
Double Standards in Comparisons of Violence and Nonviolence

— ◆ —

NED DOBOS

In the fifty years that have passed since the publication of Gene Sharp's *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, empirical evidence for the effectiveness of non-violence has grown considerably. The most compelling example is Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan's *Why Civil Resistance Works* (2012). It turns out that between the years 1900 and 2006, political campaigns that included the use of violence were actually outperformed, by a ratio of almost two to one, by those that did not. Purely nonviolent movements did often fail to achieve their objectives over this period (half the time), but those that employed violence failed even more often (three-quarters of the time). In the words of folk musician Joan Baez: "Nonviolence is a flop. The only bigger flop is violence" (quoted in Chenoweth and Stephan, 220).

Despite this, wherever there is resistance to aggression or oppression, the outcome is presumed to depend primarily on which side deploys armed force more effectively; everything else is mere sideshow. Take Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Early in the resistance there were widespread reports of Ukrainian civilians using several of the nonviolent techniques that Sharp recommends (Christoyannopoulos 2022).

Ned Dobos is a senior lecturer in international and political studies at the University of New South Wales Canberra.

Some people stood in front of Russian tanks so they could not advance. Others confronted Russian soldiers in the street with verbal tirades and reprimands. Road signs were removed to confuse the invaders; amnesty and money were offered to any Russian soldier willing to desert; and cyberattacks were launched against various Russian targets. The world looked on with admiration, and sometimes amusement, but nobody seriously entertained that such tactics might ultimately drive out the Russians. The *real* resistance, as far as the international community was (and is) concerned, has been the war effort, and accordingly this is where we continue to channel the bulk of our resources.

Since February 2022 Ukraine has received military aid valued in the tens of billions of dollars, including everything from small-arms ammunition, to missiles, armored vehicles, air defense systems, drones, howitzers, weaponized helicopters, laser-guided rocket systems and more. Meanwhile, the nonviolent part of the resistance has received almost no material support from the outside world. After some initial uptake of the Ukrainian government's offer of money and amnesty to Russian deserters, the American economist Bryan Caplan (2022) devised a way for wealthy Western countries to sweeten the deal and vastly increase the number of Russian soldiers responding to the incentive. Despite the low cost of Caplan's plan, no country has volunteered to finance it, or any other aspect of the nonviolent struggle for that matter.

This suggests a blind and stubborn faith in the superior effectiveness of violence when it comes to dealing with foreign aggressors; one that cannot be dislodged by evidence contradicting it. How do we account for this? Sharp hinted at one possible answer in a 2005 interview:

Guerrilla warfare has huge civilian casualty rates. Huge. And yet Ché Guevara didn't abandon guerrilla warfare because people were getting killed. The same is true in conventional war, of course. But then they say if you get killed in nonviolent struggle, then nonviolent struggle has failed. (Engler 2013)

Essentially Sharp is suggesting that violence and nonviolence are held to different success conditions. If violence provokes counterviolence we accept that this is par for the course and it has no bearing on our determination of whether a violent campaign has "worked." *That* depends entirely on whether the ultimate political objectives of the campaign come to fruition. When it comes to *nonviolence*, on the other hand, we do not similarly postpone judgment until the final results come in. Instead, success or failure is determined by whether the tactic is reciprocated by its target. If nonviolence fails to instantaneously pacify and is met with violence, that apparently is sufficient to conclude that the nonviolent strategy has failed and need not be pursued any longer.

This is not the only double standard that contaminates the debate, however. Even where everyone admits that a violent campaign has failed, that is not taken to prove the ineffectiveness of violence per se; it is only taken to show that violence can be

used ineffectively. Where nonviolence fails, by contrast, that *is* treated as proof that nonviolence is ineffective. On the flip side, where a nonviolent campaign succeeds, there is a reluctance to infer from this any generalization about the effectiveness of nonviolence. But there is no such reluctance when it comes to inferring the effectiveness of violence from examples of its effective use. Call this the *effectiveness asymmetry*.

