

### Nonviolence Works Against Terrorism?

In order to consider whether nonviolent action could be a practical response to terrorism (which is largely theoretical), I must first define terrorism. One little known definition of terrorism worth noting, though it is not the definition we'll use, is "violence used for political ends" (Martin, 2008, p. 64). Here we would have to define virtually any wars, repression, and torture done by governments as terrorism, which is precisely why we aren't using this definition. Instead we are defining terrorism "as violence exercised by non-government groups against civilians for political ends" (Martin, 2008, p. 63) for the purposes of this essay.

It is worth noting the wide range of definitions used by the general public and government agencies. The Oxford English dictionary defines a terrorist as "anyone who attempts to further his views by a system of coercive intimidation as a member of a clandestine or expatriate organization aiming to coerce an established government by acts of violence against it or its subjects" (Clements, 2008, p. 238). The FBI describes terrorism as the unlawful use of force or violence against people or property to intimidate or coerce a government or its population (Clements, 2008, p. 238). The British government, in the year 2000, defined terrorism as the use or threat of action designed to influence a government or intimidate the public (Clements, 2008, p. 238). Although I will focus on using a definition that includes the use of violence by non-government groups against civilians (as noted above), it is still useful to note which definition is being used by a variety of governments and publics.

One way to help decide if nonviolence could be effective against terrorism is to consider its opposite – that is, we can examine if violence is effective or not. One goal the 9/11 attacks may have had was to instigate a military response on the part of the US, thus making the terrorists look small compared to the US, essentially making the US look like, for lack of a better term, a big bully. By labeling these wars as a “war on terror” we have in effect restricted ourselves to purely military operations (and hence a violent response) whose very goals are inappropriate in countering terrorism (Summy, 2008, p. 262)... On the whole I do not believe violence is a good response to terrorism, because it tends to dehumanize its opponents. From that perspective violence needs to be replaced with something that does not dehumanize them, and instead builds up positive peace as a way of diminishing terrorism.

The backfire process describes a way in which efforts are taken to make the acts of terrorism backfire on the terrorists. Two conditions are needed for backfire: Something about the terrorism needs to be perceived as unjust, and information about the terroristic events has to be communicated to relevant audiences. Increasing outrage can cause backfire, while reducing outrage is a way to prevent backfire. To reduce outrage people can cover up what they did, devalue the target, reinterpret the event, use an official process to give the appearance of justice, and/or intimidate or reward people involved in the incident (Martin, 2008, p. 59). To increase outrage people can expose the actions, validate the target, emphasize interpretation of the action as an injustice, mobilize public concern (and avoid official channels), and/or resist and expose intimidation and rewards (Martin, 2008,

p. 60). Terrorists will rarely even try to reduce outrage, or even have the power to do so (unless it is state terrorism). Thus backfire is when actions of one group involved (terrorists or victim government) do the exact opposite of what they would have hoped, the whole theory is essentially an extension of Gene Sharp's political jiu-jitsu.

Discussing Gandhi's approach to terrorism is a useful framework to keep in mind for the rest of the essay. Gandhi would urge us to separate the terrorist from the terror (Nagler, 2008, p. 48). The terrorist is only following orders from whatever organization they're a part of, and we have to remember that they are humans just like us. Further, as "terrorist" is itself a term that is dehumanizing Gandhi would simply call such persons "people using violence". Ultimately we would need to understand the motive of the terrorist to find a solution that changes the conditions that gave rise to the terrorist actions. If the focus of nonviolence is on humanizing the people using terror, than by nature such action will be done nonviolently. Lastly, if we are to condemn terrorism, then to have integrity in our position we should be condemning all violence. These ideas of Gandhi's help us to frame where nonviolence can work against terrorism.

One way to use nonviolence as a method to dissolve terrorism is to seek to change an oppressive condition at its roots. Here nonviolence would be used to diminish the ability of terrorists to rely on their two main sources of support: authoritarian regimes and disaffected or alienated people living in oppressive societies (Merriman & DuVall, 2008, p. 222). There are three ways of nonviolently taking action of this sort: Address the oppressive conditions terrorists exploit;

provide a realistic alternative form of mass struggle; develop a new discourse about nonviolent power (Merriman & DuVall, 2008, p. 222). By working on these kinds of goals it is possible both to help actively support people in countries being hurt by terrorism, and at the same time lessen the conditions that might lend sources of support to terrorists.

