

29 Overcoming war

The importance of constructive alternatives

Christine Schweitzer

Although organised group violence has probably accompanied most of the history of humankind (see Otterbein 2005), this is not true for standing armies and weapons of mass destruction, which have defined warfare since Napoleonic times and the American Civil War (see Krippendorff 1985 and Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff 1997: 18). Modern warfare has “evolved” to such a point that today it actually threatens the continued survival of humankind. But war remains an instrument of politics. Often it is not even seen as the means of last resort but as one of the first options, as exemplified not only by numerous civil wars but also by the so-called War on Terror, with its international aggression against Iraq and Afghanistan. Those speaking up and fighting against war, those who want to see disarmament and a fundamentally different way of dealing with conflicts, seem to be on the defensive at the beginning of the new millenium. But there have been other institutions, considered immortal until quite recently, which have indeed been largely abolished – slavery being the best example. There is no reason, therefore, to believe that war cannot be overcome as well.

My focus is what I call the “constructive” approach (see Ebert 1981) – the various concepts of alternatives to war and the military. I will present here three basic concepts which have developed, or at least come to the forefront of attention, in a historical sequence: civilian-based (or social) defence, civil (or nonviolent) conflict transformation and civilian (unarmed) peacekeeping. I will conclude with the statement that the “constructive approach” is not a complete solution as such, but that its pursuit will help to overcome war for three reasons. First, it deals with the legitimisation of war and the military, taking away much of the argument that “there is no other means”. Second, the implementation of these approaches, whenever suitable, demonstrates the power of nonviolence. And third, its determined pursuit would contribute to the removal of a number of other factors that favour war.

Why is there war?

How to abolish war is not a new question. Many philosophers of the Enlightenment asked this question, including Erasmus, Crúcé, Penn, Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant and Bentham. The strategies of course are highly dependent on the particular analysis of the causes of war. Unfortunately, there is no consensus as to why and how wars come about. Different theories and approaches have been offered by the social sciences: genetic and evolutionist theories (aggression as a genetically based function to maximise survival); behaviourist theories (war as learned behaviour); rational theories (maximisation of profit); various economic theories (greed, relative deprivation, bad economic situation, the interests of the arms industry); various political theories (power imbalances, the institution of the state per se, repressive political systems especially when there is rapid change, lack of access to power, cycles of peace and

war, the institution of the military, etc.); ecological theories (worsening ecological conditions and availability of resources); cultural theories (ethnicity or nationalism as causes of war); and cognitive theories (attitudes and belief systems) (see Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff 1997, Smith 2004). The only "almost-consensus" is that it is wrong to assume that war has only one cause, and that there is therefore only one remedy that would do away with it. Dan Smith (2004) argues that it is obvious that there are "very few necessary conditions" that need to be fulfilled in order for a war to develop, and

very many sufficient conditions, of which only a few . . . may apply, in any single conflict. War is possible as soon as weapons are available with which to fight it and as long as there is a dispute between two or more parties. What makes war probable, however, is a far more complicated question

(Smith 2004: 4).

He proposes distinguishing between background causes (for example, the exclusion of groups from power), mobilisation strategies (how key actors seek to achieve their goals), triggers (factors that influence the timing when an armed conflict starts) and catalysts (factors influencing the intensity and duration of a conflict).

There is even less agreement on how to overcome or abolish war. Those considering economics the root cause – either concretely in the form of the arms industry and other war profiteers, or as a result of the capitalist and consumerist system in general – see the solution as lying in a changed world-wide economic system. Those who consider the psyche of the individual human being and its shortcomings the beginning of the problem all argue that, first, the individual must change, that attitudes towards violence and towards life must change, and everything else will follow. Those coming from a *realpolitik* position point out that democracies have more or less stopped fighting each other, and therefore suggest working on international governance with democratic rules (for a scientific argument, see Senghaas 2004). Those who believe that the ultimate power rests with the people, not with any government, go for peoples' uprisings and civilian disobedience (see Sharp 1973). And a constructive "school" works through the creation of "alternatives". What such alternatives may be has changed over the time. Before 1989, when the threat of an international conflict between West and East seemed the predominant parameter, it was social (or civilian-based) defence that was promoted. After 1989 when it seemed that international conflicts might die out and be replaced by internal (civil) wars as the main threat, "civil conflict resolution" (or "transformation", or whatever terms are used) became the new key concept and still is. What mainly characterises this approach is the discussing of conflicts that other people have, and seeing one's own (usually the Western) world as an impartial "third party". Moreover, in recent years, the issue of protection has come to the forefront of many discussions (as in the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect), and the concept of civilian (or unarmed) peacekeeping has been proposed as an alternative to military peacekeeping.

