

Are Non Violent Approaches to Peace Making Practicable in Today's World

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What do you understand by the word "peace"? To what degree do you think that the so-called "non-violent" approach to peace making is practicable in today's world?

Abstract:

This paper will consider what is meant by the word "peace" and will discuss the relevance of non-violent approaches to peacemaking in the world today. The focus of this paper will be on the success or otherwise of non-violent methods in the resolution of conflict at an international level and within states. The role of alternate dispute resolution processes employed in community and organisational settings will not be discussed although their contribution to conflict resolution is acknowledged.

This paper will examine formal mechanisms and structures (e.g. diplomacy, mediation, arbitration and peacekeeping forces) that are available to states and non-government organisations should they seek to resolve their differences via non-violent means. Also considered will be the success or otherwise of non-violent methods used by popular mass movements to achieve their goals when confronted by oppressive regimes.

It will be argued that non-violent methods of peacemaking between states are most effective when certain conditions prevail (e.g. when parties in conflict are motivated to seek non-violent means to resolve their dispute). In situations where non-violent methods are employed by mass movements against oppressive governments, it will be argued that they are most successful when (1) they are facing a Western style liberal-democracy, (2) media coverage is present and (3) pressure is simultaneously applied in the form of violence. Particular reference will be made to popular non-violent movements in South Africa, India, Czechoslovakia, China and Tibet.

Peace is not an easy concept to define. Some commentators have defined peace as simply the absence of war (e.g. French social political thinker Raymond Aron) (1966, cited in Barash, 1991) whereas others regard it as a multi-dimensional concept that reflects the internal state of individuals as well as their relationship to the external world (Barash, 1991). The notion that peace is defined by the absence of war has been described as "negative peace" (Barash, 1991). According to French thinker Raymond Aron (1966, cited in Barash, 1991) it is a condition where "no active, organised military violence is taking place" (p.7). This definition of peace could be applied to any sovereign state that is not at war with another (e.g. the United States and Australia). It can be argued that this definition of peace is too narrow. For instance, in the 1950's the former Soviet Union and Finland were not at war, but the USSR's intimidation of this country (described by some commentators as "Finlandisation") does not mirror the same "peace" enjoyed between the United States and Australia during the same period.

War can be seen on a continuum from declared (e.g. the Second World War) to undeclared (e.g. the Vietnam War and Cold War) which can technically be regarded as a form of peace according to Aron (1966, cited in Barash, 1991). If peace is merely the absence of war, the term can also be used to describe situations such as an armistice (a permanent lull in hostilities before a truce is arranged) or cease fire (a temporary lull in hostilities). It would be difficult to argue that the residents of Sarajevo enjoyed "peace" during the several ceasefires between Serb and Bosnian Muslim military forces.

Galtung (1985, cited in Barash, 1991) rejects Aron's definition (1966, cited in Barash, 1991) of peace as simplistic and has argued that peace is far more than the absence of war or violence. He has used the term "positive peace" to denote a condition that is characterised by the absence or minimisation of structural violence which manifests in the form of oppression. A society that denies people economic opportunities, social advancement, political equality and oppresses individuals on the grounds of religion, gender, race, sexual orientation, age or intellectual ability is a society that is removed from the ideal of positive peace (Galtung, 1985 cited in Barash, 1991). Types of structural violence may include repression, starvation, poverty and the denial of human rights which are in contrast with methods of direct violence which include the destruction of human life and property. Supporters of the notion of positive peace as the preferred state on the peace/war continuum would argue that a repressive state can enjoy "negative peace" with its neighbours (i.e. has no external conflict) but deny its

populace "positive peace" (i.e. has internal conflict) (Barash, 1991). Chile, for example had no conflict with its neighbouring states but waged a vicious campaign against "subversives" in its own population.

Other working definitions of peace which further expand on the idea of positive and negative peace include the concepts of objective and subjective peace. Objective peace can be defined as the "absence of external violence and the active capacity of people to attain their needs..." (Ardagh, 1998, p.7). In contrast, personal or subjective peace is based on an individual's perception that he/she exists in a state of objective peace free from the threat of violence (Ardagh, 1988). This perception can theoretically be maintained in the face of violence and oppression, if for instance the person is part of the ruling elite and is untouched by oppression; he or she has a profound religious conviction that provides inner freedom in the face of external oppression; or the individual can simply be naive to the oppression that surrounds them.

