OMNI NEWSLETTER #5 ON NONVIOLENCE, September 21, 2012 (UN International Day of Peace), Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace (#3 June 7, 2011, #4 September 30, 2011).

My blog: The War Department and Peace Heroes
http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/
Newsletters on Peace, Justice, and Ecology:
http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/
Index:
http://www.omnicenter.org/omni-newsletter-general-index/
See: Imperialism, Militarism, Pentagon, Recruiting, Suicides, Whistleblowing, and more.

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Launch of ‘The People’s Charter to Create a Nonviolent World’

May 25, 2011 by robertjburrowes  http://thepeoplesnonviolencecharter.wordpress.com/

**The People’s Charter to Create a Nonviolent World** was launched simultaneously on 11 November 2011 at several locations around the world.

The aim of this Charter is to create a worldwide movement to end violence in all its forms. *The People’s Charter* will give voice to the millions of ordinary people around the world who want an end to war, oppression, environmental destruction and violence of all kinds. We hope that this Charter will support and unite the courageous nonviolent struggles of ordinary people all over the world.

As you will see, **The People’s Charter** describes very thoroughly the major forms of violence in the world. It also presents a strategy to end this violence.

We can each play a part in stopping violence and in creating a peaceful and just world. Some of us will focus on reducing our consumption, some of us will parent our children in a way that fosters children’s safety and empowerment, some of us will use nonviolent resistance in the face of military violence. Everyone’s contribution is important and needed. We hope this Charter will be a springboard for us all to take steps to create a peaceful and just world, however small and humble these steps may be. By listening to the deep truth of ourselves, each other and the Earth, each one of us can find our own unique way to help create this nonviolent world.

Why did we choose 11 November as the date to launch **The People’s Charter**?

‘When I was a boy ... all the people of all the nations which fought in the First World War were silent during the eleventh minute of the eleventh hour of Armistice Day, which was the eleventh day of the eleventh month. It was at that minute in nineteen-hundred and eighteen, that millions upon millions of human beings stopped butchering one another. I have talked to old men who were on battlefields at that minute. They have told me in one way or another that the sudden silence was the Voice of God. So we still have among us some men who can remember when God spoke clearly to mankind.’ (Kurt Vonnegut Jr., an atheist humanist, in his novel *Breakfast of Champions*.)

**Organisation**

So far, the organising groups in various locations have organised launch events in their localities around the world. Some groups are organising follow-up events so that other people have the chance to become involved in local, personal networks.

See ‘Future Events’ for information about the next public event nearest you.

**Signing the Charter**
The People’s Charter can be read and signed online: click on ‘Read Charter’ or ‘Sign Charter’ in the sidebar. http://thepeoplesnonviolencecharter.wordpress.com/about/

‘A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.’ Mohandas K. Gandhi

The People’s Charter to Create a Nonviolent World was posted on 25 May 2011.

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See below for the Charter text.

TEXT OF THE PEOPLE’S CHARTER

THE PEOPLE’S CHARTER TO CREATE A NONVIOLENT WORLD

Launch date: 11 November 2011

Recognising that:

1. The United States government dominates world affairs and is engaged in a perpetual war (sometimes presented as a ‘war on terror’) to secure control of essential diminishing natural resources (including oil, water and strategic minerals) from what the 2010 United States Quadrennial Defense Review www.defenselink.mil/qdr refers to as ‘the Global commons’ (which means, in effect, anywhere in the world, including the land of other peoples). The USA, with less than 5% of the world’s population, consumes 33% of the world’s resources

2. The United States government (sometimes together with pliant government allies in Europe, the Middle East, Asia, America and Australia) maintains occupation forces in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and the Mariana Islands

3. The Chinese government occupies Tibet

4. The Israeli government occupies Palestine

5. The French government occupies Kanaky and French Polynesia

6. The Indonesian government occupies West Papua

7. The Chinese government violently suppresses the people of China, including practitioners of the gentle, meditative art of Falan Dafa, some of whose imprisoned members are subjected to forced organ removal

8. The populations of many countries including (but not limited to) Burma, China, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Syria, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe are violently suppressed by militarily-backed dictatorships

9. Indigenous peoples in many countries have been dispossessed of their land, culture, spirituality and human rights by settler populations from other countries
10. The use of nuclear materials to generate electricity and create weapons of mass destruction exposes humankind and other species to unnecessary and unacceptable risks of radioactive contamination.