This paper is in three parts. First, I illustrate the effectiveness asymmetry with some examples. Next, I consider several possible explanations for the pervasiveness of this double standard. Having shown that violence and nonviolence are held to unequal success conditions, as Sharp alleged, the final section of the paper draws attention to some of the adverse downstream effects of this. The effectiveness asymmetry is not an innocuous intellectual error. It can make unjust wars seem just, and it obstructs humanity's progress to the more peaceful future Sharp envisaged.

The Effectiveness Asymmetry

Most Americans are prepared to admit that the war in Afghanistan was a failure (Santhanam 2021). It is difficult to see how anyone could resist that conclusion. Whether the purpose of the war was to depose the terrorist-harboring Taliban regime, to deliver democracy and human rights to the Afghan people, to increase the security of the American people, or to shore up America's global leadership and hegemony, the operation did not do what it was supposed to. Twenty years and *trillions* of dollars' worth of military force did not "work" on this occasion. But these results have not led to a collective reappraisal of the belief that military force works. Instead, the failure has been largely attributed to inadequate civilian support for the military, in the form of insufficient resourcing, lack of political will, too many legal and ethical constraints, and even popular apathy. Almost immediately after the Biden administration withdrew the last remaining U.S. troops from Afghanistan, a headline in *The Atlantic* told readers: "Afghanistan Is Your Fault" (Nichols 2021).

This is part of a more general pattern. With regard to most any social institution, our assessment of its competence naturally varies depending on its performance: institutions gain or lose public trust by succeeding or failing in their aims. There is one notable exception to this rule, however, and that is the institution of violence. In "Gaining Trust While Losing Wars" (2017), David Burbach of the U.S. Naval War College shows that military failure no longer leads the American public to lose confidence in the military establishment. Expectations about future performance have been effectively severed from appraisals of past performance.

This disconnect produces the most prevalent form of the *effectiveness asymmetry*. Whenever violence fails we say that is because it was used ham-fistedly, or not used for long enough. The tool is not the problem; the operator is. Hence the solution is to plan wars more carefully and to train for them more thoroughly and to fight them more patiently so that the effectiveness inherent in the method can be fully realized. That is

why we have military academies, war games, tactical and strategic analysts, and so on. When nonviolence fails, on the other hand, the problem is the method itself, rather than its incompetent application, inadequate funding, or premature termination. Any effort to make it more effective is putting lipstick on a pig. Examples of violence failing tell us nothing about the effectiveness of violence, but examples of nonviolence failing supposedly tell us everything we need to know about *its* effectiveness.

This double-standard is not the only manifestation of the effectiveness asymmetry.

Chapter 1 of Peter Gelderloos's *How Nonviolence Protects the State* (2007) is bluntly titled "Nonviolence Is Ineffective." Gelderloos reaches this conclusion not by cataloguing all of the times that nonviolence has failed—and there are many—but by showing that its apparent successes have usually involved some admixture of violence and nonviolence, with the former playing a crucial role.

Take India's liberation from British colonial rule, widely attributed to the campaign of protests, noncooperation, and economic boycotts led by Gandhi. Gelderloos writes that "the actual history is more complicated, in that many violent pressures also informed the British decision to withdraw" (Gelderloos 2007, 8), including bombings and assassinations by revolutionaries such as Bhagat Singh. What about the civil rights movement in the United States, which Gelderloos describes as "one of the most important episodes in the pacifist history" (10)? Again, Gelderloos points out that the movement was not one of unadulterated nonviolence: Martin Luther King Jr. played a role, but so too did the Black Panthers. And as for the civil disobedience used by the Danes during WWII, it may have done something to frustrate the Nazi state, but Gelderloos reminds us that it took massive and concerted violence by the Allies to finally destroy that state (16).

Gelderloos's reasoning here can be analytically reconstructed with the following premises and conclusion:

- P1: If resistance relies on nonviolence exclusively and it achieves success, that counts as evidence of the effectiveness of nonviolence.
- P2: If resistance combines violence and nonviolence and it achieves success, that does not count as evidence of the effectiveness of nonviolence.
- P3: There are no examples of successful resistance that relied exclusively on nonviolence.
- P4: Therefore, there is no evidence of the effectiveness of nonviolence.
- C1: "Nonviolence is ineffective."