The notion of positive peace, even in liberal democracies, remains an ideal that many people continue to find elusive, including indigenous peoples (e.g. Australian Aboriginals and Native Americans), Australian women (who comprise over 50% of the population and are significantly unrepresented in Parliament and leadership positions in business in Australia) (The Age, 1999) and gays/lesbians who face discrimination and threat of death in some countries. The institutions of the state tend to reflect a power structure that protects the interests of the dominant group. In the case of Australia, it is not women, minorities and indigenous Australians that dominate positions of leadership in this country's business, political, academic, sporting and cultural life (The Age, 1999). Often those in power, either consciously or unconsciously, reflect the values and aspirations of the social group with which they identify (Baron and Byrne, 1987). In the case of Aboriginal land rights, many Australian political decision makers attach more to the value of mining and farming than to the notion of spiritual attachment to the land. Even though Australia and many other liberal democracies could be regarded as societies where positive peace exists, on closer inspection there are still many disenfranchised groups whose aspirations remain unfulfilled. While Galtung's (1985, cited in Barash, 1991) definition of peace is comprehensive and a goal worthy to strive for it is questionable whether this idealised view of peace (within the state) can be realised.

After considering the debate over whether peace is a positive or negative concept (at a national or international level) it can be defined as a state that exists when the

following circumstances prevail (this list is in ascending order from least to most desirable):

- a. There is an absence of war or conflict.
- b. There is an absence of covert or overt state sponsored violence.
- c. There is an absence of structural violence.
- d. People are free to pursue their rights in an environment of economic, political and social equality where self-fulfilment and self-worth are nurtured regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

For the purpose of the next section of this paper (which focuses on peace at an international level) peace will be defined as the absence of actual or threatened conflict, intimidation or violence against another state. This definition takes into account scenarios of states conducting conflict in the form of undeclared war (e.g. Vietnam War, Cold War) and in situations where a ceasefire has been imposed (e.g. Kosovo) but not adhered to by the opposing sides.

After arriving at a definition of peace, the focus of this paper will now turn to non-violent approaches to peacemaking between states and whether they are practicable in today's world. Later the use of non-violent tactics by popular mass movements will be examined. Like conflict, non-violence can be viewed on a continuum ranging from attempts to persuade through engagement or debate to mass civil protests. Non-violent attempts at peacemaking can occur at the level of the nation state down to popular mass movements or individual protests. For instance, states routinely engage in conflict resolution through diplomacy and in some cases seek the assistance of a third party to settle a dispute. Non-violent methods have also been used successfully in anti-colonial struggles (notably in India) to undermine an unpopular regime. Techniques used by non-violent mass movements include strikes, non-cooperation, boycotts and marches and exclude methods that involve the use of violence and physical intimidation (Carter, 1990).

Peace can be made in several ways between states either by one state imposing its will on another (e.g. United States military intervention in Grenada and Panama in the 1980's) or via non-violent means. Nation states, particularly in this century have used non-violent methods as alternative to military force to resolve conflict. The world community has relied on a variety of non-violent methods of peacemaking including diplomacy, mediation and arbitration. Diplomacy contributes to non-violent peacemaking by (1) seeking to resolve conflict without the use of force (2) ending conflict after it has started and by (3) fostering better relations between states.

Diplomacy has been described by Watson (1986, cited in Baylis and Rengger, 1992) as a "civilising" procedure because it attempts to reconcile conflicting interests between parties through compromise and bargaining via communication. An example of diplomacy succeeding in preventing conflict is in Antarctica, where a treaty was signed in December 1959 by 12 countries (many with competing territorial claims) including Chile, Australia, Britain, France and the former USSR to preserve the continent for scientific investigation (Palmer, 1981). Diplomacy is often used to end conflict once violence has erupted. For example in 1973, diplomacy by the US and USSR was used to restrain the Israeli armed forces from destroying the encircled Egyptian Third Army. (Westwood, 1984). Diplomacy can also be used to improve relations between countries via the exchange of high level contacts which can reduce the chances of misunderstanding and conflict. (Ziegler, 1993). For instance, diplomatic efforts between the United States and the Soviet Union prevented potential conflict after an American military aircraft was forced down over the Kurile Islands in 1968 (Ziegler, 1993) by Soviet planes. Diplomacy has also forged peace between countries previously hostile to each other (e.g. US brokered 1978 Camp David peace agreement between Israel and Egypt).

