



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Three Applications of Nonviolent Action

Nonviolent action has three major applications: change, defense, third party nonviolent intervention. In this database each case is identified by application.

Change is the best known application. Usually the campaigners have reform goals: they are seeking change in policies or conditions but not a change in the power structure. Every day's major metropolitan daily newspaper reports on action of this kind: workers on strike for higher wages, students demanding university reform, minorities demanding rights.

Sometimes, however, nonviolent action is used for revolution. In South Africa the ANC obviously wanted to replace the white monopoly of formal power with a new system, and after 1982 they mainly relied on people power to end apartheid. The Solidarity movement in Poland used nonviolent action to throw out the Communist dictatorship in the 1980s. In 2011 a massive Egyptian campaign ousted dictator Hosni Mubarak.

Defense of something valued, against the threat of change, is the second application. In Northeast Thailand, villagers and monks have been fighting to save the forest by using nonviolent action. This is one of many examples of environmental defense.

There are thousands of cases of community defense. For example, some urban black neighborhoods in the U.S. used nonviolent action to fight the invasion of drug dealers. Neighborhoods will also stop proposed highways or sports stadiums that threaten them.

Defense has also been used on the national level, either against invasion from outsiders or against a coup d'etat from insiders. In Russia in 1991, for example, much of the KGB, army, and Communist Party leadership decided to seize the state. They arrested top leader Gorbachev, took over the media and mobilized tanks. They also ran into such major noncooperation from the people that the waverers in the middle turned against them and they lost their coup. Similar events happened in Argentina in the mid '80s; a million people demonstrated in Buenos Aires, the fence-sitters turned against the military plotters, and civilian government remained.

Third Party Nonviolent Intervention (TPNI) is the physical intervention of a third party into the arena of the conflict in such a way as to reduce the level of violence. This application is also called civilian peacekeeping.

Mediation and arbitration are also performed by third parties, but mediation and arbitration are not nonviolent third party intervention. Here are some differences:

- nonviolent third party intervention is unilateral (does not require both parties to participate in structured interaction),
- expresses the value of process, rather than determination/judgment,
- enables the struggle to continue, rather than shutting down the struggle.

There are at least four forms of third party nonviolent intervention: **accompaniment, interposition, observation/monitoring, and presence.**

1. **Accompaniment:** (Also called protective accompaniment, and unarmed bodyguards.) Accompaniment began as a systematic method in the 1980s with Peace Brigades International (PBI), which sent to El Salvador and Guatemala volunteers who accompanied human rights activists threatened with assassination. The international volunteers put the local activists in a glare of publicity that reduced the chance of assassination.

2. **Interposition** is used when two forces are moving into battle and a third force (it may be a crowd) intervenes physically -- and nonviolently -- to prevent or reduce the violence. In 1986 Philippines dictator Marcos was shaken by the pro-democracy campaign and General Ramos decided to rebel with the troops under his personal command. The Ramos troops took cover in an army base, and Marcos sent the main force of the army to Ramos to destroy the rebels. The Catholic radio station broadcast urgent messages to the people to go to Ramos' base as well. Tens of thousands converged between the two armies and stopped Marcos' forces through nonviolently and forcefully confronting the soldiers.
3. **Observation/monitoring** is increasingly used in election situations where violence is expected. Rather than interpose themselves between violent individuals or groups, observers/monitors are expected to carry cameras, notebooks, and in other ways provide a physical reminder that "the whole world is watching," thereby restraining the violence.
4. **Presence** consists of individuals and teams entering a situation of open conflict and, through body language, words, and acts of service, assisting people to choose other-than-violent behaviors. This form differs from interposition in that the third party teammates do not physically place themselves directly between the fighters. The Russian group Memorial reportedly has substantial experience in this form of intervention in 1990s inter-ethnic battles; they entered the "conflict field" and, in largely subtle ways, refused to cooperate with the prevailing atmosphere in the field of hostility and violence.

- George Lakey 22/08/2011

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