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CIVILIAN PEACEKEEPING TODAY

Reducing Violence and Creating a safe Environment in Conflict Zones: Is there a Connection to Gandhis Thoughts and Praxis?

By Dr Rachel Julian, Reader in Peace Studies, Leeds Beckett University, UK.

Civilians, using nonviolence to protect themselves and others from direct and immediate violence, challenges widespread assumptions that peace and protection can only be delivered with the threat of force. Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping (UCP), with 35 years of evidence from projects worldwide, demonstrates that the use of nonviolence can challenge the exclusive role of military in peacekeeping and focus on the agency of unarmed civilians in midst of violence.

Introduction

Making, and keeping, safe spaces in conflict zones where there is violence and risk of to harm to civilians has become linked to peacekeeping as the key international mechanisms for responding when there is a direct and immediate risk to civilians. The concept has become known as 'Protection of Civilians' by UN Peacekeeping.

The work of peacekeeping, as a component of creating long term and sustainable peace, is a set of activities which will reduce harm from armed conflict to civilians, and create safer spaces for civilians to live, work and build peaceful communities. In this paper I argue that although the concept of 'Peacekeeping' has become synonymous with 'Armed Military Peacekeeping' (mainly by the UN), unarmed, nonviolent peacekeeping by civilians is also effective. By studying 'Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping', and how nonviolence underpins this type of peacekeeping, we can challenge the normalised view of the military being essential to peacekeeping and violence prevention.

The normalisation of the military as the only providers of security and safety of civilians is underpinned by militarism (the military and use of force as the best way of solving challenges in society) and is used by the military to argue that they are necessary beyond the 'defence of the state' because of the peacekeeping they undertake. The dominance of militarism has delegitimised nonviolence as an approach to tackling violence, but by studying the 35 years of Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping from across the world, we can demonstrate that unarmed civilians are effective in saving lives and reducing violent behaviour of armed actors.

Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping (UCP), as a nonviolent method of reducing violence and protecting civilians contributes to our overall understanding of the ways in which nonviolence is effective in achieving change in society. Along with other security and peace strategies that use nonviolence, such as peacebuilding, peacemaking and conflict resolution, nonviolent peacekeeping can positively contribute to the way we deal with, and prevent, violence internationally and specifically enables us to provide unarmed protection from direct and immediate violence from armed actors in

conflicts without exacerbating cycles of violence. Francis¹ has argued that without using nonviolent approaches we cannot fully achieve peacebuilding and peaceful change in societies and therefore UCP becomes an essential component in designing responses to violence without involving the military or increasing militarization.

Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping (UCP) has been practised, in its modern form, for over 35 years across the world² and proven that this method can save lives, prevent displacement, and change the behavior of armed actors. Evidence presented in this paper shows that a nonviolent approach to peacekeeping is a viable and effective component of peacekeeping.

What is Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping?

Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping (UCP) describes approaches, methodology and set of activities in which trained civilians protect other civilians from direct and immediate violence, using methods developed from nonviolence theory and practice.

Unarmed civilian peacekeepers are international staff from every continent who carry out unarmed civilian peacekeeping, who live and work in the affected communities with the people they are protecting from direct and immediate violence. They have daily contact with people (shopping, walking, cooking and meetings) so they quickly learn about existing community mechanisms for resolving conflicts and de-escalating violence. They work through 'being present' and building a wide network of contacts from all sides in the conflict, including international contacts, government, other NGO's, commanders in armed groups, community contacts and media. They become visible and known to all actors (armed, civilian, government, informal, business, etc) so they are aware of changing levels of tension, movements or emerging triggers for violence, as well as opportunities for intervention. Their presence and visibility enable them to provide safe spaces to meet those involved in, and affected by, the conflict and violence, create communication routes or quickly respond to escalating tension with pro-active presence and patrolling. They work with community leaders or commanders of armed groups to directly stop the threats of violence. The purpose of UCP is to reduce and halt the violence, not to resolve the conflict, so they are very specifically focused on security and safety.

