

7. Eric Goldman (Prof. Spencer Meredith) Political Science

Eric Goldman wrote his paper on revolutionary movements in Latin America. There has been increasing diversification of strategies vis-à-vis government structures in the region, and Eric made a compelling argument that non-violent demonstrations are most successful when coupled with ethnic cohesion within the group and separation from the larger national community. Unlike other ethnic minorities, these groups achieve their goals more readily and easily when they build on public support from "outsiders" in the rest of the country. Eric compared the Chiapas movement in southern Mexico with the FARC organization in Colombia. The result was an interesting paper that not only covered the strategies of these two groups, but one that could also be used by fledgling organizations in different parts of the world.

Why The Beatles Got Revolution Right:
An analysis of the effectiveness of nonviolent action in Latin America

Eric Goldman

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Professor Spencer Meredith III
Rochester Institute of Technology

"In a revolution, one triumphs or dies (if it is a true revolution)."
- Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Letter to Fidel Castro, 1965

When one traditionally thinks of revolution, images of bloody rebellion and armed struggle come to mind. This vision is romanticized as being not only glorious, but also effective for instituting change. A revolution, as defined by the American Heritage dictionary, is a sudden or momentous change in a situation ("revolution" 2004). Nowhere is violence a requirement. Violence may be instinctual, but it is not the most effective vehicle for change. An enduring revolution is characterized by an empowerment of the outspoken and repressed. While the rhetoric of Che Guevara still lingers in the minds of many seeking change in Latin America, a new wave of nonviolent revolution is gaining strength in this region. Exemplifying the effectiveness of nonviolence is the Zapatista revolution in Chiapas, Mexico. In contrast, the problems and faults of violent revolution are demonstrated by the lingering conflict in Colombia. Through a comparative examination of the theoretical underpinnings and the practiced tactics of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) the virtues, merits, and overall relative advantages of nonviolence will be irrefutably established.

The first order of comparison is to weigh the relative financial and human costs incurred in violent versus nonviolent revolutions. In a violent revolution, by definition, the combatants wage a physical war against the state, which results in casualties for both insurgent combatants and state fighters. Additionally, noncombatant citizens are put at risk because they are indistinguishable from the members of the revolutionary faction. In comparison, nonviolence destroys the legitimacy of violent tactics. While the government rightfully has the authority to use coercive force against any enemy of the state, such actions appear devious and unjustified against nonviolent actors (Zunes 2005). In terms of financial cost, nonviolent action is

substantially less expensive than violence. A violent revolution requires weapons. Because it is expensive and difficult to acquire, insurgent weaponry must be bought through illicit channels. Nonviolent tactics, in contrast, are generally less cost prohibitive because they rely on people and words, not on guns. The cost of organizing people and spreading the communiqués and messages of a nonviolent revolution are negligible. In addition, nonviolent movements can utilize temporary volunteers, while a violent revolution requires mercenaries who are willing to pay with their lives. On the whole, the tactics employed by nonviolent revolutions such as strikes, demonstrations, and protests are less expensive and complex to organize compared to elaborate military raids and campaigns.

Beyond cost, the tactics of nonviolence are more effective in practice than those of a violent revolution. When a nonviolent movement chooses to strike or to demonstrate, the message and objective is clear; however, the purpose of physical violence is often ambiguous. Nonviolence also tends to create friction within the government and dissent within political parties. Often, this leads the government or individual state actors to negotiate or to implement changes. The response to violence from the state, on the other hand, is usually reciprocal or crushing force (Leech 2002). In the eyes of the government, the people, and external observers combatant insurgents are tantamount to terrorists, whereas pacifist resisters are often met with extended support. Ideological motivation also ties into the success of the nonviolent revolution. The violent offensive is usually focused on destroying the state's foundation. Conversely, unarmed resistance is usually more focused on changing the current system. As a result, nonviolent resistance encourages "the creation of alternative institutions, which further [undermine] the repressive status quo" (Zunes 2005). Nonviolent movements tend to be truly popular, actively engaging a greater percentage of the population; thus the people themselves

bring about change. While, on the contrary, the violent insurgent group purports to fight for all of the people, but in reality is only seeks power for itself.