11. The burning of fossil fuels (producing carbon dioxide) and extensive animal agriculture (producing methane) is precipitating catastrophic alterations in climate patterns.

12. The Earth’s natural processes are being degraded and destroyed by human violence including (but not limited to) the destruction of ecosystems such as forests, rivers, wetlands, grasslands and coral reefs; the over-exploitation and pollution of fresh water supplies; and the degradation and poisoning of industrial agricultural and fishing systems, all of which are precipitating an unnatural and accelerating rate of species extinctions.

13. There is a massive and increasing number of refugees and internally displaced persons caused by the use of military violence and climatically induced ‘natural’ disasters.

14. Many people devote their energy to the design, manufacture and/or use of weapons and torture equipment in order to harm, mutilate or kill fellow human beings.

15. The global economic system, maintained by Western military violence, results in the death through starvation-related diseases of one child in Africa, Asia or Central/South America every five seconds, often denies ordinary working men and women a fair return for their labour, forces many people in industrialised economies into poverty and/or homelessness, and ruthlessly exploits the natural environment and nonhuman species.

16. Violent and/or discriminatory practices often deny many groups – including (but not limited to) children, aged people, women, working people, indigenous peoples, racial groups, ethnic groups, religious groups, cultural groups, people with particular sexual orientations, people with disabilities, military personnel, incarcerated people and nonhuman species – the opportunities to which they are entitled as living beings on Earth.

17. The global slave trade denies 27,000,000 human beings the right to live the life of their choice, condemning many individuals – especially women and children – to lives of sexual slavery, forced labour or childhood military service.

18. Terrorist organisations, criminal organisations, drug cartels and cults use terror and violence to exploit ordinary people.

19. There is widespread violence in the family home, in schools, at the workplace and on the street.

20. All of the violent behaviours described above have their origin in adult violence against children: this violence generates the warped emotional and behavioural patterns that later manifest as adult violence in its many forms. See Why Violence? http://tinyurl.com/whyviolence
21. It is human violence – against ourselves, each other and the Earth – that threatens to cause human extinction.

22. National governments, international government organisations and global institutions (such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation), all of which represent national elites, are not capable of addressing the above problems...

The Purpose of The People’s Charter:

This Charter identifies eight aims of a nonviolent strategy to mobilise ordinary people, local groups, communities, non-government organisations and international networks opposed to these and other manifestations of human violence to explicitly renounce the use of violence themselves and to take nonviolent action to strategically resist this violence in all of its forms for the sake of humankind, future generations, all other species on Earth and the Earth itself.

The aims of this nonviolent strategy are as follows:

1. To convince or, if necessary, nonviolently compel the United States government and United States corporations to no longer use military violence and economic coercion to control world affairs for the benefit of the United States elite and its allied national elites in Europe, the Middle East, Asia, America and Australia.

2. To convince or, if necessary, nonviolently compel the United States government and its allied governments to completely dismantle their military (including nuclear) forces and overseas bases, to decolonise or end their occupation of all occupied territories, and to instead adopt a strategy of nonviolent defence.

3. To encourage all individuals and organisations currently resisting the military and/or economic domination of the United States elite and its allied elites to recognise the shared nature of our struggle and, when appropriate, to coordinate at local, regional or global level our acts of nonviolent resistance to this domination.

4. To support the development and implementation of comprehensive nonviolent strategies for the liberation of Afghanistan, Burma, China, French Polynesia, Iran, Iraq, Kanaky, the Mariana Islands, North Korea, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Syria, Tibet, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, West Papua, Zimbabwe and all other countries living under the yoke of occupation or dictatorship. (See Robert J. Burrowes, *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defense: A Gandhian Approach*, State University of New York Press, 1996.)

5. To support the development and implementation of comprehensive nonviolent strategies to end violence in the home, slavery, the sexual trafficking of women and children, the use of child soldiers, as well as the existence of terrorist and criminal organisations, drug cartels and cults.