The core principles of UCP are that it is nonviolent, nonpartisan and begins with the 'primacy of the local'³. Nonviolence means that no staff member carries, or relies on, guns or other weapons to protect themselves or other people, nor to carry out any aspect of their work. Nonviolence is also the underlying principle through which

1 Francis, D. 'Making Peace Global' in Peace Review Volume 25, 2013, Issue 1.

2 Julian, R. and Schweitzer, C. (2015) The Origins and Development of Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping. Peace Review. Volume 27, Issue 1, 2015, pages 1- 8

3 Oldenhuis et al (2015) Strengthening Civilian Capacities to Protect Civilians, web-based course available from <https://www.unitar.org/event/strengthening-civilian-capacities-protect-civilians-tp201522e>

projects are designed and from which methods or approaches are selected. This relationship with nonviolence is explored more fully below.

Nonpartisanship is manifest through the focus on reducing threats and violence towards civilians from any armed actor, and not seeking to impose solutions to the conflicts. Impartiality is key to all peacekeeping⁴, the prevention of violence rather than re-balancing of power. This is one of the principles which distinguishes peacekeeping from peace enforcement.

Primacy of the local works along the same principles as 'local ownership' in peacebuilding⁵. It is an approach to protection and prevention of violence that assumes effective and sustainable protection and prevention of violence requires the participation, and recognition of capacity, of the local community who are experiencing the armed conflict.

Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping works from the basis of nonviolence being it's core principle. UCP is becoming established as a methodology and next we will consider the evidence that it is effective in protection and peacekeeping in the context of nonviolence.

The relationship between UCP and nonviolence.

To explain the relationship we will take some of Gandhi's principles of nonviolence and how they both enable, and are manifest in the practice of, UCP.

Firstly, the 'means' should match the 'ends'. In nonviolence, we should be acting in congruence with our beliefs. If we want to achieve long term peace, we should be using the methods and principles that match the end result. UCP recognizes and supports local capacity, civilian leadership and models nonviolent behavior. UCP is based on communication, relationship building and developing networks – which are essential for a transition to less violence. Local people are not necessarily using nonviolent approaches, but as a nonviolent intervention approach, UCP begins with the capacities, lives and experiences of local people.

UCP distinguishes between the person and the behavior, which is true in nonviolence. UCP seeks to challenge and change the violent behavior, whoever commits it, but recognize that every person has worth and value. The nonviolent principle that humans are more than the violence they commit is a component of UCP. Believing that every person they meet has a role to play in building peace, and

4 UN DPKO (n.d.) Principles of Peacekeeping Available online <
<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/principles-of-peacekeeping>>

5 Paffenholz, T. (2014) International Peacebuilding Goes Local: Analysing Lederach's Conflict Transformation Theory and its Ambivalent Encounter with 20 years of Practice (2014), in: Peacebuilding, Taylor and Francis, Vol.2, No.1, 11-27; Reich, H. (2006) "Local Ownership" in Conflict Transformation Projects: Partnership, Participation or Patronage? Berghof Occasional Paper 27, Berghof Research Center for Conflict Management, Berlin, September 2006, ISBN 978-3-927783-79-9, ISBN 3-972783-79-9, 36 pages.

recognizing they may also have been hurt by long term violence, opens doors for new relationships. Alongside this recognition is the belief that 'we have more in common than that which divides us' and that nonviolence calls us to recognize both the differences between us, and the shared unity we have with others. Not only is it a driver which connects 'means' to 'ends', but by inviting unity and inclusivity, UCP ensures that protection strategies and responses include local capacities and networks. UCP ensures people are included and recognised for their value as humans.

The strategies of accompaniment and presence⁶ depend on the nonviolent principles that believe people have choices to make about harming others, that people are more than the violence they threaten, and they can change their behavior. Accompaniment and presence are a witness to behavior which does and could harm others, and unarmed civilians model peaceful relationships, trust between themselves working together, and demonstrate skills that show a peaceful response to threats of violence. Examples of UCP accompaniment and presence saving lives includes Colombia and South Sudan, including testimony from organisations and reports of incidents. For example,

"The death sentences against each and every one of us have not been carried out, only because we are not alone, because we have Peace Brigades International's accompaniment and unconditional defence. "Francisco Campo – CREDHOS'⁷

The reasons for displacement are usually complex and a nonviolent understanding of knowledge is that from all perspectives there is some 'truth' and 'un-truth'. In preventing displacement UCP does not seek to determine an external objective truth about a situation, nor assume there is a single solution, but rather understands knowledge is collected through experiences, story and narrative⁸ and is therefore contestable. In holding armed actors to account to the agreements they have made to reduce harm to civilians, UCP can harness the most appropriate response to a range of protection threats, acknowledging there are both locally determined and generated responses which are interlinked with national and international policy decisions, but there is no 'blueprint' that can be applied to any context.

