

SUMMARY

NONVIOLENCE AND EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE



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The contents of the report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation.

INTRODUCTION

Research on nonviolent action as a world wide phenomenon and a peaceful alternative to violent means in conflicts has for the past five years grown significantly and provides academics and practitioners of today with an impressive and inspiring span of findings. This is one of the main conclusions of the recent quantitative research review commissioned by the Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation (SweFOR).¹ This paper on external assistance to nonviolent campaigns, attempts to further develop our understanding of nonviolent action in the context of prevention of armed conflicts.

We define nonviolent action as civilian extraparliamentarian activities (social, psychological, economical or political), combining not using violence (without violence) and at the same time opposing the use of violence (anti-violence).² It is a means in social conflict, based on either pragmatic or pacifist approaches. Aware of the great diversity in type of situation where nonviolent means can be and have been applied, the Project on Nonviolence and Prevention focuses exclusively on conflict situations where the contested issue of the parties is of a national character, concerning either territorial control/self-determination or governmental control/regime change. This is relevant in the context of prevention, as national high stake conflicts are more likely to escalate into becoming violent than conflicts over specific liberties (civil, political, cultural or economic).³ External assistance is here generally defined as support coming from actors outside of a country's borders.⁴

Although new statistical analyses show how nonviolent campaigns are efficient in fulfilling stated goals⁵, due to various factors such as characteristics and nonviolent strategies of the movements, we still know comparatively little about how such movements can be supported and with what effects.⁶ This is especially true in the larger context of prevention of armed conflict, where early action is essential. This report aims to shed some light on some of these questions by presenting a brief research review of the topic as well as sharing some of the conclusions and discussions emanating from an NGO-expert discussion (June 2008), expert comments of representatives from Sida (Swedish Development Agency) and the Nonviolent Peaceforce.

A BRIEF REVIEW OF RESEARCH

External assistance to foreign opposition movements or nonviolent NGOs has mainly been debated vocally, often in black and white terms, where it is either criticized or

¹ The review, compiled by Mathilda Lindgren, focuses on nonviolent movements, methods and campaigns on a national level of analysis, delimiting the quantitative research to campaigns and conflicts about either governmental power or self-determination and territory. See "Forskningsöversikt, ickevåld – empiri och resultat" May 2008.

² Vinthagen 2005, p. 30; Sharp 1973, p. 63f

³ See for instance the results of Öbergs (2002), where high stake issues increases the risk of violent escalation of protest in ethnic conflicts.

⁴ Soerensen (2006) p. 2

⁵ Chenoweth and Stephan has found that nonviolent campaigns have a short-term success rate of 55%, compared to that of violent campaigns at 28,4%. (2008 p. 18)

⁶ Johansen (2007) p. 157

commended.⁷ There are today few comparative studies that analyze different cases and types of external assistance.⁸ However, this gap is gradually being filled by, for instance, several papers presented at Coventry University Seminar in 2006 on support of unarmed resistance movements, as well as by the new statistical analyses of Chenoweth and Stephan (2008) and Bond and Bond (2008). Together, these works begin to probe deeper into the dynamics of external aid, answering questions such as; Who are the donors and the recipients? How can they support and be supported? What are the effects of different kinds of support? When can external assistance be constructive or conversely destructive, for whom and why?

TYPE OF ACTORS AND ASSISTANCE

Before looking into some of the findings on advantages and disadvantages of external assistance, it is useful to define relevant actors and options of assistance. As possible receivers of assistance, Johansen (2008) differentiates between governments and civil society actors (NGOs, media, business community, political parties not in power etc). Soerensen (2006) also identifies unstructured networks and hierarchical organizations as receivers of support.⁹ The donors on the other hand, can be classified as domestic¹⁰ and foreign donors. We shall here only focus on the latter. "Foreign donors" might include states (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Development) or private organizations close to states, development agencies or civil society actors.¹¹ Johansen also identifies international actors such as diasporas, large private, independent donors¹² (domestic or foreign) and IGOs (EU, UN etc). According to Carter, some of the most conducive IGOs for the backing of nonviolent resistance movements include the EU, particularly by monitoring human rights; the UN, by legitimizing the decolonization processes; and, finally and foremost, the OSCE. As relatively unbiased, with a developed focus on democracy and human rights, the OSCE stands out as one of the most influential IGOs in supporting nonviolent resistance movements, particularly in relation to national elections.¹³