Is diplomacy practicable as a non-violent peacemaking tool in today's world? Diplomacy provides an opportunity for states to communicate their intentions during times of tension and it also offers a face saving way of ending conflict. For instance, the United States maintained high level talks with the North Vietnamese in an attempt to negotiate an "honourable" withdrawal from Vietnam which eventually resulted in the signing of the Paris 1973 ceasefire agreement (Palmer, 1981). Diplomacy is also a relatively inexpensive alternative to war which costs lives and resources and is difficult to control. However, despite the many successes of diplomacy as a non-violent means of peacemaking it is not a panacea to end all conflict and in some cases it will delay or at worst exacerbate conflict between states. The 1938 Munich Agreement which was to create "peace in our time" failed as an appeasement strategy and 12 months later the Second World War began. It was not diplomacy but rather NATO attacks that finally ended the massive civilian casualties in cities and towns throughout Bosnia. In some cases, diplomatic negotiations fail to prevent conflict or tension between states because the issues evoke uncompromising nationalist sentiment (e.g. Serb refusal to disengage militarily from Kosovo) or there are entrenched security concerns that stifle negotiations. A recent example was Pakistan's refusal to cave in to world pressure (despite the risk of sanctions) not to detonate a nuclear device following India's nuclear test. Diplomacy is a useful method for

defusing and in some cases preventing violent conflict between states, but if it does not address the underlying issues behind conflict it can fail. In summary, diplomacy has a role to play in peacemaking however it cannot always prevent war or make peace, although it does provide a framework and opportunity for negotiations if the parties are motivated to participate in the process.

Apart from diplomacy other forms of non-violent approaches to peacemaking include mediation and arbitration. Mediation is a procedure where parties to a dispute agree for a neutral third party to become involved in facilitating a resolution (Brownie, 1997). Arbitration is a process of settlement which occurs via a third party and both parties in dispute agree to abide by the decision of the third party (Zeiger, 1993). Third parties frequently play a role in facilitating communication between states who may have severed contact because of their deteriorating relations. Zeiger (1993) noted that thousands of disputes this century have been settled via arbitration although he reported that most of these disputes have been minor with the exception of one case involving Pakistan and India. An undefined boundary was the source of armed clashes between India and Pakistan in 1965 until both parties agreed via mediation to take the dispute to arbitration. The arbitration panel which consisted of three members (i.e. one Pakistani, one Indian and one UN representative nominated by the secretary general) partitioned the border between the two countries and the decision was adhered to by both parties who were satisfied with the outcome. Several international institutions also exist, such as the International Court of Justice and the World Trade Organisation's dispute resolution services. However, it is very difficult to force a sovereign government to comply with an adverse finding from organisations such as these (Zeiger, 1993). In some cases a mediated agreement or arbitration may represent a better outcome than what is possible through protracted conflict. However arbitration and mediation as a non-violent means of peacekeeping is largely confined to disputes where the parties actively seek an external solution.

An increasingly common method of peacemaking is the use of UN or multinational forces to monitor the implementation of peace agreements. These forces contribute to peacemaking by providing a neutral presence that verifies adherence to a peace agreement or ceasefire. UN peacekeeping forces achieve this through their status as UN representatives not through their power as a military force (typically UN troops are lightly armed) (Zeiger, 1993). When NATO or multi-national forces depart from this role and are deployed to force parties to the negotiating table via the threat of military strikes they may be regarded by some as "facilitating the peace process" however this does not fit the definition of a non-violent peacemaking activity. Before

a UN peacekeeping force is deployed the disputing parties must firstly agree to a peace settlement, secondly consent to the presence of UN troops, thirdly the UN must fund the peacekeeping force, fourthly the five permanent members of the UN Security Council must not veto the proposal and finally, the disputing parties must comply with the settlement (Zeiger, 1993). This was not the case in 1982, when the presence of UN peacekeepers failed to deter Israel from invading South Lebanon. Examples of successful peacekeeping missions include the deployment of UN forces to Egypt in 1956 following the invasion by French and British forces. Another significant and successful UN peacekeeping mission was the multi-national peacekeeping force sent to the Sinai to monitor the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel. It would appear that UN peacekeeping forces can attain a level of success when certain conditions prevail that is when the UN presence is supported by both parties and both sides are motivated to comply with the agreement.