A successful nonviolent revolutionary movement is exemplified by the EZLN in Chiapas. Initially, the EZLN declared war against the Mexican government in 1994. However, soon after the initial armed conflict the organization realigned its policies to reflect an ideology of nonviolent action, popular mobilization, and increased global awareness. Today, the Zapatistas continue to build a program which works to strengthen the will of the people. Because it chooses not to rule over the people, the EZLN often abstains from involvement in local politics (Stahler-Sholk 2007). This strategy is also useful because the federal or state authorities cannot claim the local governments are illegitimate because of their connections to the EZLN. Moreover, the people have begun to establish alternative institutions with the EZLN's assistance. The development of alternatives to state institutions allows for the people to become less reliant upon the state. Additionally, alternative institutions strengthen the power of the people because they are able to exert more control over their own lives. When the people control their own fate their fear of change and of the state are diminished. The underlying concept here is the capstone of nonviolent resistance: revolutionary change comes from the bottom-up, not the top-down.

Another facet of the Zapatistas success with nonviolence is their use of modern information and communication systems to strengthen their support structure. The EZLN emerged at a time when the Internet was starting to become readily available. Since its emergence in 1994, the EZLN has used its Internet presence to share the Chiapas experience unfiltered. The Internet allows for the Zapatistas to circumvent the traditional controls of the state, which seeks to isolate the EZLN from the people of Chiapas, greater Mexico, and the international community. While inside Chiapas there are no modern communication systems, the

message of the EZLN reaches NGOs, IGOs, and the general populous in other regions and nations. Accordingly, it is easier to obtain sympathizers and contributors to the Zapatista cause. The Internet is also important to the success of the Zapatistas because it allows for unbiased dissemination of information. While the traditional media may alter or "spin" a report or story, first hand accounts from people within Chiapas and foreign observers can be freely distributed over the Internet. As a result, the Mexican government cannot cover up its own actions or the situation in general without losing credibility (Clever 1995). Furthermore, the Internet is both timeless and instantaneous. Current news and events are swiftly available for the world to see, and in addition the Internet makes it easy to browse news, accounts, and opinions throughout the history of the conflict. Thus, the Zapatistas are able to remain globally unified and to expand their outreach through their focus on the diffusion of information.

In addition to its global outreach efforts, the EZLN has made great progress towards increasing popular participation in Mexican politics. For example the EZLN have developed a program called The Other Campaign, which is an extension of the bottom-up philosophy practiced by the EZLN. This program is an effort to create a network of dissent through Mexico, in order to unite various groups in challenging the governmental status quo (Mora 2007). By uniting all of the people of Mexico, truly popular change can overcome the deficiencies in the corrupt, elite dominated government. In addition to establishing alternatives for the people, nonviolent groups such as the EZLN are willing to negotiate with the current government, providing a "golden parachute" and comfortable middle ground for the current regime. Involvement in the political process, in addition, has increased the organization's legitimacy. In 2001 the EZLN marched throughout Mexico in order to address the Mexican Congress on an important Indian rights law (Darrien Gap LLC 2001). While the bill itself was considered highly

undesirable by the government, they had no choice but to accept due to political pressure brought by the EZLN through publicity and demonstrations. As a result, the EZLN was able to bring about action for change at a low cost, with popular support, and through peaceful means.