6. To support the development and implementation of comprehensive nonviolent strategies to end the marginalisation and exploitation of particular identity groups including (but not limited to) indigenous peoples; women; workers; racial, ethnic,
religious and cultural groups; children; aged people; military personnel; incarcerated people; refugees and internally displaced peoples; those who are homeless and/or live in poverty; people with a particular sexual orientation; people with disabilities and nonhuman species

7. To encourage the people of the industrialised world (except those already living in poverty) to each accept personal responsibility for reducing their consumption of global resources to a level that is commensurate with genuine equity for all human beings on Earth and the ecological carrying capacity of the Earth itself, particularly given the needs of other species. See The Flame Tree Project to Save Life on Earth [http://tinyurl.com/flametree](http://tinyurl.com/flametree)

8. To encourage all adults to understand the violence they (unconsciously) inflict on children and to take responsibility for ending this.

The methods of this nonviolent strategy are as follows:

1. To listen deeply to ourselves, each other and the Earth

2. To engage in acts of nonviolent resistance and creation: acts of nonviolent protest and persuasion, acts of nonviolent noncooperation and acts of nonviolent intervention, including the creation of new organisations, communities, institutions and structures that genuinely meet the needs of all beings in a just, peaceful and ecologically sustainable manner. (For ideas about nonviolent actions, see Gene Sharp, The Politics of Nonviolent Action, Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973.)

The People’s Charter Pledge:

Having read and agreed with this Charter:

1. I pledge to listen to the deep truth of myself, others and the Earth

2. I pledge to make every effort to progressively eliminate the violence I inflict on myself, others and the Earth

3. I pledge to engage in acts of nonviolent resistance and/or creation to bring about a nonviolent future on Earth

Signing The People’s Charter:

If you are committed to acting on this Charter, please add your name and country to the list of Charter participants [HERE](http://tinyurl.com/flametree).

For Ideas:

If you need ideas to fulfil your pledge, please consult the websites and books cited in The People’s Charter.

You are welcome to invite others to consider signing this Charter.

Robert J. Burrowes – Australia
Anita McKone – Australia
Anahata Giri – Australia
NONVIOLENCE ORGANIZATIONS


NEVADA DESERT EXPERIENCE
An action group based at Las Vegas, NV.
 info@NevadaDesertExperience.org; NevadaDesertExperience.org (D)

ACTIVIST PROFILE

**Brandywine Peace Community**
Brandywine Peace Community, a long-time WRL affiliate, has been throwing their support behind the Occupy movement with "Welcome, Occupy Philly" signs and banners that made the connection between the corporate control of U.S. democracy and the corporate militarism of such war profiteers as Lockheed Martin, the world's #1 war profiteer and Pentagon weapons producer.

IN MEMORIUM

**Karl Bissinger, 1914-2008**
Beloved longtime WRL staff member Karl Bissinger succumbed to a stroke on November 19. Karl was an energetic and creative fund raiser, an enthusiastic civil disobedient, a generous host to countless meetings, and a loyal and supportive friend.

**Ralph DiGia: 1914-2008**
Ralph, a lifelong war resister and pacifist, died February 1 in New York City. Ralph had been the heart and soul of WRL since he came on staff shortly after the end of World War II.

**Bill Sutherland, 1918-2010**
Bill Sutherland, unofficial ambassador between the peoples of Africa and the Americas for over fifty years, died peacefully on January 2, 2010. He was 91.

Marv Davidov

Photo courtesy Tom Bottolene/Circlevision.org

Long-time Minnesota peace activist Marv Davidov died on January 14 at age 80. Marv was well known for his role in starting the Honeywell Project, which he helped start in 1968 to oppose the anti-personnel weapons made by the Minneapolis company and used against civilians in Southeast Asia. Marv was one of the Freedom Riders, and was on the Quebec to Guantanamo Walk organized by the Committee for Nonviolent Action in the early '60s.