Having examined non-violent approaches to peacemaking between states this paper will now consider the use of non-violent techniques employed by mass movements within states. Mass movements have succeeded in overcoming structural violence perpetrated by the state through the use of non-violent strategies such as civil disobedience, mass protests, hunger strikes, boycotts, etc. Non-violent resistance was particularly successful in India against the British, however it has enjoyed less success against regimes where the media is controlled by the state and public accountability of the armed forces and police are non-existent. The mass internal unrest in China in the 1980's culminating in the Tienanmen Square massacre led to government reprisals and further crackdowns on political dissidents despite world condemnation. Non-violent protests in Tibet against Chinese occupation have been severely dealt with by Chinese authorities resulting in thousands of civilian deaths. The uprising known as the Prague Spring of 1968 by the Czech population against Soviet domination resulted in Warsaw Pact troops being deployed in the country and liberal reforms being abandoned (Palmer 1981). Although world sympathy for these movements was strong and continues to be in the case of Tibet, these non-violent mass movements were not instrumental in bringing about reform or democracy.

However, mass movements employing non-violent forms of protest have been instrumental in ending state sponsored oppression and violence in a number of cases. Notably these successes have been against liberal-democracies (e.g. Britain, South Africa) rather than totalitarian regimes (e.g. Chile, Soviet Union and China). Ghandi relied on moral persuasion and "the truth" to confront British oppression in India before he encouraged non-violent action which included boycotts and demonstrations

(Cox, 1986). While he encouraged passive resistance, he also curbed terrorist activity by pro-independence Indians (Palmer, 1981). Ghandi believed that a "just society could only be attained by good means" (Carter, 1990, p.214). Non-violence for some is more than an action it can also encompass principles that dictate a way of life (e.g. the Quakers and followers of Ghandi) (Cox, 1986).

Despite the opposition to violence and terrorism by advocates of non-violence many non-violent struggles have been simultaneously accompanied by terrorist or guerilla activity. This was the case in India, South Africa, Northern Ireland and during the formation of the state of Israel. It is difficult to attribute the success enjoyed by mass movements in for instance South Africa, Israel and East Timor solely to non-violent actions. In evaluating the success of non-violent approaches to peacemaking, it is important to consider the socio-political context in which these movements operate. The citizens of the Czech Republic and Hungary gained self-determination in the 1980's only after the collapse of the Soviet Union - an event unrelated to the non-violent protests in these countries decades earlier. The possibility of East Timorese independence has arisen after economic pressure and political change in Indonesia, not because of non-violent protests in Dili.

Media coverage (e.g newspapers, television and radio) has also played an important role in communicating the non-violent message of popular mass movements to the rest of the world. For instance, public pressure (particularly in Western democracies) forced major corporations and governments to cease trade, investment and sporting contacts with South Africa following media coverage of demonstrators being dispersed by police using whips and attack dogs. The absence of media coverage of non-violent demonstrations can mean that state sponsored repression and violence remains hidden from the eye of the world.

In summary, popular mass movements engaged in non-violent actions have in many cases succeeded in overcoming structural violence and repression perpetrated by the state and achieved a peace that was preferable to the status quo. In evaluating whether non-violent action is practicable in today's world, it is important to consider factors that have influenced its success in the past. It can be argued that media coverage; the type of regime (e.g. liberal democracy, dictatorship); the socio-political climate; and the presence of guerilla forces are all factors which play an important role in influencing the success or otherwise of popular mass movement engaged in non-violent struggles. Non-violent strategies appear less successful when they are

given no media coverage and the state perpetrating the oppression is a dictatorship or totalitarian regime.

The techniques and philosophy of non-violence as advocated by Ghandi have limited application in the sphere of peacemaking between states which have generally relied on more formal institutions and mechanisms to resolve their differences. Non-violent dispute resolution mechanisms such as diplomacy, arbitration and the United Nations have made positive contributions to maintaining and restoring peace although they are not always sufficient alone to guarantee the prevention of war. Unfortunately, not all states view these peacemaking options as the best way to achieve their aims. In some cases threats, intimidation and armed conflict seem a better proposition. Although the track record of non-violent approaches to peacemaking between states is at times chequered it continues to provide an alternative to the costly price of war and conflict.

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