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University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

607 South Mathews Street Urbana IL 61801 217/333-7086

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NEED MILITARY AGGRESSORS KILL PEOPLE?

**Frank De Roose
Research Associate**

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FRANK DE ROOSE

Since October 1988, Frank De Roose has been a research associate with the Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security (ACDIS) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is a graduate of the State University of Ghent, Belgium, where he studied moral science and wrote a dissertation concerned with animal and environmental ethics. He recently completed a book, based on his dissertation, entitled *Cruelty and Caring Rethinking Animals and Ethics*. As a member of the ACDIS research staff, De Roose is examining how the political appeal to patriotic sentiments contributes to international conflicts, as well as other questions about the ethics of war and deterrence.

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Research Associate

Program in Arms Control, Disarmament
and International Security
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
330 Davenport Hall
607 South Mathews Street
Urbana Illinois 61801

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ABSTRACT

Arguments in support of the adequacy of civilian-based defense generally assume that military aggressors are bound to make massive use of brutal force. In defiance of that assumption, the paper starts by showing how a military invasion that refrains from employing deadly force is conceivable. The basic principle behind such an invasion is that military forces neutralize nonviolent actions and do not suppress them. Tactics that are guided by the principle avoid the counterproductive effects of the use of lethal force while clogging the channels of resistance. The second part of the paper indicates ways in which a civilian-based defense could effectively anticipate and react to such tactics. It is argued that, although the population's means for struggle are more limited than under most other circumstances, the invaded country can never be forced into total submission.

NEED MILITARY AGGRESSORS KILL PEOPLE?¹

I

In the late 1950s Sir Stephen King-Hall, a then retired naval officer, urged the United Kingdom and other western nations to prepare themselves against the threat of Soviet occupation. His advice was to complement conventional military defense with organized nonviolent resistance. A social defense system, he stated, would coat Western Europe with an extra security layer and provide a harmless substitute for the nuclear deterrent.² Although King-Hall's ideas were not taken seriously at the time, they have now been accepted and elaborated by a considerable number of scholars.³ For instance, the currently leading authority on the subject, Gene Sharp, has recently argued that nonviolent or civilian-based defense could make Western Europe unconquerable.⁴ By unconquerable, Sharp does not mean that a nonmilitary defense could stop a military invasion at the borders. Like King-Hall and others, he claims rather that nonviolent action could make a military invasion so unprofitable for the aggressor that the latter would be forced to retreat. To support this claim, two main arguments have been developed. The first one is that the use of military violence against nonviolent civilians erodes the support basis of the invasion. It damages the morale of the troops, tempers domestic enthusiasm for the invasion, and increases the opposition to the invasion by other countries. The second argument rests on the observation that the success of an invasion is dependent upon the compliance of the population with the occupier's rule. It claims that a nonviolently resisting population withholds that compliance and cannot be coerced into complying by the use or threat of violence.

The two arguments make many assumptions that invite doubt. In this paper I will investigate only one of them, namely, the assumption that a military invasion needs to inflict lethal violence on nonviolent civilians.⁵ Both arguments claim that it is the futility of such violence that makes military invasions fail. Hence, if it is the case that invasions can do without lethal violence, the arguments will, at the very least, require revision. Taking up the task of revamping the argumentative basis of civilian-based defense is what this article is ultimately about. By assembling the tightest possible case against the viability of nonviolent resistance, the paper aims [indirectly] to highlight its resilience and versatility.

First, I will show how a military invasion that refrains from employing deadly force is conceivable. The basic principle behind such an invasion is that military forces neutralize nonviolent actions and do not suppress them. Tactics that are guided by the principle avoid the counterproductive effects of the use of lethal violence while clogging the channels of resistance. The second part of the paper indicates ways in which a civilian-based defense could effectively anticipate and react to such tactics. I will argue that,

although the population's means for struggle are more limited than under most other circumstances, the invaded country can never be forced into total submission

The suspicion may arise that the issue addressed in this paper merely deflects attention from what many critics view as the main weakness of nonviolent resistance its inability to protect the population against a ruthless, brutal, and potentially genocidal enemy⁶ Civilian-based defense seems to be least effective when confronted with the gravest and most horrible threats, therefore, identifying the danger for civilian-based defense as military action that refrains from the use of lethal violence seems little more than cynical

