

Gandhi's Five-point on Non-Violence and the Struggle against Imperialism

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Mr. Chairperson, Foreign Ministers, Excellencies, Panelists!

Gandhi² was fighting the UK Empire, meaning UK invasion and occupation. One invasion, Viceroy Richard Wellesley in 1798 against the Sultan of Mysore, was also clearly anti-Muslim. The same year Napoleon's mission civilisatrice invaded Egypt to make himself Sultan el-kebir, Great Ruler, but were thrown out in 1801. The English came in 1807 and Egypt was a colony till 1922.

Gandhi fought an evil empire as seen by how they reacted to the Sepoy mutiny 150 years ago or to the 1919 Amritsar massacre. Churchill not only referred to him as a semi-naked fakir, but sincerely hoped he would fast himself to death. But in 1947 it was all over: first went India, then the rest of the empire, mainly due to Gandhi's nonviolence. Today they are both, India and England, blossoming, India with a brilliant linguistic federalism and phenomenal economic growth, England heading the same way but still with some residual imperialism. And Gordon Brown sounds much like Tony Blair without the flare; in the "special relationship" with the senior partner.

The US global Empire--broader, deeper, and more evil--was the successor to the UK global Empire, with Israel being the successor in the Middle East and Australia in the Pacific. They all have settler colonialism in common. That spells invasion and occupation; today by the USA in Iraq, Afghanistan and partly Saudi-Arabia, and by Israel in Palestine. But people hate being invaded and occupied, regardless of invader-occupier creativity in legitimizing the exercise. So there is massive resistance in all four, like there was in Norway under Germany.

How did Gandhi resist? By brilliantly transcending the conflict between the kshatriyah varnadharma of violent heroic struggle, and his own swadharna of nonviolence into nonviolent heroic struggle, known as satyagraha. Born 9/11 1906; with no readiness to kill but to be killed, the ultimate sacrifice.

To many satyagraha above all means nonviolent struggle resisting direct and/or structural violence. But there is much more to satyagraha, particularly five points that go beyond such terms as "struggle", "resistance", "heroic" and "sacrifice", way into deeper and wiser politics than victorious invasions.

All five points apply to the four anti-imperial struggles today. The struggles spell an end to fundamentalist Christian US and hard Zionist Israeli imperialism. But the gandhian points would raise USA and Israel to conviviality with others. They cut both ways: these are gandhian messages not only to the invaders-occupiers in Washington-Jerusalem but, also to the invaded-occupied in Iraq-Afghanistan-Palestine-Saudia. The more they are practiced the better for both sides, and for us all.

Point 1: Never fear dialogue

Gandhi dialogued with everybody in his many struggles, including with the Viceroy of an Empire he had come to loathe. And it bore fruits. It is pathetic to watch a US Secretary of State travel in and out of Israel assuring them that she will meet with neither Hamas, nor Hizbollah, nor Damascus, nor Tehran when that is exactly what she has to do to make her points and maybe learn some new ones. She may feel it is too much an honor for those evil parties. But they [1] may not see an encounter with the USA as that much an honor, nor [2] will this approach make them more amenable. They will not go away anyhow.

But this also applies to a Mullah Omar and a Hektamayar, representing the religious and the national resistance, on top of which comes the resistance from the overwhelming majority of Afghans one way or another who simply want neither invasion nor occupation. USA/NATO fight three wars. Thou shalt dialogue. The conditionality approach, first NATO out, then talks,

is highly understandable, but that point can be much better communicated in a dialogue covering all issues.

Point 2: Never fear conflict: more opportunity than danger

For Gandhi conflict was a challenge to know each other, having something in common, not being irrelevant to each other. Let us talk it over! He preferred violence to cowardice and conflict, disharmony to no relation at all; the best being, of course, the nonviolence of the brave and relations of harmony.

Conflict can be understood the Anglo-American way as violent clashes of actors-parties, or as an incompatibility of the goals of those actors-parties. The former perspective leads to control of one or more party, usually of Other, even to incapacitation-expulsion-extermination. The latter may lead to problem-solving. Thus, how can legitimate goals of all parties be accommodated? Could it be that even Other has legitimate goals? And--horribile dictu--that I, Self, fall short?