24th Annual WRL RAFFLE FOR RESISTANCE 2012
Nearly Twice as Many Prizes!
$3 per ticket, $25 for a sheet of 12

Your raffle contribution directly supports the campaigns and programs of War Resisters League in our efforts to end war and eliminate its causes. We try to choose prizes with some special meaning: unique, handcrafted items and/or those from people or companies who are members and friends in the struggle for justice and peace. We are eager for new suggestions and prize donations. Please let us hear from you!

Surprise a friend or two by sending in a few tickets with their names as well!

GRAND PRIZE - FOUR NIGHTS ON CAPE COD
Have a quiet getaway on Cape Cod, MA. The three-room house, kindly offered by member Craig Simpson, is next to a nature preserve near Hyannis and Woods Hole and includes a wonderful screened-in porch! (Travel is not included.)

And 23 more prizes, including books, music, artwork and handcrafted jewelry!

TEAR GAS is lethal to people and lethal to movements

Facing Tear Gas is a story-telling project of War Resisters League by and for people that have experienced tear gas all over the world. By making the links between these stories we hope to bring those that profit off of tear gas further into the public consciousness and, along with that, the inspiring movements the gas is used to squelch. This is part of a broader campaign to end the US’s role in the business of tear gas in solidarity with global nonviolent uprisings and those facing US-backed repression everywhere, including within the US.
Get more info at  http://facingteargas.tumblr.com/
and  https://www.warresisters.org/content/info-tear-gas

**Slideshow from the WRL Archives: On the Centennial of the Life of Bayard Rustin**

2012 marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of civil rights icon Bayard Rustin, and many groups—from the Quaker-based American Friends Service Committee and inter-faith Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) to the labor federation AFL-CIO to countless educational institutions—are engaged in celebrating this man of humble beginnings. Rustin, however, was more than simply a campaigner for individual liberties—be they for Black or gay folks. He was a revolutionary critic of the status quo, one whose commitment to radical pacifism and ability to bring together broad and often conflicting peoples made a mark still very relevant today.

This slideshow, put together by the War Resisters League (WRL, for whom Rustin served as Executive Secretary from 1953 till 1965—including the period when he was chief architect of the historic 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom), focuses on this radical bridge-building aspect of Rustin’s life.

View the slide show on Slideshare

**New! WIN Magazine Summer 2012**

Our summer issue focuses on music, with articles on using rap music in a social justice curriculum, hip hop against homophobia and heavy metal songs you forgot were antiwar.

The issue also features an interview with Basra, Iraq labor activist Hashmeya Muhsin al-Saadawi, a speech by Bayard Rustin, conscientious objector and civil and gay rights pioneer (who would have turned 100 this year), and reviews, news and reports from WRL organizers.

Check out the Summer 2012 issue of WIN

Subscribe to WIN!
You Can't Take What's All of Ours! Breaking Down NATO/G8 and Rising Up Against Austerity and Militarism
To mark the NATO summit to held in May 2012 in Chicago and the simultaneous G8 summit held in Camp David, Maryland, War Resisters League and the Grassroots Global Justice Alliance released a new popular education resource.

Download the curriculum here.

Download the supplement to the curriculum.

2012 Peace Calendar || Organize This! A 1955-2011 Retrospective
$ 5 each -- Order Online Now!

Organize This!
A 1955-2011 Retrospective

War Resisters League
2012 Peace Calendar

Edited by Liz Roberts
Foreword by Noam Chomsky
Afterword by Wendy Schwartz

WRL PIE CHART FLYERS - Where Your Income Tax Money Really Goes
BUY NOW!

The War Resisters League's famous "pie chart" flyer analyzes the Federal Fiscal Year 2013 Budget (released in February 2012). Perfect for Tax Day!

Each year, War Resisters League analyzes federal funds outlays as presented in detailed tables in "Analytical Perspectives" of the Budget of the United States Government. Our analysis is based on federal funds, which do not include trust funds -- such as Social Security -- that are raised separately from income taxes for specific purposes. What you pay (or don't pay) by April 15, 2012 goes to the federal funds portion of the budget.
MORE BOOKS


Kurlansky, Mark. Nonviolence. (review below)

Senthil Ram and Ralph Summy. Nonviolence.


--Zinn, Howard. The Power of Nonviolence.

