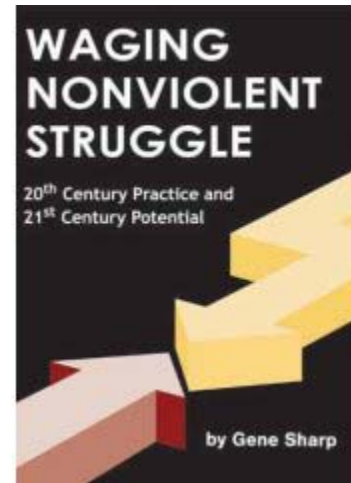


**GENE SHARP. WAGING  
NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE: 20<sup>TH</sup>  
CENTURY PRACTICE AND 21<sup>ST</sup>  
CENTURY POTENTIAL. BOSTON,  
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Gene Sharp is a much-published and very significant student of the possibilities of non-violent action (NVA), having pursued this topic for decades. This latest volume is both a summary and an extension of this work. It is an intriguing book, which will repay study from multiple perspectives. It presents a number of strengths and, to some degree, also corresponding weaknesses.

The aim of the study as presented (p. 3) is "to advance knowledge and understanding of the technique of nonviolent struggle and its potential." To that end, it hopes to make "a significant scholarly contribution to the deliberate refinement and development of nonviolent struggle." The book may be assessed from a variety of perspectives: as advocacy, as a "how-to" manual, as theory and as analysis based on the sustained study of specific cases. Its greatest strengths are in the first two categories, which are where it will find much of its more immediate appeal. Its more scholarly aspects, in the areas of theory and case analysis, are somewhat more limited, in significant part because of its first two aspects. One might take issue with both the theory and the content and method of the case studies. One should also fairly note, however, that from a scholarly perspective the book should properly be read in the context of the author's

earlier studies. Moreover, both the theory and the cases, taken as they stand here, have interesting implications and possibilities if pushed further.

The relative emphasis on the advocacy and "how-to" aspects is indicated by a number of factors. First, clearly Sharp is not presenting simply a dispassionate analysis of NVA. He is deeply committed to its potential as a serious alternative to violent methods of waging various sorts of struggles. He wants to persuade others that NVA is both possible and desirable, and also wants to help those contemplating the use of this technique whether as a morally-informed choice or simply for its pragmatic strengths. Second, the book lacks an extensive set of footnotes and has only a small bibliography, except for specific references for specific cases. Instead, one is often referred to Sharp's own previous work for further information. This is particularly the case for the initial section of the book, which contains the theoretical base for his argument. Third, as a part of this, one will not find in the book extensive references to a potentially wide-ranging set of literatures that might exist in Sociology, Political Theory, History, Comparative Politics and so on. The by-now extensive theoretical and empirical literature on civil society, for example, is not touched on here, though it has obvious application. One might therefore conclude that this theoretical basis either is developed elsewhere or is more implicit than explicit, more taken as given as a starting-point than examined in its own right. Fourth, while numerous cases are presented, they are not actually explicitly and systematically organized, presented and mined here through a strong analytical strategy. Insofar as the "how-to" aspect follows from the theory and the analysis, then, there is much that seems sustained by these, but also much that could be more thoroughly

linked in detail to a closer presentation and examination of the theoretical and empirical base. Fifth is Appendix C, advice on preparing a translation.

All of these factors on the one hand make a large volume (nearly 600 pages) more accessible and attractive to non-scholarly users, and are understandable if this is intended as the primary audience. The sometimes inspirational tone of the case studies, as well as the stated intention of showing that NVA has been employed in a number of differing contexts, are also quite likely to make the book more palatable to non-scholarly readers. On the other hand, the theoretical and analytical limitations of the book might constructively encourage more academic readers to identify, examine and develop further some issues and possibilities apparent in the first two sections of the book as well as arising in the more strategically- and action-oriented later parts. Ultimately, the advocacy aspect of the book – the claim that NVA has a wide and varied potential for use – stands or falls with the technical aspect, and the technical aspect in turn depends on the sustainability and development of the theoretical argument and the conclusions drawn from cases.

Leaving aside the advocacy element of the book, let us turn first to its technical aspects. Sharp presents a long (198 items) list of specific methods of particular NVA techniques (pp. 51-64), categorized according to three broad groups: protest and persuasion, non-co-operation, and non-violent intervention. Far more important, however, is his stress on strategic planning and his detailed listing and discussion of a number of elements to be considered in thinking about, planning and conducting non-violent struggles. Appendix A alone ("Preparing A Strategic Estimate For Nonviolent Struggle", pp.