What Gelderloos doesn't seem to realize is that this argument equally supports the conclusion that *violence* is ineffective. All the historical examples of successful resistance that Gelderloos appeals to are, by his own admission, examples where violence and nonviolence *in combination* defeated the aggressor or oppressor. But in that case:

- P1: If resistance relies on violence exclusively and it achieves success, that counts as evidence of the effectiveness of violence.
- P2: If resistance combines violence and nonviolence and it achieves success, that does *not* count as evidence of the effectiveness of violence.
- P3: There are no examples of successful resistance that relied exclusively on violence.
- P4: Therefore, there is no evidence of the effectiveness of violence.
- C2: Violence is ineffective.

But of course, Gelderloos does not admit C2. This unwillingness is a manifestation of the second kind of *effectiveness asymmetry*. Paradigm examples of successful nonviolent resistance are treated as inadmissible as evidence for the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance because the nonviolence can never be completely “distilled and separated” from the violent parts of the resistance (Gelderloos 2007, 11). Paradigm examples of successful violence, on the other hand, are taken to demonstrate the effectiveness of violence *despite* the impossibility of distilling and separating.

There is a second variant of the same double standard in Gelderloos’s first chapter. Let us return once more to the civil rights movement in the United States. Gelderloos gives two distinct reasons for his reluctance to accept it as an example of successful nonviolence. The first I have already noted: violence was mixed in with it all along. The second is that the movement did not achieve all of its objectives. It may have ended segregation, but it certainly did not give black Americans full economic and political equality, or the communal independence that some wanted. In light of this, Gelderloos invites us to question the received wisdom and ask: Was nonviolence really “effective” in this case? Did it really “work”?

A few pages later, Gelderloos turns to consider an example of violent resistance that achieved something, but certainly not everything that those involved would have hoped for: the Warsaw ghetto uprising. This example, however, gets a very different treatment.

The uprising began on April 19, 1943, and was defeated within a month. Thousands of the ghetto’s inhabitants were killed in the process, many burned to death or suffocated. Afterward those who remained were rounded up and deported to concentration camps and extermination centers. The Germans meanwhile suffered fewer than twenty casualties, and both the war effort and the Holocaust continued unabated; they “won” the battle in any meaningful sense of the term. Nevertheless, Gelderloos is reluctant to describe the Warsaw ghetto uprising as a failure, and rightly so, I think, for although it may not have defeated the Nazis, it nevertheless contributed to their defeat. Gelderloos writes of those involved: “By rebelling violently, they lived the last few weeks of their lives in freedom and resistance and slowed down the Nazi war machine. Another armed rebellion broke out in the ghetto of Bialystok, Poland, on August 16, 1943, and continued for weeks” (Gelderloos 2007, 17).

Gelderloos's position seems to be this: As long as violence achieves *something*—as long as it contributes to the defeat of aggression or oppression—then it should be deemed a success (or at least it should not be described as a failure). In contrast, nonviolence should be deemed a success if and only if it achieves *everything* aimed at—mere contribution to the goal is not enough. This is the second kind of effectiveness asymmetry in a different skin. Gelderloos can say that the Warsaw ghetto uprising “worked,” but the U.S. civil rights movement did not, only by equivocating between two very different standards of success. The one he applies to violence is reasonable. The one he applies to nonviolence is impossible. The game is doubly rigged in favor of his conclusion that “nonviolence is ineffective.”

Some Speculative Explanations

So, failure proves the ineffectiveness of nonviolence but not the ineffectiveness of violence. And successful violence demonstrates that violence works, but successful nonviolence does not similarly establish that nonviolence works. In both respects the dice are loaded to produce the verdict that violence is superior in terms of effectiveness. Why are so many of us in the grip of this fallacy? Space does not permit a comprehensive investigation, so instead I offer a diverse sample of contributing factors. In what follows I suggest that the effectiveness asymmetry is likely produced and perpetuated by: (1) motivated reasoning, (2) availability heuristics, and (3) military PR.