In sharp contrast, the militant organization FARC continues its violent revolutionary campaign in Colombia. FARC was originally founded in the 1960s as military extension of the outspoken Colombian Communist Party. While at the time a violent guerilla organization may have seemed appropriate, it is troubling that FARC has not updated its ideology to align with the changing political environment. This theoretical fixedness has resulted in the long-term failure of FARC's violent revolution, and additionally has made it difficult to sustain the movement over time. Thus, the primary tactics of FARC's revolution have remained armed resistance, kidnapping, and occupation of Colombian territory (Leech 2002). While the Revolutionary Armed Forces have experimented with pacifism and political involvement numerous times, they have always returned to a policy of "fundamental societal transformation through the armed achievement of state power" (Venden 2006, 250). The continued violence and involvement in illicit enterprises has significantly diminished the reputation of FARC, and has garnered the organization international disapproval rather than support: the era of cherishing violent revolutions has ended. As a result, FARC has alienated a large base of its external support, and has isolated itself from many of its internal constituencies (Rodgers 2006). This can be attributed to FARC's use of violence and fear tactics on the general populous.

While it may seem counterintuitive for FARC to alienate and attack the people of Colombia, this is one of the side effects of using violence and terrorism. As Logan and Myers point out, FARC is now fighting for survival and not for "the cause". Moreover, this so called band of revolutionaries has transformed itself into a criminal enterprise. Their actions are not

bringing about any fundamental or systemic changes; rather their actions are focused on consolidating control over the people and physical territory. As a result, FARC must be considered illegitimate and ineffective. Clearly, after more than 40 years of fighting, FARC's revolution has failed because of its insistence on violence. Its only real accomplishment is that it has become more corrupt and odious than the government it fights. In contrast, true revolutionaries would inspire the people and fight for lasting change. As Logan notes, "FARC [has] almost no regard for public opinion, little popular support, and use[s] intimidation more than anything else to force civilians to live in fear" (2005).

This focus on itself has prevented FARC from addressing any real problems in Colombia. Only about 10% of murders and a low percentage of all kidnappings in Colombia can be attributed to FARC (Leech 2002). Neither the government nor FARC have sought to address any of the real problems in Colombia. The fighting between the two serves as a distraction from the real issues plaguing Colombia. There is no time to worry about the people of Colombia while both the state and FARC remain engaged in this power struggle. While the state is ineffective at governing the people, FARC does not provide any stable alternatives. As a result, from the vantage point of the common citizen, FARC does not present a viable or preferable alternative.

While nonviolence tends to move third party institutions and organizations in-line with the revolution, violence confounds external issues. The first external factor which intertwines with revolution is the culture of violence within the country. In Colombia, oppressive violence is very familiar. Violent atrocities ravaged Colombia as political factions fought for control during the mid twentieth century. Thus, a culture of political violence was developed. Colombia remains a fairly unstable and violent country, even though it is called a democracy (Leech 2002). On the other hand, since the Mexican revolution, there has been relative political stability in Mexico.

The low level of political purging and violence coupled with the stability of state institutions has helped create an environment that is conducive to change. The violent tactics of FARC have only exacerbated the culture of violence in Colombia instead of creating a stable foundation for change.

The involvement of foreign powers is another external factor which is affected by the mode of revolution. If a super power or regional power has a vested interest in the success of the state, a violent revolution is very unlikely to succeed. The training and funds provided to the state by a foreign government increases the gap between the insurgent and state tactical advantages, which is the main determinant in an armed battle. Because it has become increasingly difficult to separate legitimate violent revolutionaries from terrorists, supporting armed rebellions is imprudent for almost all foreign governments (Zunes 2005). On the other hand, a nonviolent revolution is much more likely to gain support abroad. One can easily see that the EZLN has created an extended network of support inside and outside Mexico, while FARC has become infamous in almost all Latin American and Western countries.