There are many different types of assistance. They often act simultaneously and are seldom completely independent of each other.¹⁴ They can generally be categorized as 1) financial, 2) material, 3) practical, 4) participatory and 5) symbolic support.¹⁵ Development agencies' assistance may be channelled as so called democracy export/promotion, governmental financial support through state-financed trusts and foundations, and civil society support through the financing of sister organizations, preventive presence in the country or capacity building. A donor's motives may be based on moral concern or expectations of gaining something in return, whereas a receiver's motives may rely on a sense of need or depend on a longer relationship of reciprocity.

⁷ Soerensen (2006) p. 2; Some written case study analyses elaborate on the issue. See for instance Åslund and McFaul (2006) *Squeezing the Orange Revolution*.

⁸ Note that this review is only introductory and not comprehensive.

⁹ Soerensen (2006) p.

¹⁰ Domestic donors can however be interesting for indirect external support. Johansen delimits domestic supporters to the nonviolent movement itself, other domestic organizations, individuals and institutions.

¹¹ Johansen (2006), (Draft2008); Soerensen (2006) p. 2

¹² An example of such a private donor is philanthropist George Soros who since 1979 has contributed with large amounts of money to nonviolent democratisation movements in the Balkans and Eastern and Central Europe. ([Hwww.georgesoros.comH](http://www.georgesoros.com))

¹³ Carter (2006) p. 8f

¹⁴ Johansen (2008) p. 5

¹⁵ Soerensen (2006) p. 2ff

Each action of assistance has furthermore a certain function and a certain meaning to the donor and the receiver, which are important in our understanding of unarmed resistance and nonviolent action.¹⁶

DISADVANTAGES AND HINDRANCES

Direct financial and material aid, from private donors, governments or NGOs, is often criticized for replacing local support and sense of ownership of the nonviolent movements. Recent quantitative research finds that external direct material aid¹⁷ to nonviolent campaigns has a statistically significant negative effect on the likeliness of the campaign fulfilling its short-term goals of, for instance, self-determination or power sharing.¹⁸ This is explained by lack of local ownership and decreased legitimacy of the movement in the eyes of the domestic population – the primary basis of support. In other words, foreign aid risks replacing local backing, which may weaken the efforts of the population in withdrawing their consent from the regime. We still know little of the disadvantages of financial support. However, Chenoweth and Stephan find that sanctions, a type of indirect financial assistance for resistance movements, have a negative effect on nonviolent campaigns, as these often essentially have a negative impact on the population and its living conditions.¹⁹

Studying international financial assistance, Johansen identifies few disadvantages per se, although it runs counter to the norm of national sovereignty. Russia (July 2005), Zimbabwe and Eritrea (2005) have all passed legislations²⁰ restricting or forbidding foreign support of civil society actors while the regimes of China, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have increased pressure on civil society in general.²¹ Similarly, help to nonviolent movements working for increased democracy becomes increasingly difficult when such movements are labelled as terrorist.

In relation to different types of support, Rigby (2006) highlights the risk and possible disadvantage of, otherwise constructive, aid to external diasporas that have become detached from the reality of certain conflicts, and aggravating communal cleavages and polarisation in their home societies.²² This is plausibly a risk for all kind of actors, where external assistance might exacerbate a conflict, especially in a short-term perspective and in situations where the supporting actors' neutrality is questioned. Furthermore, theories of conspiracy, a common hindrance to external support, can be addressed by increasing transparency.²³

ADVANTAGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Many maintain that external financial aid is often crucial for a movement's survival, particularly in the early stages of its formation.²⁴ There are today no statistical or

¹⁶ Soerensen (2006) p. 6

¹⁷ Note that this kind of support is more delimited than development aid as democracy promotion.

¹⁸ Chenoweth and Stephan (2008) p. 14f; The same study shows that violent campaigns become four times more likely to succeed when receiving material assistance.

¹⁹ Chenoweth and Stephan (2008)

²⁰ Note also that Ethiopia is also about to pass a similar legislation.