Examples come from Sri Lanka where the use of UCP changed the conflict dynamics and prevented the burning of houses and shops⁹, or in Mindanao,

6 Schweitzer, Christine (Ed.) (2010) *Civilian Peacekeeping – A Barely Tapped Resource*. Arbeitspapier Nr. 23, Institute for Peace Work and Nonviolent Conflict Transformation Wallace, M (2017) *Security without weapons: Rethinking violence, nonviolent action and civilian protection*. Routledge New York and London

7 PBI (2017) *PBI Our Impact*. PBI. Website <https://peacebrigades.org.uk/about-us/our-impact> Accessed October 18th 2017

8 Julian, R., Bliesemann de Guevara, B. and Redhead, R. (2019) *From Expert to Experiential Knowledge: Exploring the Inclusion of Local Experiences in Understanding Violence in Conflict*. Peacebuilding.

9 Furnari, E. (2006) *The Nonviolent Peaceforce in Sri Lanka Impacts, Learning and Summary Paper August 2003 to December 2005*. Internal Document: Nonviolent Peaceforce.

Philippines, where UCP teams stepped in to investigate reports of armed actors' movement that threatened a village, and negotiated a halt in movements that protected the village¹⁰ Geographical peace zones to help prevent displacements include South Sudan where a weapons-free zone was negotiated¹¹ and in Colombia where peace zones were created and have been protecting residents for many decades.¹²

In order to achieve long term peace we must follow Gandhi's¹³ principle that the means must be consistent with the ends. If it is peace that we want, then modeling peaceful relationships, trust, local capacity enhancement and nonviolent conflict resolution is a more consistent approach than a military response. Living and working in affected communities supports the re-establishment of relationships and communication across divided communities.¹⁴ UCP is active and effective in divided societies because nonviolence challenges the 'othering' which deepens and maintains divisions. One of the hardest and most transformative components of nonviolent principles is the transforming of 'us' vs 'them', into 'we'. On a daily basis communities are bombarded with messages that encourage it is 'their fault' or 'they did this', or 'avoid them'...the 'othering' of parts of humanity, setting one part against another only reinforces division. UCP enables those who do peace and human rights work to work more safely and with more people. For example ensuring it is safe for them to visit UCP staff and centres, offering safe space for peace meetings and providing direct protection for community leaders can help them rebuild the trust that has been harmed by violence in the past.

Conclusion

By applying nonviolence to peacekeeping, we have demonstrated that nonviolence is also effective in protecting people from armed conflict, that peacekeeping is not a domain that should be dominated by the military, and that through the application of some of Gandhi's principles of nonviolence, civilians can create mechanisms which reduce threats or direct violence. Nonviolence can create long term peace.

10 Reiman 2010

11 Easthom, T. (2015) The South Sudan Weapons Free Zone. Peace Review Vol 27: 1 (2015) pp31-36

12 PBI Colombia (2017) PBI Colombia. PBI Website Available online

<https://www.peacebrigades.org/en/pbi-Colombia> Accessed October 18th 2017

13 Gandhi's Principles of Nonviolence (<https://www.cpt.org/files/PW%20-%20Principles%20-%20Gandhi.pdf>)

14 Furnari 2006, Furnari and Julian 2014, Furnari et al 2015, Lindsay-Poland 2016; McCarthy and Pickney (2016) Israel and Palestine Case study. In Furnari (2016) Wielding Nonviolence in the Midst of Violence. Pub Institute for Peace Work and Nonviolent Conflict Transformation, Reiman 2010, Gunduz and Torralba 2014, Nonviolent Peaceforce 2015; Schweitzer, C. (2012). Nine Years of Nonviolent Peaceforce in Sri Lanka. Brussels: NP.