eight of Gandhi's references to nonviolent defense.

⁷That earlier title is indicative of the tenor of some--not all--nonviolent defense writing, even to the present: 'Not that we [UK/America] would ever really be invaded anyway . . .' Being a prudent pessimist (and American), I disavow that frame of mind. Admittedly, occupying the USA would be quite a logistic task, but then so was D-Day, and Barbarossa. I am aware of only two fictional works on a Soviet conquest and occupation of America: Not This August by C. M. Kornbluth (New York: Bantam, 1956; orig. 1955; and serialized in Maclean's Magazine, Canada, 1955-05, -06); and Vandenberg by Oliver Lange (New York: Bantam, 1972; orig. 1971). And of course, there were many other nations facing a variety of dangers, not excluding danger from an armed US. Two Canadian best-sellers by Brig. Gen. Richard Rohmer have Canada stymying a future US invasion: Ultimatum (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1973; Pocket Books, 1974); and Exxoneration (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974; Pocket Books, 1976). Britain under the Russian boot is the backdrop of a thriller by Clive Egleton, A Piece of Resistance (London: New English Library, 1972; orig. Hodder and

Stoughton, 1971). These books are all entertaining, but none is as plausible as some of the nuclear holocaust fiction: On the Beach; Red Alert; Alas, Babylon; Fail Safe; A Canticle for Liebowitz; etc.

⁹Neither precludes the other, but the change of emphasis is palpable; compare for instance the Quakers' 1955 and 1967 works as mentioned. Ralph Bell's 1959 pamphlet, meanwhile, was a largely unnoticed effort from the pacifist side to propose an interventionist, neo-military kind of "Active non-violent Resistance" in world affairs (by Britain, as it were).

¹⁰My 1971 senior thesis explored the proposition that unarmed military forces could perform a wide range of missions, including defense to the death, if organized to do so by a polity with sufficient martial fibre and moral nerve. My intention was to predicate a military complement to the emerging doctrine of "civilian resistance," which by its very name tends to overlook any notion of how nonviolent defense might be co-organized by professional soldiers. I hold that if nonviolent common defense ever comes to pass, it should, and will, have a much larger military component than some of its theorists presently envisage.

¹¹Gene Sharp revised the set to read conversion, accommodation, or non-violent coercion.

¹²Long out of print. Olson has recently prepared a revised and extended version, unpublished as yet.

¹³I, too, though intermittently exploring the field since 1962, have also undertaken an ongoing project of world map design, as a kind of geopolitical adjunct to nonviolent defense studies.

¹⁴Bear in mind that this book is more broadly conceived than just non-violent defense in particular--the subject of a forthcoming volume by Sharp--but is about nonviolent action in general. It had been my judgment that Roberts, and Ebert, have a somewhat better sense of the strategy of nonviolent defense, while Sharp's forte is tactics, plus concepts and dynamics. On the other hand, Boserup and Mack claimed in their 1974 book that the nonviolent defense literature has lacked any strategic analysis at all, and was only a stockpile of pressure tactics. They set about remedying this presumed theoretic deficiency, with results to be further discussed [in another part of the thesis--ed.].

¹⁵In some respects I had initially taken this to be a potboiler among works on nonviolent defense. But its tour de force of abducting Clausewitzian strategic theory for nonviolent defense proved more than suggestive by the time my own study was completed, as will be seen.

¹⁶Such an inversion I reject. But that is to be expected; any school of thought whatsoever has exponents who are an embarrassment to each other. It is worthwhile to speculate about nonviolent revolution, and I have done so in an unpublished paper, as has George Lakey in his recent book. But we do not elevate such musings into the antithesis of nonviolent common defense.

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* These references are listed by Keyes in topical rather than alphabetical order.

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