**Nonviolence: A History of a Dangerous Idea by Mark Kurlansky**

Reviewed by Tim Wolcott

Non-violence seems like harmless idea, it being rooted in compassionate and peaceful interests. Why is it then that practitioners of non-violence are often seen as enemies of the state? Mark Kurlansky’s book illuminates that dark corner where commercial, religious and state power often collude to perpetuate violence and marginalize activists for peace. It also delivers context to our struggle and hope for our prevailing.

Violence between combatants is disturbing and wasteful enough, but when statistics show that civilians are increasingly the majority of the casualties of war (In World War I, 20% of the casualties were civilian. In WWII, 67% were civilian. In 21st century warfare, such as Iraq, the casualties may be as high as 90%), there is more impetus to eschew violence. Many believe that violence is inevitable, however, - hard wired into human behavior. Kurlansky posits that the source of violence is not human nature, but a lack of imagination. He asserts that, "War’s inevitability does not rest on natural law, but on individuals incapable of conceiving of another path."

The Nazis are often cited as an example of an enemy against whom non-violence would have been futile. This book contends that in fact, more Jews were saved by non-violence than by violence. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were saved by individuals who risked the lives of their entire family to hide a Jew or a Jewish family. Moreover, the governments of Denmark and Bulgaria, a German ally, saved thousands by refusing to cooperate in anti-Semitic measures.

Etienne de la Boetie asked in a 1548 essay on dictators, "What could the dictator do to you if you did not connive with them who plunders you?" Gandhi said, "No government can exist for a single moment without the cooperation of the people, willing or forced, and if people withdraw their cooperation in every detail, the government will come to a standstill". History shows that this became the successful strategy of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia in their resistance to Soviet Union dictatorship.

The presumption that political conflicts must necessarily be resolved through warfare wasn’t always the case. Confucius (551-479 B.C.) was known to have said, "If the distant peoples do not submit, then build up culture and character and so win them." In his The Analects was the idea that the military is essential to government, but less important than other functions. The current US Department of Defense including the VA requires 57% of the federal budget. How did we arrive at the point where endless war dominates our lives, where national treasure is squandered while civilian support systems wither away? Non-violence traces the history of this evolution.
The ideology of warfare that has been repeatedly invoked for the past thousand years of Western history grew out of Bishop Augustine of Hippo’s thesis of "just war" in the fifth century. He believed that if a pious man believed in a just cause and truly loved his enemies, it was permissible to go to war and to kill the enemies he loved because he was doing it in a high-minded way. Pope Urban II developed a propaganda campaign to launch the first Crusade at the end of the eleventh century based on this ideology. Pope Urban’s speech became a textbook model for rallying the troops. It contained all the traditional lies by which people are convinced to kill and be killed. The enemy is evil, and we have God on our side. Those who did not support the war should be and would be singled out as immoral. President Obama invoked the concept of "just war" to rationalize his "surge" in Afghanistan. Neither Kurlansky nor I believe that religions necessarily promote war. Most religions shun warfare and hold non-violence as the only moral route toward political change. However, religion and its language have often been co-opted by the violent people who have been governing societies. Once a state takes over a religion, the religion loses its non-violent teachings. The state imagines it is impotent without a military, because it cannot conceive of power without force.

Peter Chelcicky in fifteenth century Prague was one of the first to see that the cause of perpetual war lies not in the nature of man, but in the nature of power. He believed that to establish a world living in peace would require the abandonment of power politics. He saw war as a conspiracy in which the poor were duped into fighting to defend the privileges of the rich. He was even opposed to universities promoting a militaristic, wealth-hoarding society. His thoughts still resonate today.

America’s Founding Fathers were greatly influenced by the 17th century Oxford scholar Thomas Hobbes who believed that man had a selfish nature and that continued warfare was his natural state. He also believed in man’s acquisitive nature and that until contracts to the contrary were established, he had the right to take what he wanted (and that we did in earnest - starting with Indian lands, continuing with Spanish, Mexican, Philippine, Iraqi, etc.).