There are two ways of responding to this charge The first one is by advancing the claim that, whatever the intentions of the aggressor may be, massive use of violence to carry out these intentions would be counterproductive Given the boldness of the claim, I cannot hope to defend it within the confines of this paper The second response is more appropriate in the current context It grants that massive violence may succeed in crushing nonviolent resistance, but points out that reasons of domestic or international support will, as a matter of fact, prevent many aggressors from exercising such violence For these aggressors, military invasions that rely on low-level, non-lethal violence are the most attractive option Thus, analyzing the implications of choosing that option is not a cynical move but a realistic anticipation of potential threats to a nonviolent national defense

II

The requirement to abstain from using lethal force is, when applied to civilians, no more than an affirmation of a rule that is basic to most modern societies When applied to soldiers, however, the requirement almost amounts to a contradiction in terms For soldiers differ from civilians precisely because the exercise of force, including lethal force, is part of their social function On the other hand, military operations do not intrinsically produce casualties They do so only when the political goals they serve cannot be reached except by causing death in the opponent's ranks Moreover, as a rule, it is when the opponent resists with military operations of its own, that reaching political goals requires lethal violence Hence, it is the clash between military operations, rather than military operations per se, that results in a high toll in human lives

Plain as this may be, it yields the not so obvious conclusion that the road to victory against a nonviolent opponent need not run through killing fields In the current world, war stands for violent confrontations Winning the confrontation has become an end in itself, obscuring the political objectives that instigated the war Nonviolent resistance refocuses on these

objectives, it aims at frustrating their attainment instead of destroying the means for their pursuit⁷ To regard a nonviolent adversary on the same level as a military adversary, and to define victory as the elimination of resistance, is sure to produce widespread bloodshed But it is a circuitous way of bringing the goals of the military action closer to fulfillment Unlike military resistance, civilian resistance poses no threat to the lives of soldiers There is no need, then, for the soldiers to kill the resisting civilians Winning the war and military victory lose their traditional bloodstained meaning, and deaths and injuries can even become obstacles for the pursuit of the invasion's goals

If not through the use of lethal force, how can armed forces, geared as they are towards exercising that force, be the means for attaining political ends? Armed forces can still function in many ways that are off limits to nonviolent resisters All forms of coercion that do not inherently cause death or serious injuries remain within the arsenal of the invasion troops How and whether they will be employed depends on the goals that the invasion troops ultimately want to achieve To underscore the potential of non-lethal military action, I will assume that these goals are ambitious Specifically, the argument postulates that the invasion aims at total control over the other country's political and economic life, either by establishing a colonial rule, or by installing a puppet regime Motives that undergird that aim may include reasons of material gain, the desire to reinforce one's geopolitical power position, or ideological considerations

The broad-gauged nature of the invasion's purpose requires the military aggressor to prepare for a long-term occupation Crossing the border and spreading out over the whole country is the first and easiest step Tanks and other heavy artillery are of little use then or at any other stage of the action Lightly armed soldiers in rapid all-terrain vehicles have far greater mobility and will appear less threatening to the invaded population Civilian technical and administrative personnel can, from the very start, accompany the soldiers to accentuate the peaceful character of the invasion In the country under attack, such measures may not raise the tolerance for the occupation by much, but within the international community they should succeed in fostering a more lenient view towards the military intervention

Once the first wave of occupation troops has spread out, nonviolent resistance can be expected to become fully activated It is useful to distinguish among four types of resistance institutional noncooperation, defiance of the occupier's regime, bodily obstruction, and symbolic intervention Institutional noncooperation goes into effect when occupiers try to adapt the invaded society's institutional apparatus (comprising mainly economic enterprises and the state bureaucracy) for their own purposes By discontinuing or disturbing the functioning of the apparatus through strikes, work delays and sabotage the nonviolent resistance makes it into an unreliable tool that hinders rather than helps the invader achieve its aims

Defiance of the occupier's regime is a response to the invader's promulgation of new decrees that try to coax, con, or coerce the population into submission. Through disobedience (e.g., ignoring curfew), affirmation of autonomy (e.g., displaying the national flag), or even overcompliance (e.g., giving oneself up to be arrested) the new order is scorned, its authority ridiculed, and its power emaciated.