A conflict can be seen by the less mature and very self-righteous as a chance to impose oneself, prevail, to "win". Or, by the more mature, as an occasion for Self-examination rather than Other-censure, and a search for that possibly new reality where legitimate goals of all parties can be accommodated. Like the Muslim world's goals of Respect for Islam and the Western world's goals of Democracy and Free markets. Not easy, that one.

Maybe West could learn from Islamic economics deep respect for economic transactions as human transactions? And Islam from the West deep respect for more diversity of views and opinions? Welcome conflict, welcome challenge!

Points 3 and 4 introduce a major medium in which all conflicts unfold: time. Diplomats in general, not only Anglo-Americans, negotiate ratifiable agreements in the game of goals, values, interests as they present themselves synchronically, at present. But in real life the past throws long shadows into the present. Conflicts are often asynchronic, the parties live in different time zones; years, decades, centuries apart. They all have their own Greenwich Mean Time, and often very mean, indeed.

And in real life the future is like a light-house with red, yellow and green sectors: Danger, stay out! - Proceed with care! - This is the road! Some lights are strong, even blinding, others are perceived only by the most sensitive. You neglect them at your own considerable risk. As the advisor to Serbian president Cosic, Professor Stojanovic, said of the US approach before the 1999 illegal NATO attack on Serbia: USA suffers from excessive presentism, aware neither of history, nor of what the future may hold in store of good, bad and worse.

Point 3: Know History or you are doomed to repeat it (Burke)

Gandhi knew the history of the English and their Empire often better than they themselves while at the same time being at home in his own, the facts and the equally important fiction (like the Mahabharata). He came to the conclusion that the UK imperial inclination to glory and ruling the waves (with some land thrown in) had to be fought at its root, by spinning chains of nonviolence into the very heart of England. So he did.

But history sediments layers of trauma, not only glory, in the collective memory. How can we ever understand the resistance of the four without understanding the traumas suffered by Iraq: 1258, the Baghdad massacre by the Ilkhan and the Pope and 1916, UK carving out Iraq; province 19, Kuwait in 1898; Afghanistan: the UK invasions 1838-1878 and the soviet 1979; Palestine: 1916 Sykes-Picot treason, 1948 nakhba for 711,000; Saudi Arabia: the 1945 treaty killing the wahhab vision of life.

Suffer such unreconciled traumas, and, rightly or not, next time the perpetrator comes uninvited the response is "there they go again". Anglo-America is so self-righteous that they do not even fear confirming predictions flowing from history. Like most perpetrators their memory is short. Victims never forget. Acknowledgment of the traumas and conciliation are much overdue.

Point 4: Image the future or you will never get there

"Be today the future you want to see tomorrow" was Gandhi's way of translating this point into positive non-cooperation and civil disobedience, emptying the oppressive structures while at the same time shedding light on the future and training the satyagrahi for positive peace, conviviality, not only for the repertory of meetings, resolutions and demonstrations.

The unifying vision in the struggle is Invaders Go Home!, saying that loud and clear. But Gandhi's vision went beyond independence, swaraj, to a world that included the occupier: more English than today, but as friends, on a basis of equality!

Very compelling, very disarming. Maybe there is a message here for all six parties to think, speak and act in terms of a future together? Example: a Middle East Community--modeled on the European Community that accommodated former Nazi Germany--of Israel's five border countries Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine fully recognized and Egypt, with a formerly hard Zionist Israel?

Point 5: While fighting occupation clean up your own house!

Gandhi was certainly resisting the English Empire and fighting for swaraj. But that did not prevent him from attending to such ills of his own Mother India as untouchability, discrimination of women, misery, and the increasing gap between Hindus and Muslims. The latter ultimately led to the partition, which, with the disastrous change of the proposed borderline by the last Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, led to a blood bath and a trauma exacerbating for generations the protracted Kashmir conflict.