²¹ Johansen (2008) p. 5

²² Rigby (2006)

²³ Soerensen (2006) p. 8

²⁴ Palmer (2003) p. 154f; Ackerman and Kreugler (1994) p. 32f; Johansen (2008) p. 9; Sharp (2005)

comparative case analyses of the effects of financial assistance, but independent case studies often emphasize the advantages of early financial support, especially from civil society actors, as this also allows for a mutual exchange of experiences.²⁵

There are also several advantages of international presence in the form of observers and volunteers. First of all, such assistance may strengthen the protected and observed nonviolent organizations.²⁶ Secondly, so-called accompaniment can be very effective in confronting common methods of repressive governments that attempt to inhibit dissent. According to Martin, observers may counter governmental cover-up through publishing reports, communicating lies and rationalizations as well as intimidations to the international community through investigational newsletters, for example.²⁷

Studying larger processes of democracy transitions, Ackerman and Karatnycky find nonviolent methods to have significant positive long-term effects on democratization, which, they claim, can be further enhanced by third party assistance, initially general and later, more specified. The process can be directed at increasing knowledge of nonviolent methods, at building governmental platforms for dialogue or at media and anti-corruption efforts, as well as training of political parties. They further emphasize the importance in assisting in the construction of broad-based coalitions for the future formation of opinion in civil society, as well as focusing on reducing the legitimacy of repressive behaviour of governments through preventive diplomacy, increased exchange of information and education.²⁸ Sharp also emphasizes the advantages of education and training in nonviolent methods.²⁹

Discussing the importance of international solidarity, García-Durán highlights how external actors can help coordinate humanitarian assistance efforts and, perhaps, even more important, raise international awareness of domestic situations of conflict, injustice and repression. This can be done through, for instance, distribution of leaflets and books, organizing of tours for the representatives of the national nonviolent movement or through lobbying towards relevant regional organizations as well as towards governments in neighbouring countries.³⁰

Increasing international attention on nonviolent methods in general may provide a new opportunity for the prevention of armed conflicts, as assistance may be activated before conflicts risk becoming violent, while there are greater opportunities for resolution.³¹

²⁵ Cerletti (2006)

²⁶ García-Durán (2006) p. 11

²⁷ Martin (2006)

²⁸ Ackerman and Karatnycky (2005) p. 11ff

²⁹ Sharp (2005) p. 412, 471f

³⁰ García-Durán (2006) p. 10f

³¹ McKinzie and Farriss find that protests that are violently repressed by institutionally weak governments have an increased risk of becoming violent (2008 p. 9) and Chenoweth and Stephan (2008 p. 5f) and Finnegan and Hackley (2008) emphasize how actors using nonviolent methods are less extreme in behaviour and therefore such conflicts are much easier to resolve

EXPERT COMMENTS

*Reflections of the Expert Discussion Forum, 10 June 2008, Sundbyberg*³²

In discussing advantages and disadvantages of different kinds of external assistance to nonviolent movements, a handful of representatives of Swedish civil society and academia³³ suggested three actors to be of high importance for support to nonviolent initiatives, both as direct agents connected to the country and as indirect channels for other external actors. These include NGOs from the global south with experience of nonviolent activities in their home countries, peace observers from external NGOs and different kinds of mediators. NGOs from the global south come with a special kind of legitimacy as they often have practical experience of nonviolent methods and come from countries free of post-colonial motives. This makes them less likely criticized for engaging in the conflict and it allows for a fruitful exchange of experiences and moral support. They also contribute with expert knowledge on how to operate in autocratic regimes. Peace observers, on the other hand, may provide protection and increased international awareness of the conflict situation through their networks. Finally, a mediator can assist in resolving the conflict by providing spaces and entry points for dialogue and de-escalation of the conflict.

For external civil society actors and governments outside of the conflict area some of the most fruitful strategies of assistance include the formation of international public opinion and increased awareness of the conflict as well as capacitation and training in nonviolence. These actors can make conflict situations visible for institutions of the EU or the UN, by inviting representatives of nonviolent movements to these fora, which might increase international awareness and, in extension, increase pressure and incentives for accountability, dialogue and democratization of the conflict government. For development agencies, NGOs, and other civil society actors, capacity building and training can strengthen nonviolent movements and make them more independent. By offering tools for conflict analysis and conflict resolution, such assistance will most likely also increase the local ownership of the process. A third strategy of financial or material aid might also be constructive in the initial phase of mobilization. However, this risks loosing local ownership and creating overconfidence in the responsibility and capacity of external IGOs and NGOs.³⁴ Financial support of development agencies through capacity building, might however decrease part of these risks.