525-541) will present a daunting task for groups contemplating NVA, and likely much potential for internal dispute, even as it presents a rich source of potential insights (and, for the academic, possible testable hypotheses).

The key to effective planning for NVA, much less its successful execution, is found in a correct assessment of: (1) the social situation in which both the activists and the target find themselves; (2) the dependence of the target on those who are refusing to co-operate, the ability of the target to repress or control opposition, the degree of non-compliance the target can tolerate, and the strength of the belief of the target and its supporters in their position; (3) the potential for the useful involvement of third parties; and (4) the strength of belief, organization and planning of the non-co-operating group, and the soundness of their strategy and tactics. Sharp distinguishes as well between situations in which a single campaign may be all that is needed, and one in which a larger and longer effort might be required. Disarray, uncertainty, illegitimacy, weakness and dependence in the target group and its supporters will favour a single campaign, but longer and more difficult struggles may be needed in other circumstances, in part simply to create the conditions for a more successful struggle.

The insistence that good intentions are not enough, and that clear thinking about the waging of non-violent struggle is both possible and highly-desirable, even if not always found in past examples (including some successes), are recurring themes of the book. The insistence on technically-sound thinking and planning might introduce a source of tension with the advocacy aspect of the book. In fact, Sharp's more technical focus does not require that users of NVA have more than a pragmatic acceptance of it: he is quite clear on this score. While he may favour NVA on ethical grounds among oth-

ers, his argument for it is also firmly put on practical grounds. Thus, while he clearly shares the moral penumbra that affects so much thinking about NVA, including its potential for social transformation, the "how-to" aspect aims to provide a fairly clear-eyed and dispassionate approach to considering prospects for, approaches to and techniques of NVA.

Even more, he notes (p. 22) that "there is nothing in nonviolent action to prevent it from being used for both 'good' and 'bad' causes." This recognition has the intriguing consequence – not explored in the study, however – that methods of resistance by a target to NVA could also legitimately be studied, not merely to permit more effective use of NVA but also precisely because NVA is not limited to good people doing praiseworthy things for laudable purposes. If even the Devil may quote Scripture, so, too, might groups turn to NVA to further undesirable causes. Approaching NVA on a technical basis may thus make it more of a morally-ambiguous strategy. This, too, may prove uncomfortable for some readers.

It is recognized in the book that NVA is not only a means of conducting conflict, but also, especially in the category of "non-violent intervention," is a coercive, not merely a persuasive, technique. It does not simply depend on winning over the target through moral influence. Instead, it might aim at the disorganization and fragmentation of the target, the breaking of its will and ability to resist. NVA may be, to extend a phrase, war by other means. This, in turn, leads to an interesting conclusion: save unless physical destruction is an inherent element of one's intent rather than a means to an end, the object of war might be to disorganize, fragment, demobilize, isolate and manage one's opponents, so that one might impose one's will upon them. Violent meth-

ods are potentially merely incidental to this end, not the only means of accomplishing it. NVA thus becomes seen as a contest in which the NVA practitioners attempt to accomplish these objectives vis-à-vis a target, while facing countermeasures (not necessarily restricted to non-violent means) from an opponent attempting to do the same, or even aimed at the movement's physical destruction.

Moving on to the cases, the 23 cases included take up about 270 pages of the book, comprising its second section. Sharp notes that his selection cannot be taken as a representative sample, and so the conclusions that can be drawn from them are limited in any sort of statistical sense. The selection is intended, rather, to indicate that NVA examples may arise in a wide variety of countries, both Western and non-Western, against foreign occupiers, domestic governments, and also against primarily social or economic targets. The outcomes of the cases are not all successful, although in some cases initial failure might still pave the way for eventual success. Nor, in some cases, is the instance of NVA studied necessarily the major factor generating the outcome. The mothers of the Plaza de Mayo did not themselves topple the Argentine dictatorship – the Falkland War was also a factor noted – but they indicated some resistance to that regime. Nor do the cases necessarily aim at the same scope of objectives, even where some cases are successful. Demonstrations in wartime Berlin helped to save hundreds of Jewish husbands, but this limited objective did not address the far larger Holocaust.