Motivated Reasoning

We like to think of ourselves as good people. In the parlance of cognitive science, this is a “motivated belief”: a proposition that we desperately *want* to be true. What the research shows about such beliefs is that we are prone to interpret information and events in a way that confirms them, and to ignore information that contradicts or challenges them. We do not want to believe that we are morally deficient, so any data we encounter that indicates a moral deficiency is liable to be discounted or rationalized away for the sake of ego protection. That nonviolence is just as effective as violence (if not more so) is one such datum, I would suggest: it has some rather unwelcome implications regarding our collective virtue and decency, hence our reluctance to accept it is perfectly understandable.

In *Ethics, Security, and the War Machine* (Dobos 2020) I catalogue the enormous costs that a society incurs simply by creating and maintaining a military establishment. These are not the costs of war, but the costs of a war machine, so to say, which are borne even when that machine is running idle. Most obvious are the economic opportunity costs, but there are also serious *moral* costs to be reckoned with.

Armed forces must replenish themselves, which means people must be continuously recruited into them and conditioned to be effective combatants. Whether

or not they are ever deployed, there is a respect in which this conditioning can be morally injurious to those involved. Its purpose, after all, is to desensitize people to violence, to reduce their emotional aversion to it so that they can kill and maim people on behalf of the state. The desired result is a numbness or coldness or indifference, where an inflamed conscience would normally be considered a sign of moral health, human decency, or good character. To that extent military conditioning is corrosive of virtue; it destroys valuable human sentiments. In the words of clinical psychologist Richard Doss (2016): “There are a couple of things that the military takes out of every soldier and every Marine, something that they never really put back. The first thing is empathy: the ability to care about how somebody else is feeling.”

If the only way for a political community to defend itself is through large-scale organized violence, then we can tell ourselves a comforting story about the moral damage inflicted on the young men and women recruited into our armed forces: “This is regrettable, but necessary and justified, all things considered, to prevent some even greater harm.” To admit that an alternative arrangement for national defense would likely work just as well as the military does is to deprive ourselves of this convenient out. If it turns out that national security objectives can be achieved without inflicting moral damage on anyone, then we confront the awkward reality that we are inflicting moral damage on a massive scale unnecessarily. We do not want to believe that we are guilty of this, so we cling to the dominant narrative: that violence is the only way to defend ourselves in the real world.

Availability Bias

The easier it is to think of examples of something, the more common we take instances of that something to be. This is known as “availability bias,” so called because our estimation of objective probabilities is skewed by the ease of recall. Given this heuristic, if examples of successful violence come to a person’s mind more readily than examples of successful nonviolence, then we should fully expect that person to judge violence as being more effective, regardless of what the empirical research says. There are several reasons to believe that this probably describes most of us, including:

- Militarized education: Students spend a lot of time learning about war; not so much about civil resistance. In a review of history textbooks used in the U.S. at the elementary, middle school, and high school levels, Laura Finley found that an average of eighty-nine pages were devoted to war and military engagements. By contrast fewer than five pages were devoted to nonviolence, pacifism, and peace movements (Finley 2003a, 11).
- “Lest we forget”: Throughout adulthood our memories of wars past are periodically refreshed by an assortment of commemorative rituals. In

Australia there is Anzac Day (April 25), VE Day (May 8), Korean Veterans' Day (July 27), VP Day (August 15), Vietnam Veterans' Day (August 18), Malaya and Borneo Veterans' Day (August 31), Merchant Navy Day (September 3), The Battle for Australia Day (September 1), and Remembrance Day (November 11).