Whatever the specific situations may be, the other main way nonviolence can be used to change conditions is by stepping back from the big picture and trying to influence politics nonviolently at the local level, which can in turn be a template for national action (Hastings, 2008, p. 219). There is no single strategy for this way of changing conditions, but everything you try ought to adhere to the following lessons Hastings has identified. One key thing to note is that even though you may be fully cooperative in your ways of operating internally, this may seem hostile to whomever you are up against instead; which will in turn dampen the relationship you're trying to build (Hastings, 2008, p. 219). You must also, says Hastings, remember that if you offer yourself as a sacrifice (like a martyr) for your cause, or show that kind of selflessness, you will win hearts and minds to your cause (Hastings, 2008, p. 219). Overall you have to remember that acting locally is just as important as acting with a national or even international strategy.

To bring Gandhi's framework into the context of Bin Laden let me use an imaginary dialogue between those two. Bin Laden had four goals that helped drive his actions, according to Parekh: getting Americans out of Muslim society; creating a sovereign Palestine; removing the US stooges from Muslim society; and restoring the glory of Muslim society (Parekh, 2004, p. 56). Bin Laden chose violence because,

as Parekh argues, Bin Laden thought it was the only language the US would understand (Parekh, 2004, p. 57). Parekh says that Gandhi would counter such a claim by explaining that terrorism leading to violence (which is more or less what occurred after 9/11/01) creates an endless cycle of violence (Parekh, 2004, p. 63). Gandhi would point out that the root of this terrorism was measuring the Middle East against the West, two societies that simply can't be equally compared, as Parekh states. Instead using more appropriate scales (such as countries that are actually similar in regard to wealth, government structure, etc.) would be one example of changing conditions to get rid of some terrorism. Gandhi also would try to show Bin Laden how he has interpreted Islam incorrectly, and that religion is therefore not an appropriate excuse for the terrorism he has inflicted.

It is also worth discussing what factors will influence the choice of violent or nonviolent responses to terrorism. One basic reason why violence is the choice in almost all the cases, not just 9/11, is that (however sad a commentary on our society you may think this is) our instant reaction to violence against ourselves is to fight back militarily. What else are standing armies designed for but such self-defense? In order to use nonviolence as a response to terrorism we need to build up a system to create a response that functions in a similar way to our existing army but is nonviolent.

This sort of buildup will not occur until nonviolence is as understood and "de-facto" in our society as violence currently is. Such a condition can only be achieved with education at many levels of growth about the many elements of nonviolence. McInnis' article discusses how much of a difference peace education

may make in changing responses to terrorism (McInnis, 2008, p. 146). One part of this education is to understand the culture of war and violence to learn how violence itself is a form of terrorism. In doing this you will expose the real war system and redefine both war and terrorism (McInnis, 2008, p. 147). The single most important change in education to enable larger use of nonviolence is to understand that hate and prejudice is learned. Our educational structures need to stop teaching hatred, prejudice, and “othering”, and instead teach the values of peace, justice, and social equality (McInnis, 2008, p. 152). Such an education does not help all on its own, but rather enables citizens to explore the options for their own contributions to a peace culture (McInnis, 2008, p. 153). Once nonviolence is understood across our society we may well begin using it in place of violence as our default response to terrorism even without directly realizing that we are doing so.

Yet another theory to touch on regarding where nonviolence can be used in relation to terrorism is Ram’s idea of terror jiu-jitsu (Ram, 2008, p. 78). This is the notion that with every instance of direct terrorism (think flying planes into the World Trade Center) there is indirect terrorism as well (Ram, 2008, p. 81). Terrorists use violence in the hope that their opponent’s response will be more violent and disproportionate (Ram, 2008, p. 82). Thus, terrorism is not just the act of violence, but the long-term feelings other countries may have towards the country attacked given their response. Nonviolence provides a way to disarm this indirect terrorism since you will be less violent, and likely act to a lesser degree, than the terrorists did. Perhaps here is the first area that countries can work

towards in order to have nonviolent means fully take over violent ones in dealing with terrorism.

In conclusion let me state that nonviolence may work against terrorism, but the kind of structural institutions needed for such a response have yet to be considered, much less created. Nonviolence working against terrorism is not so much working against terrorists, as it is the means of nonviolence being used to instill changes in the systems in which and against which the acts of terror are focused. Nonviolent means against terrorism will have different reactions depending on the specific terrorists and what they did. In essence, nonviolence doesn't (yet) work against terrorism, but rather works as a method to change the systems that terrorism attacks, and will work as a way to fight terrorism once the institutions are in place to support it.

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