William Penn and his Quaker allies who controlled the Pennsylvania Assembly denied the state its Hobbesian rights to war, colonial expansion and slavery. Quaker control of the colony lasted only 74 years, until 1756, when they were voted out of office. The central problem was that the pacifist state was part of a larger colonial system that vehemently rejected non-violence.

According to Kurlansky, it is always easier to promote war than peace, easier to end the peace than end the war, because peace is fragile and war is durable. Once the shots are fired, those who oppose the war are simply branded as traitors.


Resource Library
Nonviolence: An Alternative for Defeating Global Terror(ism)
The so-called 'war on terror' has gone badly for the West, playing directly into the strategy of al-Qa'ida and the rest of the terrorist network. Why did this happen? Were there other approaches that might have been implemented with better prospects of success? This edited collection of perspectives on the non-violent counter to terrorism opens the topic to serious consideration. The development of a non-violent paradigm brings into sharp focus the deficiencies of present thinking, and paves the way for comprehending how non-violence might overcome those deficiencies and introduce viable alternatives. Since there is a general ignorance about the history, theory and operational dynamics of non-violence, these aspects are featured throughout the book, and related to the special case of terrorism. To understand empathetically the background and mind-set of the opponent (without condoning his actions), to study his culture, to avoid the strategic trap he has set, to examine the different gender reactions of a Muslim Society, to differentiate between non-violent Islam and Islamic Terrorism, to jettison the misinformed baggage we carry about violence, to appreciate the positive role education and aesthetics can play, and to investigate ways in which a non-violent counter to terrorism might be staged, including a Gandhian response. These are just some of the tasks that the contributors have collectively pursued. Their ideas excitingly open up a whole new set of possibilities for a more peaceful world.

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2. Searching for an Exit in the Corridor of Fear: Revisiting Gandhi and King in Times of Terror[ism]  
by Anna Alomes

3. The Mahatma and the Muhiadeen: Gandhi's Answer to Terrorism  
by Michael Nagler
“Marching on together”


*The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence and the Will of the People* by Jonathan Schell 435pp, Allen Lane, £20

This is an admirably ambitious and intelligent book. It seeks to trace the changing
nature of war over time: a somewhat specialist subject, you might think, but this is no narrow military history. On the contrary, it places war and force in its proper context, the evolution of society.

Jonathan Schell starts, as have so many before, with Carl von Clausewitz, and his discussion of the conflict between the desirable aim of pursuing war to its ultimate end and the necessary political constraints that should always prevent this happening. Clausewitz, a Prussian military philosopher, was trying to make sense of the profound impact that the French revolution, and the rise and fall of Napoleon, had had upon warfare.

During the course of the 19th century, Schell contends, four parallel developments were to transform the nature of warfare: the democratic revolutions that brought the masses into politics for the first time; the scientific revolutions that introduced new military technologies; the industrial revolution, which allowed these to be applied; and imperialism, which ensured that the new European war system became a global one, bringing the whole world into its vortex. "This system," Schell writes, "implacable and merciless, compelled all 'backward' nations to reform on pain of death, in short, to adapt to the modern western system or die as independent countries."

The rise of democracy fed the new war system, as the whole body politic could, in the guise of modern nationalism, be mobilised for war in a new way. In this context, Schell makes an excellent observation later in the book. Historically speaking, when it came to nation-building, western European countries such as Britain and France enjoyed a great advantage in that when they became modern nations, the question of who was French or British within their territory was largely taken for granted.

In contrast, the situation was far messier in central Europe, and even messier and more difficult in Africa and the Middle East. But the cost for others was to be enormous: these ethnically homogeneous countries exported their sense of unproblematic racial superiority overseas in global conquest and plunder. Between 1870 and 1900, European nations seized control of some 10 million square miles of territory on which 150 million people lived.

The new war system reached its terrifying apogee in the first and second world wars when, for the last time, total war was fought to the bitter end. In the very death throes of the second world war, there was born the weapon that would profoundly change the nature of warfare. "The [nuclear] bomb revealed that total war was not an everlasting but a historical phenomenon," Schell writes. The invention of atomic weapons rendered the old global war system unworkable. The bitter end would in future mean nothing less than the destruction of humanity.