Noncooperation and defiance attack the occupation's infrastructure. They respectively prevent the invader from taking over the existing organizational structures and from putting up effective new ones. Bodily obstruction and symbolic intervention strike at the occupation's superstructure, that is, at the morale of the troops. Symbolic intervention tactics include protest marches to make clear that the troops are unwanted and persuasion campaigns to convince them that the invasion is unjustified. Bodily obstruction refers mainly to limiting the troops' movements by forming living walls on roads, railroad tracks, and in front of buildings. This compels the troops either to use force, which could cause them moral distress, or accept temporarily a humiliating retreat.

Every type and form of nonviolent action could be combatted with violence. Strikers, protesters, and violators of rules could be imprisoned, cudgelled down, shot at, or even tortured. But if one imprisons strikers, they are not put to work, if one cudgels down protesters, they will not become more tolerant of their assailants, and if one starts shooting or torturing violators of rules, the invaded society is killed off, not governed. To be sure, it is conceivable that if enough brutal examples are set, the population will be finally forced into submission. But if the purpose is to establish a regime that does not require soldiers on every street corner and in every factory, another strategy is called for to smother the resistance. Such a strategy fights the resistance on its own terms, it takes over the initiative by responding to each of the four forms of nonviolent action in ways that violate the expectations that guide them.

Institutional noncooperation is guided by the expectation that to some extent the occupier has to rely on the invaded society's institutions in order to control that society's population. To render this noncooperation ineffective, the occupation forces initially could abstain from attempts at exerting influence through the existing organizational channels. If businesses and governmental services go on strike or engage in other boycotts, the invader could stand idly by and wait for the campaign to drown in its own pointlessness. When normalcy returns, the troops could launch their own institutional noncooperation campaign. With limited violence, the economic and bureaucratic machinery could be deregulated or even be brought to a virtual standstill. Transportation and communication could be delayed and entrances to factories and office buildings could be sporadically barricaded. The purpose of these largely nonviolent actions would be to

blackmail the country's leadership into conceding part of its power to the occupier. There would be no need to dispose of the country's regime; it could continue to function as a front of legitimate authority for the gradual erosion of its real power. Ideally, the transferral of power would have to be paced in such a way that it becomes impossible for the population to determine whether the laws and instructions that are issued spring forth from the resistance leadership or the occupation's command.

Defiance of the occupier's regime is guided by the idea that the aggressor will want to impose its own rules on the invaded society. Since obedience to these rules can be withheld, the resistance expects that through defiance of the occupier's decrees, the aims of the invasion can be frustrated. To disturb that expectation and to neutralize potential acts of defiance, the occupier could follow two, not mutually exclusive, principles. The first principle is not to issue orders and regulations that provide the population with rallying points for defiance campaigns. The second principle is to decree rules that confuse the resistance and transform it into a caricature. In line with the first principle, curfews, prohibitions on displaying patriotic symbols, and restrictions on holding protest demonstrations would all be carefully avoided. In any case, since such limitations are mostly issued in response to violent protests, there would be no need to impose them in the case under consideration. The preservation of law and order could safely be left in the hands of the indigenous judicial system. However, in line with the second principle, the occupier could make its presence felt by promulgating decrees that, if massively disobeyed, would hurt the resistance by ridiculing and exhausting it. Such mock decrees could demand the population to respect the laws of the country, ask people to stay inside in the middle of the night, or even instigate them to undertake certain forms of protests. In addition, laws could be adopted that discriminate in favor of certain parts of the population and commands could be issued that contradict each other.

The symbolic intervention actions of the resistance are predicated on the expectation that the troops are misinformed about their mission: that they have been told that they are liberators rather than aggressors, or that they have been made to believe that they come to restore justice rather than commit injustice. That expectation need not be valid, for it is not inconceivable that the aggressor's country has grievances that make its population feel justified in invading the other country. If so, symbolic intervention actions of the resistance may prove to be largely harmless.⁸ If, on the contrary, the invasion troops are misinformed about the reasons for the invasion, persuasion campaigns of the resistance could easily damage the morale of the troops. To counter such campaigns, the occupier should try to make the mass communication channels unavailable to the resistance and use them, instead, to put up a persuasion campaign of its own with the purpose of justifying the invasion. Because the resistance would not be

violently suppressed, propaganda that supports the invader's activities could be more effective than under harsher occupation circumstances