Supporting nonviolent movements, especially in autocratic countries, can be dangerous and controversial and it does not automatically imply success and increased democratization. In deciding on whether or not to assist, we need to identify, not only *who* should support and *how*, but also *why* such support would be given and *when*. For civil society actors, it then becomes important to have a profound understanding of the processes and dynamics of conflict, nonviolent action, governments and IGOs.

³² Participating in the meeting were representatives of the Life and Peace Institute, the Department of Peace and Conflict Research of Uppsala University, other researchers and the Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation.

³³ Note that the participants had not, at the time of the meeting, seen the introductory summary of research on external assistance of nonviolent movements and methods.

³⁴ In this regard, the effects of financial support might also be a result of the donor actor's political agenda with influence on the process. (Smedjeback, Martin, e-mail 8 August 2008)

Comments of Nonviolent Peaceforce

Nonviolent Peaceforce, a member of the European Peacebuilding Liason Office (EPLO), emphasize in their comments how nonviolent interventions of INGO's, compared to many other unarmed or armed interventions, often enjoy greater freedom of action, as well as legitimacy, than states do. We find some of the reasons for this advantage of INGOs in the Feasibility Report of Nonviolent Peaceforce (2001). INGOs are namely not directly inhibited by e.g. international law on territorial integrity and sovereignty of states. In fact, humanitarian law with provisions on war provides protection for non-combatants and human rights law³⁵ theoretically gives INGOs a certain right to intervene on behalf of the protection of human rights – a right not yet normatively or legally accepted, although elaborated on by the United Nations General Assembly in a draft declaration from 1998.³⁶

Turning to the European Union and its role in conflict prevention Alessandro Rossi emphasizes two ways in which the EU can assist nonviolent movements for regime change. First of all, the European Initiative for Human Rights and Democracy Funding Programme provides assistance from the EU's country-based funding in countries where the EU stands for "regime change". Mr Rossi exemplifies this type of work with Belarus, one of Europe's last autocracies. Although not explicitly specified by the European Commission online, the Strategy Paper of the Democracy and Human Rights Projects of the European Commission (2007-2010) suggests that the EU may provide support to nonviolent movements for example by strengthening the role of civil society in promoting human rights and democratic reform, in facilitating the peaceful conciliation of group interests and in consolidating political participation and representation.³⁷ A second option for EU involvement can come from its member states through their diplomatic representatives in the delegations of the European Commission, placed in non-EU countries. These may work with and support national nonviolent initiatives through diplomatic instruments such as human rights and political dialogue with the third countries or implementation of guidelines for human rights defenders.³⁸

Comments of the Democracy and Governance Unit of SIDA

SIDA, the Swedish development Agency, supports three types of peace and security projects: 1) Promoting dialogue: The objectives of SIDA's dialogue promoting activities are to change attitudes and to create, or improve, the conditions for dialogue, negotiation and peaceful conflict resolution. 2) Promoting security: This might include civil peace monitoring, dissemination of accurate information and disarming, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants. 3) Promoting structural stability: Trying to deal with the causes of war and insecurity such as, for example, controlling different kinds of weapons and reforming the security sector. SIDA offers only very limited financial or capacity-building support to the work of nonviolent movements through its cooperation with Swedish civil society organizations. There is no strongly developed discussion in SIDA on the issue. However, through a long-term, and relatively broad, focus on

³⁵ See the preambles of the International Covenant on Civic and Political Rights (ICCPR) as well as the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights where individuals do not only have the right but also the responsibility to protect human rights (Schweitzer p. 2001) p. 35

³⁶ The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders was adopted by the GA in 1998. See A/RES/53/144. (<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/defenders/declaration.htm>)

³⁷ European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) Strategy Paper 2007 – 2010 (DG RELEX/B/1 JVK 70618)

³⁸ Comments of Alessandro Rossi, 29 August 2008, per e-mail.

processes for peace and development, democracy and structural changes, SIDA has indirectly begun to channel assistance to some nonviolent movements.