Social defence

Social defence (or civilian-based defence) is a concept of nonviolent resistance for very particular situations of large-group conflict which allows a clear distinction between aggressor and defender. It was developed on the basis of a particular scenario, that of a military attack by the Warsaw Pact countries on Western Europe – a war to bring about regime change, as it would be called today. Later, social defence was broadened to cover other scenarios, such

as coups d'états or interventions by (former) allies. The starting point for social defence is that in most cases of (international) war the occupying forces depend on the cooperation of the population of the occupied country, just as putschists replace only the people at the top of the bureaucracy and rely on ruling over the others. The basic idea is that this cooperation can be refused or withdrawn, and that if the population is willing to accept the sanctions that are sure to follow, the aggressor is eventually bound to fail because he cannot govern the territory he occupied with his troops (see Sharp 1985, Martin 1993).

In the 1990s the interest in social defence waned with the breakdown of the Warsaw Pact and the consequent new security threats perceived. In fact, social defence has few answers to offer in scenarios of civil war or international terrorism. However, the concept has survived and entered both into training and advising of civil rights movements in other places (see Sharp 1992, Huxley 1992), and also remains a valid concept for whatever future constellations might bring the threat of international war closer to our doorsteps again.

Nonviolent conflict transformation

Nonviolent conflict transformation as a practice is of course as old as conflict itself, as countless examples from history as well as so-called traditional mechanisms of dealing with conflict show. As a concept presented as an alternative to military interventions and mediation backed by military force it is, however, much younger. Most of the peace research literature – with the exception of the field of mediation – stems from the 1990s onwards. Generally speaking, the task of conflict transformation is to prevent wars and, where conflicts do escalate into violence, to end them, restore security and remove the causes and the consequences of violence successfully and in a sustainable manner (see Galtung 1976). Today, states have created a number of instruments for this purpose. On the side of civil society the number of actors, programmes and projects has similarly increased. In addition, conflict sensitivity is considered more and more a general issue in aid, development cooperation and human rights work.

Conflict transformation has three main functions or tasks. Johan Galtung (1976) called them peace strategies, and the former UN secretary general, Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1992), used them in his "Agenda for Peace" (see Schweitzer 2009a and 2009b for an overview).

The first is peacemaking, the task of finding an agreement about the visible aspects of the conflict, which usually happens in negotiations. Peacemaking refers to the search for a solution to the visible, explicit aspects of the conflict between the parties. There are three basic types:

- Peacemaking by law. This quite rare type could mean for example that the conflict is taken to an international court whose rulings are considered binding for the parties in conflict. The precondition of course is that all parties are willing to respect the authority of the court.
- Peacemaking by negotiation. Very often external parties play the role of mediators. These mediators are usually representatives of international organisations (such as the UN or its regional organisations) or governments. Comparatively rare are so-called "elder statesmen". NGOs are even rarer since they usually lack the access to this highest level of decision-makers. A small number of them nevertheless have established themselves in this field, usually in the role of mediators that prepare formal negotiations through various "good offices".
- The enforcement of an agreement by external powers through power and violence, for example through sanctions or the use of military power. It is difficult to separate this type of peacemaking from the second since "coercive diplomacy" is often used in negotiation.

Peacekeeping is the task of using controls to prevent violence and restore security. This task will be discussed further below.

Peacebuilding is the task of dealing with the causes as well as the consequences of the violent conflict. It consists of a combination of different tasks that all aim to reduce the causes of violent conflict and work to undo its destructive consequences. These destructive consequences are destitution, material destruction, the breakdown of social relations, hatred of the "other", who is perceived as the "enemy", traumatisation, and often also the weakening or total breakdown of state functions and of civil society. Peacebuilding also includes activities aiming openly at inducing social change. It is often placed in the post-war stage of a conflict. But the majority of the tasks and functions of peacebuilding also take place in the "hot" phases of a conflict. So it needs to be emphasised that this is not about the description of a certain phase of conflict, but about certain tasks or functions. In two other publications (Schweitzer 2009a and 2009b) I have tried to formulate 10 categories of peacebuilding objectives and tasks:

- 1 To help people to survive: humanitarian aid.
- 2 To reduce the number of weapons and warriors: disarmament generally (arms control), disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of soldiers (DDR) after a peace agreement, and removal of land mines.
- 3 To repair the damage and enable people to return: reconstruction and refugee return.
- 4 To strengthen social behaviour and social relations, empower people and help them to overcome the wounds of war: social and psycho-social work.
- 5 To support economic recovery.
- 6 To create justice: transitional justice, dealing with the past.
- 7 To build a functioning state: state-building and democratisation.
- 8 To support civil society.
- 9 To support the capacity for peace and reconciliation: peace work.
- 10 Normalisation of relationships and cooperation in further sectors of society: support and exchange in science, culture and sports.