These acknowledged limits on the cases are welcome, but one still notes strong, informal connections between the cases of Part Two and the analytical and strategic considerations of Parts Three and Four. It is also here, however, that the relatively informal character of the cases and their analysis poses a limit on the more scholarly as-

pirations of the study. The cases are generally presented very briefly, and largely in a chronological and narrative mode. There is no explicit framework applied, derived from the theoretical section of the study, so there is no real prospect here for a specific, well-developed comparison even among these cases to draw out patterns and connections, identify potential deviant or unusual cases, or to suggest even tentative conditional hypotheses for further investigation. The assessment and scoring of the cases is relatively general and informal. While the terms of presentation and arguments can be linked to the analysis and strategic considerations of Parts Three and Four, then, this is not done in any structured or formalized way. Instead, the undoubted depth of the author's knowledge seems to provide the more unspoken linkages. Other students of NVA may, however, build on these and other cases by exploiting both more explicit frameworks of analysis and the widening array of case study strategies becoming available.<sup>1</sup> Such an investigative strategy, developing the scholarly apparatus of the book, would be of less interest for some practitioners on the one hand, but could serve to test and to strengthen its analysis and its strategic conclusions on the other. This, then, presents both a point of tension among the varied aims of the book and a point at which further study could be very rewarding.

Similar limitations arise in the first, theoretical, part of the book. Here, clearly, Sharp is relying on his earlier work, but the foundations of that in turn are not much elaborated on. It would thus require further reading, including of his earlier work, to develop a sense of those foundations. At this point then, one is here left to wonder whether wider literatures in Political Theory, Comparative Politics and the like, much less the burgeoning literature on civil society, have been drawn on as extensively as

might be possible, and the consequences were one to do this. Two examples might suffice. One element of NVA that is noted by Sharp is its potential for social transformation. In some cases, in fact, failure to realize this potential in a sustainable fashion may either defeat the movement initially or eventually, or at least limit its gains. One is reminded in this of aspects of Samuel Huntington's old distinction between praetorian politics and mass mobilization.<sup>2</sup> In the former, the range of political forces at play in a society is quite limited; in the latter, however, it is precisely the bringing of previously-excluded groups into the realm of action that transforms the nature of politics in a country. Similarly, Gramsci's distinction between and elaborations on "wars of position" and "wars of manoeuvre" could be of considerable interest.<sup>3</sup>

The theoretical foundations of NVA, as outlined in the initial pages of the book, seem substantially liberal in character. In particular, it is clear that not only weakness in the target group and its supporters but also the existence of a well-developed and independent civil society would seem to strongly favour successful use of NVA. Sharp is aware of this, but also argues that the techniques may still be applied usefully outside of a liberal social-political context. The fundamental argument would appear to be that obedience to "the Powers that Be" is effectively given by those "below," and can effectively be withdrawn by them. Power is, in effect, socially-constructed. Obedience is a resource given by the dominated to the dominators; to the degree that the latter depend on the former, and the flow of that resource can be disrupted or even redirected, dominant groups may be vulnerable. The existence of independent civil society groups, the ability to challenge the legitimacy and coherence of target groups and their supporters,



and the ability to mobilize one's own power while reducing that of the target group all flow from this basic consideration.

Where, in a relatively liberal polity, a target can be delegitimized, isolated, disorganized and fragmented, these contentions seem most appropriate. In non-liberal regimes where the target is relatively weak as compared to social forces, and similarly can be separated from them, these contentions could be reasonably founded. If, however, a society's basis of legitimacy is not amenable to this analysis – if, for example, "the Powers that Be are ordained by God," and this has wide acceptance – then that alone, much less the possible penetration of civil society groups by regime agents, may significantly inhibit the scope for NVA. Argued, that is, from a relatively liberal theoretical/ideological basis, the foundation for NVA as presented here might seem persuasive. If one considers, however, that the social and political foundations of other societies may not be liberal in even a limited degree, the reality depends not on what we might think, but on the bases of legitimacy and obedience current in the societies under consideration. Whether or not liberalism has universalist pretensions, a consideration of the possibilities of NVA within the context of non-liberal theories and ideologies might thus be in order.

Overall, the book pursues a wide-ranging and ambitious range of objectives. In some of these it is clearly more immediately successful and attractive than in others. As advocacy, it will appeal to those already interested in NVA, whether morally or pragmatically. As a strategic text, it presents a rich array of ideas well worth serious consideration and further development, from an activist as well as a scholarly or even a professional-strategic viewpoint. These successes are bought to some degree, however, at

the expense of a set of case analyses and a theoretical foundation which are not as developed as they could be. As a scholarly work, then, this is more limited. This, perhaps, is a function of reliance on earlier works by the same author. Nonetheless, these limits could themselves be approached positively, as indicating further directions and approaches for thinking and development.

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## **Endnotes**

1. E.g., Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, Cases Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005). The pioneering work on the “diagnosis” of cases, found in Alexander L. George, David K. Hal and William R. Simons, The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy: Laos – Cuba – Vietnam (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1971), should also be noted.
2. Samuel P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).
3. Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds. and translators), Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1971).