The consequence was the freezing of the global system by the policy of deterrence, together with the "sweeping displacement of military conflicts from theatres of actual combat to a theatre of appearances". In a fascinating discussion of the Cuban missile crisis, the most dangerous moment of the bipolar nuclear conflict, Schell shows how Kennedy and Khrushchev reached one agreement in public and a quite different one in private (the withdrawal of
American nuclear weapons from Turkey), whose terms were to remain secret until well after the end of the cold war.

On a more optimistic note, Schell traces the rise of a second, concurrent development that was also to have a profound impact on the nature of war: the rise of "people's war", whose origins he traces back to the Peninsular War of 1807-14, in which the Spanish mounted fierce resistance to Napoleonic conquest. Schell is - unlike all too many writers - unerringly excellent on imperialism, displaying a rare knowledge, awareness and feel for its all-encompassing nature, multifarious ramifications and colossal impact on the traditional world.

"The confrontation between the modern imperial west and the world's traditional societies," he writes, "presents one of the most extreme disparities in the power of civilisations that has ever existed - a disparity wider by far, for instance, than that between ancient Rome and the peoples she subjugated."

Take Iraq and the United States today, for example, or the historical template of such conflict, that between Vietnam and the United States. People's war was the means by which less developed societies could overcome this yawning disparity and fight to defeat the world's most powerful. The crucial laboratory for people's war was the Chinese communist guerrilla struggle against the Japanese in the late 30s. The Vietnamese war was to bring together the two great new military innovations that transformed the war system in the latter half of the 20th century, as the world's foremost nuclear power fought its most sophisticated exponent of people's war, the Vietnamese communists.

Notwithstanding the profoundly discouraging portents of the world's current predicament, Schell points to the underlying democratic trends of the last 100 years or less. He draws encouragement from the success of the national self-determination movement, representing the assertion of people and politics in the face of overwhelming force. He points to the manner in which, when societal conflict has been at its most dangerous and acute, namely during the course of revolutions, they have for the most part been surprisingly non-violent. He cites the glorious revolution in England of 1689, the American revolution, the French revolution and indeed the Russian revolution (it is reckoned that more people died in Eisenstein's filming of the storming of the Winter Palace than in the actual event): only in their aftermath did they become such bloody events.

From this he argues that when the mass of the people is in support, violence is marginalised. Similarly, he rightly takes solace in the fact that the fall of the Soviet Union and the east European regimes proved to be remarkably peaceful events. Likewise, he points to the extraordinary recent spread of democracy: 30 democratic states in 1971, 121 in 2002.

For Schell, these developments represent the possibility of a non-violent rather than ever more violent future. But he is not a dreamer. He is starkly aware of the dark clouds that now threaten the planet. In ridiculing Fukuyama's "End of History" thesis, he coins a far better notion of the significance of 1989: "a grand settlement along liberal lines of what might be called the
western civil war of the 20th century". But, he asks, was this but the setting of the stage for a new confrontation, that between the west and the Islamic "east"? Or perhaps, I would add, a little further down the historical road, between the west and China, another very different kind of civilisation?

It is the rise of a very different United States, of course, that lies at the root of these fears and forebodings. Schell is excellent at laying bare the emergence of the new America and describing the character of its new imperial policy: the insistence, following 9/11, on describing the fight against terrorism as "war", thereby enabling the full deployment of the supreme military machine of our time; the assault on proliferation with the invocation of the axis of evil, combined with the endorsement of pre-emptive action, giving the United States the right to intervene anywhere at any time; the rejection of multilateral treaties; and the hubristic assumption that the American economic and political system is the only valid one. We have entered a profoundly dangerous era with potentially catastrophic consequences.

Schell's book is an important contribution in our quest to make sense of this new era. Although at times it gets becalmed in too much detail, Schell writes well, and the overall argument and reach are impressive. He is also to be commended for seeking to find a positive way of thinking about the present - although, alas, his optimistic prescription for the future is far less convincing than the sobering realities of the present. He can hardly be blamed for that.

Martin Jacques is a visiting fellow at the London School of Economics Asian Research Centre

MISC. FROM AMAZON

Films

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