Bodily obstruction limits the enemy's movements. The resistance expects these limitations to confront the troops with the dilemma of either acquiescing to them or removing them with violence. However, there are several other ways to deal with them. First of all, the limitations could be circumvented or avoided by taking other roads or choosing other means of transport and, thus, remain unacknowledged. Secondly, the obstacles—human or otherwise—could be removed and carried off by force without using violence.⁹ Finally, the enthusiasm of the resistance for engaging in bodily obstruction could be undermined by outperforming the resistance. This means that the aggressor could itself apply obstruction methods to such an extent that use of them by the resistance might seem to contribute to the invader's cause rather than its own. This tactic has already been mentioned as part of a counter-noncooperation campaign and would, at any rate, be part of the invader's action repertoire.

The ground rule for reacting to nonviolent resistance in each of its four forms is to substitute patience for violence. The occupier should not expect the speedy collapse of defense efforts, but must gradually undermine them by, on the one hand, destabilizing the society's normal way of life and by, on the other hand, instigating people to invest energy in pointless anti-occupation actions. Thus, on the assumption that the invaded population failed to anticipate such a strategy, a condition of emergency is created with which civilian-based defense is unable to cope. The resulting confusion and exhaustion may produce a climate of helplessness among the people that make them come to regard the reinstatement of order—any order—as desirable. They may become convinced that nonviolent resistance is counterproductive and that, in order to prevent the country from sliding into chaos, cooperation with the invader is necessary. In the wake of that realization, the occupation forces could, without major opposition, increase their control over the state. By this process, they would, in the end, be able to install a regime in the invaded country that meets the objectives behind the invasion.

However, it may take months or even years before the invader can reap any benefits from this strategy. In the meanwhile, there will be a pressing need to defray the costs of the invasion. For, although these costs will be far lower than the costs of conventional warfare, they are likely to be a considerable burden to the invader's national budget. To solve this essentially financial problem, the invader can try to levy an indirect tax within the occupied country. For instance, the invader can bring the food distribution chain under its control, provide food freely to its own troops, and hike prices for the rest of the population. In addition, goods, ranging from precious natural resources to machines and consumer products, can be

shipped out of the country to be sold in the home country or on the international market. Such moves are largely invulnerable to noncooperation actions, for they do not rely on compliance of the producers.¹⁰ By depending on its own means of transportation, the invader would also be less vulnerable to resistance actions aimed at dislocating the distribution infrastructure. At best, then, the resistance could fight back with obstruction actions. But, as has been indicated above, the invasion troops have effective ways of neutralizing such actions, so that there is little that the population can do to hinder the invader's organized pillage. In short, economic plunder could compensate for the financial cost of the invasion and allow the occupation troops to continue their largely nonviolent attrition warfare.

III

Military forces can follow a course of action that is largely not violent, but they are not restrained by it. Paradoxically, this implies that they have more tactics at their disposal that are not violent than does a civilian-based defense. For some, such tactics (arresting people, for instance) can only be effective when backed up with the threat of violence. In theory [at least], military operations contain a larger potential for action that is not violent than civilian resistance operations.¹¹ How that potential can be successfully used has been explained in the previous section. The question that remains to be answered is: can a civilian-based defense employ tactics that would effectively thwart such a nonviolent military strategy? Or do the military's larger acting capacities render it invincible?

In part, the effectiveness of nonviolent military action rests on a surprise factor. Armed forces are not expected to behave in a nonviolent manner and, as a result, if they do behave that way, they trigger inefficient forms of resistance. But nonviolent military strategies can be anticipated and appropriate responses [to them] developed. The rule governing these responses should be that active resistance is put on hold as long as the invader does not pose a real threat to the country's institutions and laws. If applied, this rule would avoid mass mobilizations as an initial response to invasion and make the invader's mock decree policy lose its sting. Energy to resist would be conserved in this way, and the invader would, at the very least, need much more time to succeed in a war of attrition.