That the colonizers also critiqued untouchability and women discrimination, outlawing its extreme expression in the suttee, did not prevent Gandhi from attacking these social ills. His was not the cheap logic of denying any truth also held by the chief antagonist. Many at a lower level of maturity become victims of polarization. Nor did he attack caste because the colonizers often used it as one of their levers in their divide et impera tactic to dominate India. He fought it as evil in its own right.

Back to occupiers and occupied: what could they learn from Gandhi in addition to turning from violence to nonviolence?

- USA: to struggle energetically to lift the bottom 50% of society where basic needs are concerned; to decrease the gap between rich and poor; to restore to dignity the First Nations, the Inuits, the Hawaiians; to lift discrimination; to reduce the alienation and fear underlying the violence and drug abuse in spite of the fact that many who hate the US Empire say so -
- Israel: to lift Arab Israelis into first class citizenship, to reduce the increasing gap between rich and poor and between Ashkenazim and Sephardim and other groups; to reduce the corruption and normless hedonism tearing at the society in spite of the fact that many who hate hard zionism say so -
- Iraq: for the Sunnis to give up their goal of running Iraq from Baghdad, for Kurds and Shias to fight nonviolently for their inalienable right to open borders to other Kurds and Shia Arabs, for them all to find a unity in diversity somewhere between federation and confederation; to preserve such Hussein gains as literacy, welfare state, freedom of choice for women to wear the hijab or not in spite of the fact that Saddam said so -
- Afghanistan: will be managed by Afghans, but enter a compact with drug-consuming countries: we reduce the supply, you reduce the demand by creating more humane societies and we monitor each other in spite of the fact that invaders and Taliban say so - ;
- Palestine: to continue the Hamas struggle against corruption, renewing the society, to lift non-Muslim Palestinians into first class citizenship; to pursue energetically the struggle on the basis of the Qur'an for more gender equality.

- Saudi Arabia: to try to bridge the gap between wahhabism and Western materialism, to be up front searching for alternative non-polluting and non-depleting ways of converting energy; to pursue energetically the struggle on the basis of the Qur'an for more gender equality; to explore non-Western form of democracy.

There is so much work to do! The problem is how to channel the energies produced by a conflict so that the parties blossom. The three (and a half) occupations have to be lifted, invaders have to go home and dismantle their imperial structures. Both sides must be liberated from the disastrous tie of imperialism. Fighting the gandhian way both sides can blossom because these energies are used positively.

Nonviolent resistance would have served Iraqis against both Hussein and Bush, Afghans against their invaders, Palestinians inside and outside Israel against hard zionism, and Saudis much better than the violent 9/11 (an extra-judicial execution of two buildings for their sins against Alla'h?).

To repeat, Gandhi also used these five approaches in his constructive handling of conflict:

Point 1: Never fear dialogue

Point 2: Never fear conflict: more opportunity than danger

Point 3: Know History or you are doomed to repeat it(Burke)

Point 4: Image the future or you will never get there

Point 5: While fighting occupation clean up your own house!

As Sonia Gandhi said in her concluding address this morning of the first International Day of Nonviolence: Let us embrace nonviolence, and become truly human. A vote of thanks to India for putting Gandhi and his nonviolence on the political agenda!

1 Dr. Galtung is a Professor of Peace Studies and Founder of the TRANSCEND: A Peace and Development Network. On October 2, 2007, UN General Assembly Plenary organized an informal meeting at United Nations, New York. Mr. Galtung presented this speech on International Day of Nonviolence in front of UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon along with panelists: Dr Ahmed Kathrada, Prof. Amartya Sen, Dr Ela Gandhi, Dr Gene Sharp, Rev Jesse Jackson Sr., Prof. John Nash, Dr Lia Diskin and the author himself. Ms. Sonia Gandhi had also expressed her gratitude on this occasion. He is a principal advisor of the Conflict Study Center, Nepal.

2 On June 15, 2007, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution to observe and celebrate Mahatma Gandhi's birthday annually on October 2, as the International Day of Nonviolence. The resolution was piloted by India and was co-sponsored by 142 countries. Among those not cosponsoring were the United States and Norway.