- Vividness effect: our ability to conjure up examples is not based solely on the number of examples we are fed, or the regularity of the feeding, but also by the vividness with which the examples are depicted. Hence when violent crimes are portrayed to us in graphic detail, our estimate of the prevalence of such crimes goes up. This is known as the vividness effect. Since depictions of war are highly vivid compared to depictions of nonviolent resistance, this is liable to exacerbate the availability bias toward an overperception of the relative commonness of the former.

The result is that examples of successful violence—such as the military defeat of Nazi Germany in WWII—are a lot easier for the average person to recall. Examples of successful nonviolence aren't nearly as salient in our collective memory, which is going to dispose us to believe that successful nonviolence is comparably less likely.

To make matters worse, the particular examples of effective violence that receive the lion's share of our attention are, in an important respect, unrepresentative. War can effectively resolve a conflict where a clear-cut winner emerges, and a correspondingly clear-cut loser accepts the outcome. According to Russel Weigley (2004), such wars have occurred, but most of the examples are concentrated over a relatively short historical period—the “age of decisive battles” he calls it, from Breitenfeld to Waterloo. Outside of this window the background conditions and the nature of war have made it much more difficult to arrive at an unambiguous outcome, making protracted conflict and quagmire the norm (though of course there are exceptions). Even though this result—the failure of war to decisively resolve conflict—is historically more common, in the public imagination it is the climactic and conclusive wars that loom largest, precisely because of this feature. We consequently see decisive battles as the paradigm, when in fact they are an anomaly.

Military PR

It should come as little surprise that military establishments tend to have well-funded public relations wings whose explicit purpose is to protect the brand. The website of Army Public Affairs in the United States says that the agency's function is “to establish conditions that lead to confidence in America's army” and “to maintain the trust of the American public.” In Australia the job of the MECC (Ministerial and Executive Coordination and Communication, a division of the Defence Department) is “to build on and improve defence's public standing,” and “to shape the narrative of Defence.” MECC's internal guidelines list various “communication priorities,” such

as highlighting the Australian military's "operational effectiveness" and "capability edge" (Hehir 2020). But these functions are just the tip of the iceberg.

The release of *Top Gun: Maverick* in 2022 led to renewed scrutiny of the military-entertainment complex, and in particular the manipulation of popular movies and TV shows in service of the military's PR agenda (see Coyne and Hall 2021). *Maverick* is only the latest in a long list of blockbusters supported by the Pentagon. The list includes the original *Top Gun*, which is credited with driving up recruitment considerably and, according to the Pentagon's own database, "completed the rehabilitation of the military's image, which had been savaged by the Vietnam War" (Stahl 2022).

For the most part, military influence over the content of TV shows and movies is achieved by way of a conditional offer: we will give you access to our aircraft, tanks, warships, etc., on the condition that you allow us to vet your script and alter it to our liking. In many cases a film cannot be made—at least not in a cost-effective manner—without access to the military's resources, and so scripts are either changed to satisfy the Pentagon after vetting, or self-censored in advance in the hope of being greenlit without revision. But we can learn more from the films that the Pentagon has refused to support—such as *Apocalypse Now* and *Platoon*—than we can from those that it has supported. Such refusals are almost always justified with reference to authenticity and accuracy, which is hardly unreasonable, but the devil is in the definition. Phil Strub, who headed the Pentagon's film liaison office for nearly three decades, admitted: "Any film that portrays the military as negative is not realistic to us" (Turley 2003).

What is considered a "negative portrayal" is rather expansive too. Depicting U.S. soldiers engaging in war crimes or torture is considered a "showstopper," but the Pentagon seems to be especially sensitive to anything that might cause the public to lose confidence in the armed forces' ability to protect them. Depictions of military failure and incompetence are among the most common reasons for rejection. Even the script of *Independence Day* was met with complaints about how easy it was for the alien spaceship to decimate the U.S. Army with its laser beams. And not only that. The military was also unhappy that in the original script the soldiers were not the saviors: "All advances in stopping aliens are result of actions by civilians," read one of the Pentagon's annotations (Stahl 2022). This is about more than *confidence in* the military; it is about fostering a sense of *dependence on* the military.