The occupier's obstruction of transportation, production and communication is much more difficult to counter. The only method that may be somewhat effective is to obstruct the obstructors. If, for instance, troops block a road, nonviolent resisters could, in their turn, block the troops. It is doubtful, however, whether this tactic can force the invader to give up its obstruction campaign. Whereas military troops can remove blockades of nonviolent protesters, nonviolent protesters cannot remove blockades of

military troops Hence, civilian-based defense suffers from a serious operational handicap

Civilian-based defense is also largely powerless against organized pillage Theoretically, people could destroy their goods before they are taken away from them but, in practice, this solution would be worse than the problem It is impossible to know in advance which goods the invader will want to confiscate, hence, only by completely annihilating its wealth could the population prevent the invader's pillage campaign Apart from being too draconian, such a measure would also pulverize the economic basis of the resistance and, thus, hasten its collapse

Since the invader's obstruction and pillage campaigns are largely invulnerable to direct nonviolent resistance, the invaded country could try to halt them by mobilizing the international community against the invader Tough economic sanctions and political ostracism may, if internationally supported, be so costly to the invader as to force it to give up its occupation However, it is dangerous for a civilian-based defense to bet too heavily on international backing The record of the effectiveness of international sanctions is not particularly enchanting If the invader belongs to powerful alliances, chances are that the invasion will be widely condoned rather than condemned Even if this is not the case, there are at least two reasons not to bank on the willingness of the international community to sanction the invader First of all, the invader employs predominantly nonviolent methods, so that the occupation is unlikely to produce the moral outcry that is typically needed to prod nations into action In addition, third nations will be tempted to blame the victim They will be inclined to argue that, if only the attacked country had put up a military defense, the invader would have refrained from aggression They may conclude, therefore, that the attacked country should be able to deal with a military occupier without expecting outside help

Symbolic intervention campaigns that weaken the morale of the enemy troops could turn out to constitute the most effective resistance strategy However, as has been observed earlier, this will be so only if the leaders of the aggressor country blatantly misinform their people about the objectives of the invasion On the assumption that this is not the case, the response of a civilian-based defense to a largely nonviolent military occupation is bound to be weak At best, it can prevent ineffective anti-occupation mobilizations and, in this way, prolong the life of the resistance But since this allows the invader to continue to reap the benefits from its pillage strategy and to continue to undercut people's will to resist by deregulating their day-to-day living patterns, the defeat or retreat of the invader is unlikely

And yet, time and victory are not, by definition, at the side of the invader. Traditionally, a military victory evokes images of triumphant generals who impose their wills on a cowering populace. Such a victory is not in store for the armed forces that take over control in a nonviolently defended country, for even though the resistance may be forced into conceding power to the invader, that power will necessarily be limited. First of all, the invader's power will be limited in kind. Imposing restrictions on the freedom of speech and assembly, for instance, fall outside its scope. Such restrictions would provide the population with concrete rallying points for renewed resistance and, thus, strengthen instead of weaken its position. The invader's power is also limited by the rate at which it will be able to effectuate radical changes. Abrupt changes in the system would provide the resistance with a new focus for effective protests. To avoid this effect, the occupier would have to change the existing system slowly and gradually, with each change being too insignificant to provoke widespread protest.

The power of the invader lies primarily on the economic level. Instead of relying on pillage for its income, the invader could, through control over the production system, usurp the surplus value produced by the labor force. The result for the population would be a considerable decline of its standard of living. However, as the invader becomes more dependent on the production apparatus, strikes and economic boycotts against the occupation regime could regain effectiveness. Therefore, if the occupier would revert to its obstruction strategy in response to them, its newly acquired management position would be undermined. Rather than going back to square one, the occupier may thus seek social peace through negotiations, compromises, and concessions.

Ultimately, then, the net material gains of the invasion may remain very humble. An invader can never be sure of having eliminated the resistance. Nonviolent protest movements can always flare up again and recapture terrain. In terms of a cost-benefit calculation, this renders the invasion a dubious enterprise. To be sure, risks are inherent in all political endeavors, and warfare is often considered as merely the continuation of politics by other means.¹² There may seem little reason, then, to think that military powers are bound to shrink from invading a country that defends its interests with nonviolent means. However, a country that relies on a civilian-based defense is not in a worse position than a country that relies on a military defense. There are no defense systems that can guarantee immunity from attack and neither are there any such systems that will always be able to defeat an attack. Hence, the fact that non-lethal military aggressions may sometimes be able to eliminate civilian-based defense systems should not count as a decisive argument against adopting them.