Conflict transformation must not be equated with what external actors (so-called third parties – international organisations, third countries and NGOs working on a world-wide scope – are doing. Much more decisive is what state and non-state actors are doing in the country concerned. It is they who have the key to war or peace, while intervention by external parties is often useful, sometimes essential but sometimes also harmful, namely if it leads to marginalisation and disempowerment of these local actors.

Civilian peacekeeping

Peacekeeping is one component in the total picture of functions and strategies that are needed when seeking to transform conflict and eventually overcome war. In many cases peacekeeping has proven to be essential in

- monitoring ceasefire agreements and, in doing so, building the trust necessary to overcome the conflict in the post-war stage;
- controlling buffer zones, disarmament and demobilisation;
- protecting the civilian population in general and vulnerable groups in particular (for example, minorities, internally displaced people) in all phases of a conflict;

- preventing violence in critical moments like elections, referendums or the implementation of other agreements.

The by now almost traditional picture of the lightly armed Blue Helmet soldier standing on some street surrounded by curious children has today, due to these developments, and due to wars like those in Afghanistan and Iraq which are falsely presented to the international public as “humanitarian”, been replaced by the picture of a NATO soldier in combat dress sitting in an armoured vehicle, driving around in fear of a suicide attack by terrorists.

But at the same time as what I would call the militarisation of peacekeeping has occurred, the concept of alternative peacekeeping undertaken by unarmed civilians has also won ground. Why is the military often used? Of course it has the short-term enforcement capacity that unarmed missions lack. But often more important is that it has the material resources available or easy access to them (equipment and money), that it has the necessary personnel resources both in terms of a large standing army and institutions for training, that it can therefore always be deployed at short notice, that it has expert knowledge relevant for moving in areas recently affected by war, and that it has a professional attitude towards risks. All these points could easily be transferred to a civilian organisation (or organisations) if the political will was there to do so.

Civilian peacekeeping I have defined elsewhere (Schweitzer 2010) as “the prevention of direct violence through influence or control of the behaviour of potential perpetrators by unarmed civilians who are deployed on the ground”. Compared to other fields in peace and conflict research, civilian peacekeeping has so far received very little attention.

Civilian peacekeeping as it presents itself today has five different manifestations:

- 1 Activities that could be summarised under the heading of civilian peacekeeping have a history that goes back at least to the 1930s, certainly with earlier cases yet to be discovered in the history books (see Weber 2000, Schweitzer et al 2001), and with Gandhi's concept of a *Shanti Sena* as model.
- 2 Different peace team organisations, with quite different approaches, methods and philosophies. At one end of the spectrum there is Peace Brigades International (PBI). This was founded in 1981 and has specialised in non-partisan protective accompaniment of human rights activists, and been very successful in this work in many countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Indonesia). At the other end there are groups – often of fundamentalist Christian orientation – engaging in solidarity work with groups or peoples they perceive as being oppressed, in particular in countries in which the United States (where most of these groups hail from) are involved in the conflicts (see Moser-Puangsuwan and Weber 2000).
- 3 The 1990s saw the first larger civilian missions with protection mandates deployed by governments or international organisations: the European Community (later, Union) Monitoring Mission (ECMM) and the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) in the former Yugoslavia and the Truce/Peace Monitoring Group in Bougainville are examples (see Schweitzer et al 2001), as are today's EU observers in Georgia.
- 4 In the last 10 years relief, development (and human rights) organisations have increasingly started to realise that humanitarian protection is a task they must take into account in their programming and work in the field.
- 5 The fifth has yet to come to completion: larger-scale unarmed civilian peacekeeping by NGOs. The NGO, Nonviolent Peace-force, has (as did many earlier organisations) set itself the goal of growing sufficiently to enable it to deploy civilian peacekeepers in

numbers that would allow comparison with governmental peacekeeping missions, but in spite of fast progress over the last years and growing recognition by a number of governments who fund its activities it has yet to achieve this aim (see www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org).