Domestically, a nonviolent revolution is more likely to result in long term success regardless of the current government model. First, violence against an authoritarian state results in counterattacks and increased repression against the entire population. Thus, the people suffer greater hardships rather than change. In a democracy, violence is impractical because an attack on the government, by definition, is an attack on the people. Consequently, violence only weakens the people's power and gives legitimacy to state repression. Second, nonviolence attempts to empower the populous and unify the people. The nonviolent revolution thus has a much stronger base of support to bring about change. In authoritarian systems, the people are often silenced; however, nonviolent strategies, such as the strike, will serve to unite the people

and give them strength to speak out against the government. This presents a threat to an authoritarian system because it reduces the non-popular state's power compared to that of the populous. The nonviolent tactics serve to empower democratic practices and institutions which can become more powerful than the authoritarian or artificially democratic state. Nonviolence brings about true democracy, which by its nature allows for change from within.

While Churchill's claim that democracy is the worst form of government, except for the rest (speech, House of Commons, November 11, 1947), it is the governmental model which allows for the most change. Full scale revolution in a true democracy is unnecessary. In fact, the founding fathers of the United States believed that revision and change were inevitable parts of a democratic country's destiny. This ideal is best expressed by Thomas Jefferson: "The oppressed should rebel, and they will continue to rebel and raise disturbance until their civil rights are fully restored to them and all partial distinctions, exclusions and incapacitations are removed" (Notes on Religion, 1776. Papers 1:548). Democracy lends itself to change and continual evolution. The nonviolent methods of change are, like democracy, transparent and popular; they are ingrained in the structure of democracy. When a violent group overthrows the government, it usually only brings about a new repressive regime. On the other hand, the design of nonviolent revolution puts the power in the hands of the people. Once the people reign, their will can be justly exercised and they become free to rule themselves.

The success of nonviolence in Chiapas, as compared to FARC's bloody campaign, stands as a testament for other countries in transition or seeking a revolution in Latin America and throughout the world. One of the keys to modern nonviolent revolution is international awareness. As globalization continues to expand, the effect of international events and policies will continue to increase their effect on domestic policies (vis-à-vis Second Image Reversed

Theory). Therefore, by gaining global attention through NGOs, IGOs, and self-publications, a nonviolent group can spread their message and gain sympathy. The effect of the international community can often outweigh a government's effort to censor an insurgent organization. Second, an insurgent organization's use of nonviolent tactics is more likely to involve a greater percentage of the populous. While the common individual would balk at becoming a "freedom fighter", participation in a strike or demonstration is less perilous and will engage a larger percentage of the population. Furthermore, nonviolent tactics do not threaten the current institutions, but rather demonstrate to the state that the people have the power to operate outside of its control. Lastly, the costs of a violent insurrection are too high; blood is not a necessary component in the formula for change. More people will participate, and more people will live through a nonviolent revolution. The financial costs of nonviolent revolutions are also less expensive, and therefore the revolution has a reduced likelihood of failing due to insufficient funding. Additionally, because fewer funds are required, the revolution can carry on without turning to illicit means. When these factors are combined, the governmental pressure to change from within is heightened. As the people become more powerful and the international community inputs its desires, the current state loses its power. In a nonviolent revolution awareness, democratization, and unity increase while the costs generally do not. Ultimately, the nonviolent revolution weakens the current state infrastructure and its actors to the point that it must choose either to bend to the will of the people or to fully abdicate power.

Epilogue

In the song "Revolution" by the Beatles, John Lennon has an imaginary debate with a violent revolutionary. When the revolutionary proposes destruction, Lennon responds that "you can count me out". The revolutionary then asks for a contribution- money for his violence - and Lennon again denies his request: "All I can tell is brother you have to wait". In the last stanza, Lennon denies the revolutionaries call to a violent government overthrow, suggesting that "You better free you mind instead". The Beatles message permeates the current world view, which has dismissed the romanticism of the violent revolution. People will continue to seek change in their world; however, as revolution itself evolves, revolutionaries must realize that violence no longer is effective today. Lennon was aware that "We all want to change the world", and while we will continue to persevere for the cause, there is no need to give one's life or to take the life of another. He was wrong about revolution: In a revolution, when we join together and fight, the revolution cannot die (if it is a nonviolent revolution).

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