It is hardly a stretch to suppose that this has helped to inoculate perceptions of the effectiveness of military force against disconfirming evidence. Because nonviolent resisters are seldom in a position to establish their own slickly oiled PR machines, their failures *do* tend to undermine confidence in their methods.

So What?

The effectiveness asymmetry is not a harmless mistake. It has two kinds of adverse consequences that need to be taken seriously.

First, it contributes to the overuse of the institutions of violence. Sometimes this is not such a big deal, as when civilian functions get transferred to the military establishment. A recent example is the militarization of Australia's COVID-19 response. The vaccine rollout was entrusted to the Defence Force and called "Operation COVID Shield." One of the first acts of the task force was to "war game" its strategy. The public then received televised updates not from a public health expert or even an elected representative, but from Lieutenant General John J. Frewen, in full military dress with medals and decorations proudly displayed. There was some disquiet admittedly—an editorial in the online newspaper *Crikey* described the affair as "a corrosion of the democratic commitment" (Rundle 2021)—but it stands to reason given the effectiveness asymmetry. Why entrust anything important to civilians, whose competence and effectiveness varies, when it could be entrusted to the military, whose effectiveness is unassailable?

More worryingly, too much confidence in the military can mean too many military operations.

The "just war" tradition sets out a list of conditions that must be met before the use of military force can be justified. One of them is the principle of last resort. This prohibits recourse to violence where nonviolent alternatives are yet to be exhausted. Another is the principle of a reasonable prospect of success. This prohibits recourse to violence where it is predicably futile, even where it is a last resort. The effectiveness asymmetry biases the application of both principles towards false positives.

The principle of last resort does not demand that we try anything and everything conceivable before using force. It only requires that we exhaust those peaceful methods that are potentially effective. The trouble is that, because of the effectiveness asymmetry, we are liable to exclude some peaceful options from the list of "potentially effective" on the grounds that they fail to meet a standard that violence itself fails to meet. As for the principle of reasonable prospects, if our confidence in military force is so invulnerable to counterevidence that it withstands even repeated failures of military force, then it is almost a foregone conclusion: every proposed use of military force will be judged as having a reasonable prospect of success, whether or not it does in fact. The result is that the strictures of just-war theory, which are meant to impose constraints on the use of force, do no such thing.

The second adverse consequence of the effectiveness asymmetry is that of institutional inertia.

Sharp (1990) spent years advocating for so-called "postmilitary" defense systems. These would perform the core functions currently entrusted to the armed forces, including national defense against external aggression, but they would rely on nonviolent means and methods. The transition from military to postmilitary Sharp called *trans-armament*, as opposed to disarmament, to emphasize that it would not involve throwing our weapons down, but rather replacing them with other (in Sharp's estimation, better) ones. He was careful not to present this as an all-or-nothing proposition, however. Ideally, Sharp thought that states should replace their

militaries with civilian-based defense systems, but he also emphasized the benefits of establishing the second to complement the first rather than to supplant it.

Although several states have abolished their armed forces (see Dobos 2022), most countries remain militarized, and to my knowledge most of these have not seriously entertained the possibility of trans-armament. Their obliviousness is unsurprising if we assume that most people are in the grip of the effectiveness asymmetry in one form or another. The double standard all but guarantees that violence is regarded as superior in terms of effectiveness, regardless of how many violent failures and nonviolent successes we encounter. This being the case, any expenditure on a postmilitary is bound to be perceived as buying less security than an equivalent expenditure on the military. No rational security-seeking state would do this, hence the status quo. In every country, the defense force is a military, and calls for more “defense capability” can mean only one thing: more military.