An example of this is in Sri Lanka, where SIDA initially declined supporting a local branch of Nonviolent Peaceforce in 2005. SIDA had initial concerns regarding the structure of its programme in Sri Lanka and pointed to a lack of institutionalized mechanisms for nonviolent interventions, existent in other organizations such as the Red Cross. The Swedish Monitoring Mission had just been deported from the country and a situation of drastically increased risks. However, after improvements in the organizational structures of Nonviolent Peaceforce, SIDA granted it financial aid for actions in Sri Lanka in 2008. The nonviolent preventive presence of the organization, especially its providing information as well as witnessing and reporting on kidnappings, was regarded as important, likewise its assistance to local organizations in protecting human rights, building peace and development.

The case of Sri Lanka is relatively unique in that SIDA had previously seldom granted any direct aid through its country-budgets for nonviolent movements. SIDA focuses generally on conflict resolution and peacebuilding, rather than on nonviolent presence and direct prevention. Palestine however has also received aid for nonviolent peace observers, but this support has mainly been funded indirectly via Swedish civil society organizations.

SIDA is primarily concerned with structural prevention of armed conflict as one of the main goals of its development aid. This can be envisaged both directly via funds, or indirectly, via Swedish civil society actors. Guiding this work is the principle of “do no harm”. Therefore, though not an explicit ambition of SIDA, its preventive goal of international development work may indirectly lend support to nonviolent initiatives.³⁹

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There are many channels for different kinds of support that deserve clarification and structuring, in order to better be able to answer crucial questions on nonviolent action and prevention of armed conflicts. Some of the remaining gaps include differentiating between various phases of conflicts, so as to see whether some donors, recipients and types of assistance are more effective early or later on in a conflict. What can be done within the ongoing programmes of the governments and institutions of the EU? Do we perhaps need political leadership on these kinds of specific matters within the framework of prevention and in that case, how can such leadership and norms be developed? Or are civil society actors better equipped to constructively and effectively provide financial, material and practical support, as well as to offer their preventive presence to resistance movements and different kinds of nonviolent democracy movements?

The expert comments included in this report begin to provide some of the answers to the above questions. The role of civil society actors such as INGOs, NGOs from the global south and peace observers/human rights defenders appears to be central, contributing with constructive potential for peaceful engagement. This is mainly due to a relatively high degree of freedom of action compared to that of states, and also from

³⁹ Telephone interview with Urban Sjöström, Division for Democratic Governance, 18 June 2008.

legitimacy and perceived neutrality, professional commitment as well as previous experience. These actors can assist nonviolent initiatives for democracy through the two strategies of: 1) public opinion, raising international awareness of conflict situations and 2) local capacity-building. A third strategy for involvement, discussed in the comments, is that of financial/material aid, used by for example development agencies and the EU in its Programmes on Human Rights and Democracy and work of the delegations of the European Commission. However, the comments indicate that financial/material aid should be distributed at an early stage and with great care in order not to endanger local ownership. The recent experience of the Swedish development agency in Sri Lanka incorporates this logic where local nonviolent initiatives have been granted financial aid for a constructive presence, providing dialogue spaces and information dissemination. This kind of engagement is relatively new for Swedish development agencies and deserves more attention and understanding for the future development of such programmes. Finally, a profound understanding of the international political systems, which NGOs, IGOs and states engage in, is of great importance, as well as the complementing support for nonviolent campaigns with measures such as conflict resolution, e.g. mediation.

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Comments

Expert Discussion Forum, Sundbyberg, 10 June 2008

- *Malin Brenk* – Life and Peace Institute, Uppsala
- *Kristina Lundborg* – Life and Peace Institute, Uppsala
- *Birgit Carlsson* – Independent Researcher
- *Isak Svensson* – Associate Professor at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University
- *Martin Smedjeback* – Programme Officer for Nonviolence at SweFOR
- *Håkan Mårtensson* – Project Leader, Programme Officer at SweFOR

Telephone Interview with SIDA, 18 June 2008

- *Urban Sjöström*, Division for Democratic Governance

Comments via e-mail from Nonviolent Peaceforce, 29 August 2008

- *Alessandro Rossi*, European Coordinator