Many people, used to the predominant framework where violence is considered the only source of protection, find it hard to understand what an unarmed peacekeeper can achieve in a violent environment. It is true that unarmed civilians do not have means for direct enforcement – they cannot shoot and kill attacking perpetrators, as military peacekeepers nowadays are usually mandated and equipped for. Unarmed peacekeepers however, have their own sources of power (see Mahony and Eguren 1997, Schirch 2006, Schweitzer (ed.) 2010):

- Foreign nationals often are protected – at least to a certain degree which may vary from place to place – from violence because they are respected *per se* or because the countries or organisations they come from enjoy such respect. This is particularly true in countries of the global South where past and present power disparities protect those coming from the global North or representing the international community (UN). Being protected themselves they can help protect individuals, groups and communities they are accompanying because a potential perpetrator, if he attacks, risks hurting or killing foreign nationals.
- In addition the potential perpetrator runs the risk that the foreign nationals will report the misdeed to the international world, which may lead directly or indirectly to repercussions for them, for example in the form of pressure by supporters of the perpetrators who find themselves vulnerable to international discredit or sanctions. “The world is watching” has often proved a powerful deterrent.
- Foreign nationals and locals may be protected because of the standing they have within the local community (for example, in the latter case, as village elders), and again transmit this standing to the community as a whole.

All these sources of protection of course are relative – perpetrators may be aware of these factors but dismiss them, or there may be countries and areas where foreign nationals are hated rather than protected by their status as outsiders – our Western countries unfortunately tending to be such places.

Nevertheless, when one takes a step back and looks at the efficiency of nonviolence as such, it must be recognised that the nonviolent means are very powerful means (see the bibliography on people power by Carter, Clark and Randle 2006 for references). “People power” movements have without use of any organised violence overthrown numerous dictatorships (as in the Philippines and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), have liberated countries from colonial rule (India, Zambia) and have made very powerful countries withdraw their armies from foreign places they have invaded (Vietnam). Even under the Nazi regime, which was not known for its leniency regarding civil society protest, civil society in Germany as well as the countries occupied by the German forces in World War II was able to protect Jews or other threatened groups when they tried. Famous examples are the teachers in Norway refusing to submit to the implementation of a fascist school curriculum, and the “women of Rosen Street” – women married to Jews who, when their husbands were arrested in 1942, protested in front of the prison on Rosen Street, Berlin, until their husbands were released (see Semelin 1995).

Conclusions

I have briefly presented three generations of concepts that are part of the “constructive approach”. Their pursuit alone would of course not be enough to overcome the institution of war, or lead countries to disarm and abolish their armies. There are other factors at work which are relevant when looking at the causes of war. In particular, war profiteering by private and governmental actors, strategic interests to control the world (or large parts of it) and strong ideological barriers cannot be overcome simply as a result of pointing out that it is not necessary to send in the military or to resort to arms, and that there are other ways to solve conflict and to make a living without exploiting one’s neighbour. The three constructive alternatives presented here do not present a full solution, but their pursuit will help to overcome war for three reasons. First, these alternatives deal with the legitimisation of war and military, taking away much of the argument, “but there are no other means”. This goes both for the conservative legitimisation of the military as a means of defence against the evil neighbour and for military interventions.

Second, the implementation of these approaches, wherever suitable, demonstrates the power of nonviolence. A good example is the wave of people power movements that have gone around the world since the Philippine uprising against Marcos in 1986. People see that nonviolence can be efficient and effective, and that does positively influence other movements trying to work out how to achieve their goals. To use Dan Smith’s terminology, mobilisation strategies, which are one factor in how war comes about, may be affected positively.

And third, pursuing these determinedly would contribute to the removal of certain other factors that favour war, in the area of triggers as well as root causes. If the threat of the use of arms is removed so too is one powerful potential trigger of the actual outbreak of violence. And the different means described as those areas where conflict transformation may be active deal with many of the root causes there may be.

In other words, social defence, nonviolent conflict transformation and civilian peacekeeping work on all the three angles of Johan Galtung’s famous triangle: They have the potential to change attitudes, they constitute a different form of behaviour and are thereby a catalyst for further nonviolent action, and they have the potential to tackle the root causes – the contents or contradiction – of the conflict.

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PART 4: CONFLICT ANALYSIS, TRANSFORMATION AND PREVENTION

Suggestions for further reading

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Websites

The Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation: <http://www.berghof-handbook.net/>
Christian Peacemaker Teams: <http://www.cpt.org/>
Nonviolent Peaceforce: <http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/>
SIPRI's Databases: <http://www.sipri.org/databases>
South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission: <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/>

Questions for reflection and discussion

- 1 What are some of the main challenges in building a stable democratic state after the end of a war?
- 2 What are the most important arguments in favour of and against the view presented by Richard Falk in 'Nonviolent Geopolitics: Rationality and Resistance'?
- 3 What can be done to reduce the dominant role of the winners in courts for war crimes and commissions for reconciliation?
- 4 What is the role of disarmament negotiations when an increasing number of wars are fought by non-state actors?
- 5 Why have the alternatives to war less clout among most politicians and academics than do the military measures used to try to reduce or end conflicts?