In conclusion, two results of the investigation should be stressed. The first one is that military aggressors need not kill people. If they direct their

actions against nonviolently defended countries, they may (sometimes) attain victory through non-lethal strategies and, perhaps, more successfully so than by the massive use of brutal force. The second result is that civilian-based defense leads to a radical redefinition of warfare. Death and injury no longer play a dominant role, and the casualties become largely psychological ones. Moreover, defeat and victory are not clearly delineated: a country's resistance may seem to be crushed, but nonetheless regain its original power soon afterwards. This last fact may in the end turn out to be the best deterrent against military aggression, for it robs such aggression of the promise of an ultimate and total victory.

NOTES

¹ I would like to thank Jeff McMahan, Brian Martin, and Robert Burrowes for their comments on an earlier version of this paper

² See his *The Alternative to the Nuclear Deterrent Non-violent Resistance*, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 103, February 1958, pp 4-20, and *Defence in the Nuclear Age*, (London Victor Gollancz, 1958)

³ For a somewhat outdated but otherwise excellent overview of the literature, see Herbert M Kritzer, *Nonviolent National Defense Concepts and Implications*, *Peace Research Reviews* 5, April 1974, pp 1-57 More recent and introductory overviews can be found in Gene Keyes, *Strategic Non-Violent Defense The Construct of an Option*, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 4, 1981, pp 125-151, and Jack D Salmon, *Can Non-violence Be Combined with Military Means for National Defense?*, *Journal of Peace Research* 25, 1988, pp 69-80

⁴ Gene Sharp, *Making Europe Unconquerable*, (Cambridge, MA Ballinger, 1985)

⁵ Critiques of other assumptions in the arguments can be found in Thomas C Schelling, *Some Questions on Civilian Defence*, in Adam Roberts (ed), *Civilian Resistance as a National Defense*, Harrisburg, PA, Stackpole, 1968, pp 303-308, Edward B Atkeson, *The Relevance of Civilian-Based Defense to US Security Interests Part II*, *Military Review*, June 1976, pp 45-55, and Koen Koch, *Civilian Defence An Alternative to Military Defence?* *Netherlands Journal of Sociology* 20 , 1984, pp 1-12

⁶ See, e g , Liddell Hart, *Deterrence or Defense*, (London Stevens & Sons, 1960) pp 220-21

⁷ As Gene Sharp has put it *Instead of striking indirectly at the opponent s military forces which are the outward expression of the opponent s power, the nonviolent sanctions strike directly at the sources of that power cooperation and obedience From The Role of Power in Nonviolent Struggle*, p 21, unpublished paper, presented at the Conference on Nonviolent Political Struggle, sponsored by the Arab Thought Forum,

Ammam, Jordan, November 15 - 17, 1986 See also Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack, *War Without Weapons*, (London Frances Pinter, 1974)

8 Brian Martin has pointed out to me that at least one facet of symbolic intervention, namely fraternization, does not presuppose that the occupation troops are misinformed in order to succeed However, while this may be true, it is of minor importance here, for fraternization is especially important as a psychological tool to inhibit the invader's use of brutal force Since, in the case under consideration, the invader does not use such force anyway, fraternization can contribute little to frustrating the invader's goals

9 Here, as elsewhere in this paper, violence refers to violence against persons only, I follow the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989, 2nd ed) in defining violence as the exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on, or cause damage to, persons or property, action or conduct characterized by this treatment or usage tending to cause bodily injury or forcibly interfering with personal freedom It does not follow from this definition that a military aggressor who refrains from using lethal force is nonviolent The violence of such an aggressor is merely physically—but not necessarily psychologically—less harmful and of a lower intensity than the violence one habitually expects from military aggressors

10 To be sure, the producers could go on strike and thus make the invader's source of income dry up But a prolonged food production strike, for instance, would cause far less harm to the occupier than to the local population who is dependent on that production for its survival Hence, as a method of resistance, it would threaten instead of bolster the opposition to the invasion

11 Robert Burrowes has pointed out to me that it is useful to distinguish between actions that are not violent and those that are nonviolent By stipulation, the latter category is smaller than the former (of which it is part) for it excludes actions, such as arresting people, that derive their effectiveness from being backed up by the threat of violence

12 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1976, p 87

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