This inflexibility is regrettable because military organizations are obscenely costly, not just financially and morally, as already mentioned, but also ecologically (Crawford 2022) and politically (Crawford 2021). The world’s militaries, and the industries that provide their equipment, are responsible for a disproportional amount of global CO₂ emissions. Exactly how much is difficult to verify given that the Paris Agreement contains a loophole that exempts governments from having to provide full data on greenhouse gases emitted by their armed forces. But Scientists for Global Responsibility estimates that the U.K.’s military emits 11 million tons’ worth of CO₂ annually, roughly equivalent to the amount that is produced by around 6 million cars each year. The E.U.’s carbon footprint is close to 25 million tons, and the U.S.’s is estimated to be as much as 205 million tons annually, making it “the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the world” according to Brown University’s Cost of War Project (Ambrose 2021). To put this in perspective, the U.S. military contributes more to climate change than Portugal (the whole country, not just its military). It contributes more to climate change than 140 smaller countries *combined* (Neimark et al. 2019).

The *political* impact of militarism is not so easily quantified, but I think it would be a mistake to assume that it is negligible. In his farewell address George Washington urged the American public to “avoid the necessity of those overgrown military establishments which, under any form of Government, are inauspicious to liberty, and which are to be regarded as particularly hostile to Republican Liberty” (Washington 1796). Washington was primarily concerned with the concentration of power that tends to accompany militarization, but the tension between militarism and democracy runs deeper than this, I believe. A healthy democracy requires that citizens reject violence as a means of achieving political goals. But the state’s decision to maintain a powerful military at all times implies that it does regard the use of violence as a legitimate and effective way to solve political problems. Democratic stability depends on the population internalizing beliefs that are contradicted by the very existence of their national army.

Conclusion

The trans-armament project faces a number of obstacles. Most obviously, there are vested interests in the way: a great many people whose careers and livelihoods depend on violence and the social institutions devoted to it. Eisenhower's "military-industrial complex" does not even begin to capture the extent of it. In addition to the "military-entertainment complex" described earlier, there is also, according to investigative journalist Nick Turse (2008), a "military-corporate-conference complex," a "military-petroleum complex," and even a "military-academic complex."

This essay has focused on an altogether different kind of obstacle, however—an intellectual one that distorts our thinking about these issues. The reality is that nonviolence is still widely considered to be less effective or less reliable than violence, at least when it comes to defense against aggression. This belief has shown itself stubbornly impervious to counterevidence. Sharp recognized one of the likely reasons for this: violence and nonviolence are held to unequal evidentiary standards. This essay has identified two distinct manifestations of this asymmetry, but there are likely many more that will need to be called out and corrected if the trans-armament project is to gain momentum before the next anniversary of *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*.

References

- Ambrose, Tom. 2021. World's Militaries Avoiding Scrutiny over Emissions, Scientists Say. *The Guardian*, November 11, 2021.
- Burbach, David. 2017. Gaining Trust While Losing Wars. *Orbis* 61, no. 2: 154–71.
- Caplan, Bryan. 2022. Make Desertion Fast. *Bet on It* (blog), March 3, 2022. At <https://betonit.substack.com/p/make-desertion-fast>.
- Chenoweth, Erica, and Maria Stephan. 2012. *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Christoyannopoulos, Alexandre. 2022. Ukraine: Nonviolent Resistance Is a Brave and Often Effective Response to Aggression. *The Conversation*, March 5, 2022.
- Coyne, Christopher, and Abigail Hall. 2021. *Manufacturing Militarism: US Government Propaganda and the War on Terror*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Crawford, Neta. 2021. Democracy and the Preparation and Conduct of War. *Ethics and International Affairs*, 35, no. 3: 353–65.
- . 2022. *The Pentagon, Climate Change, and War: Charting the Rise and Fall of US Military Emissions*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Dobos, Ned. 2020. *Ethics, Security, and the War Machine: The True Cost of the Military*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2022. Military Abolitionism: A Critical Typology. *International Studies Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (June).

- Doss, Richard. 2016. "Trained Not to Cry: The Challenge of Being a Soldier." Filmed December 6, 2016, in Naperville, Ill. TEDx Talks video, 18.32. At <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkCq6BWFbAM>.
- Engler, Mark. 2013. The Machiavelli of Nonviolence: Gene Sharp and the Battle against Corporate Rule. *Dissent*, Fall 2013. At <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-machiavelli-of-nonviolence-gene-sharp-and-the-battle-against-corporate-rule>.
- Finley, Laura L. 2003a. Militarism Goes to School. *Essays in Education* 4, no. 1: art. 3.
- . 2003b. How Can I Teach Peace When the Book Only Covers War? *Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution* 5, no. 1 (Summer).
- Gelderloos, Peter. 2007. *How Nonviolence Protects the State*. Boston: South End Press.
- Hehir, Grant. 2020. *Defence's Management of Its Public Communications and Media Activities*. Australian National Audit Office, Auditor-General Report no. 24.
- Mills, Claire, and John Curtis. 2022. *Military Assistance to Ukraine Since the Russian Invasion*, Research Briefing 9477, August 14, 2022. London: House of Commons Library.
- Neimark, Benjamin, Olive Belcher, and Patrick Bigger. 2019. US Military Is a Bigger Polluter Than as Many as 140 Countries—Shrinking This War Machine Is a Must. *The Conversation*, June 25, 2019.
- Nichols, Tom. 2021. Afghanistan Is Your Fault. *The Atlantic*, August 16, 2021.
- Rundle, Guy. 2021. The Idea That You Have to Resort to Military Command to Impose Efficient Administration Is Unquestionably Pre-anti-democratic. *Crikey*, July 7, 2021.
- Santhanam, Laura. 2021. Here's Who Americans Blame for US Failures in Afghanistan. *PBS News Hour*, September 2, 2021. At <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/most-americans-think-u-s-failed-in-afghanistan>.
- Sharp, Gene. 1990. *Civilian-Based Defense: A Post-Military Weapons System*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Stahl, Roger, dir. 2022. *Theaters of War: How the Pentagon and CIA Took Hollywood*. Documentary film, 87 min. North Hampton, Mass: Media Education Foundation. At <https://shop.mediaed.org/theaters-of-war-p839.aspx>.
- Turley, Jonathan. 2003. Hollywood Isn't Holding Its Lines against the Pentagon. *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 2003.
- Turse, Nick. 2008. *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Washington, George. 1796. Farewell address. September 17, 1796. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress. At: <http://www.loc.gov/resource/mgw2.024/?sp=235&st=text>.
- Weigley, Russel. 2004. *The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Acknowledgments: I am thankful to Christopher Coyne for the invitation, and for his feedback on an earlier draft. Thanks also to members of the International Ethics Research Group in Canberra for their comments on the piece, especially Toni Erskine, Cian O'Driscoll, Deane-Peter Baker, and Ana Tanasoca.

SUBSCRIBE NOW AND RECEIVE A FREE BOOK!



“*The Independent Review* does not accept pronouncements of government officials nor the conventional wisdom at face value.”

—**JOHN R. MACARTHUR**, Publisher, *Harper’s*

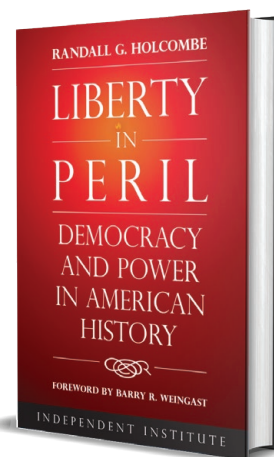
“*The Independent Review* is excellent.”

—**GARY BECKER**, Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences

Subscribe to [The Independent Review](#) and receive a free book of your choice such as *Liberty in Peril: Democracy and Power in American History*, by Randall G. Holcombe.

Thought-provoking and educational, [The Independent Review](#) is blazing the way toward informed debate. This quarterly journal offers leading-edge insights on today’s most critical issues in economics, healthcare, education, the environment, energy, defense, law, history, political science, philosophy, and sociology.

Student? Educator? Journalist? Business or civic leader? Engaged citizen? This journal is for YOU!



Order today for more **FREE** book options

SUBSCRIBE

The Independent Review is now available digitally on mobile devices and tablets via the Apple/Android App Stores and Magzter. Subscriptions and single issues start at \$2.99. [Learn More.](#)

