STRATEGIC NONVIOLENT CONFLICT

Peace & Conflict Studies (26:735:576)
Spring Semester 2014

Engelhard Hall 213
Tuesdays 5:30 to 8:10 p.m.

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Office Hours: Mondays, 9:00 am to 12 noon.

OVERVIEW

In this graduate seminar we will examine strategic nonviolent conflict; i.e., conflicts prosecuted by civilians wielding methods of nonviolent action in struggles against oppressive and often violent opponents. The organized and sustained use of methods of nonviolent action by civilians in asymmetric conflicts is often referred to as “civil resistance” or “nonviolent struggle.” Civil resistance and nonviolent struggle occur partially or entirely outside of institutional political channels (which may be non-existent, blocked, or controlled by hostile parties) and involve people using methods of nonviolent action to deny legitimacy and support to the opponent. Historically, the impact of civil resistance on challenging unjust relationships between citizens and states, and oppressor and oppressed, has been significant.

The roots of modern mass-based civil resistance can be traced back to nationalist and labor struggles in nineteenth century Europe and the struggles led by Mohandas Gandhi for racial equality in South Africa and national liberation in India during the first half of the twentieth century. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, authoritarian regimes throughout the world were toppled in part due to a wave of mass-based civil resistance movements that delegitimized authoritarian rulers and dissolved their bases of support. Examples include the “people power” movement in the Philippines that toppled the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, the pro-democracy movement that led to the ouster of General Pinochet in Chile in 1989, the Polish Solidarity movement that effectively challenged communist rule in the 1980s, and the anti-apartheid struggle that contributed to democratization in South Africa in the early 1990s. In each of these cases, and numerous others, power shifted hands when people stopped obeying the government and used nonviolent actions to separate rulers from their sources of power. Nevertheless, this form of struggle is never guaranteed to succeed, as demonstrated by suppressed civil resistance movements in China, Tibet, Burma, Iran, the Palestinian Territories and elsewhere.

Since 2000, civil resistance movements have successfully challenged governmental tyranny and electoral fraud in Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), and Ukraine (2005) through the premeditated and strategic use of demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, civil disobedience, and other forms of protest and noncooperation. In Lebanon in 2005, nearly one million citizens took to the streets in a remarkable display of strategic nonviolent resistance to demand government accountability and force the withdrawal of Syrian troops.
The “Arab Spring” contributed to the ouster of dictators in Tunisia and Egypt. Moreover, there are ongoing opposition movements engaged in nonviolent struggles for basic human rights and freedoms in Zimbabwe, Belarus, Iran, Burma, West Papua (Indonesia), Western Sahara (Morocco), Tibet (China), the Palestinian Territories, and elsewhere.

In addition to democratization, methods of nonviolent action have been used by citizens to promote racial equality (e.g., the civil rights movement in the U.S. led by Martin Luther King, Jr.), land reform (e.g., the Landless Rural Workers Movement in Brazil), women’s rights, worker’s rights, indigenous peoples’ rights, environmentalism, sustainable development, and government transparency. Significantly, in recent years a “global justice” movement has emerged that implements methods of nonviolent action in an attempt to alter the trajectory of economic globalization. Recently the “Occupy Wall Street” movement emerged in the U.S. to challenge the inequitable distribution of wealth and the political influence of corporations through methods of nonviolent action.

In this seminar we will employ analytical insights from various academic disciplines—notably sociology, political science, and strategic studies—to analyze the dynamics underlying civil resistance. Although there is nothing inherently incompatible with spiritual or pacifist approaches to nonviolence, this course will focus on the practical application of nonviolent methods and strategies.

Major topics include: (1) the nature of nonviolent action and civil resistance, (2) the increasing use of nonviolent action over time and across the globe, (3) principled and pragmatic nonviolence, (4) violent and nonviolent strategies for social change (and their inter-relation), (5) dynamics of civil resistance movements, (6) civil resistance and democratization, and (7) data and approaches to studying political conflict. This seminar will be useful for students interested in social movements, contentious politics, democratization, and human rights.

**LEARNING GOALS**

*Substantive knowledge:*
- mastery of the most important scholarly literature on strategic nonviolent conflict
- mastery of core theories and concepts for understand strategic nonviolent conflict

*Analytical skills:*
- knowledge of the research methods used by social scientists to study political conflict
- ability to locate and utilize data sets on political conflict
- ability to conduct original research on political conflict for a term paper, master’s thesis, or doctoral dissertation
- ability to intelligently discuss the scholarly literature on civil resistance

*Professional development:*
- ability to convey key principles of nonviolent resistance to civilians faced with political oppression and/or economic exploitation
REQUIREMENTS

Participation in class discussions: This course is organized as a seminar, not as a lecture. Therefore you must complete the readings before the class meeting for which they are assigned, and it is expected that you actively participate in the discussion of the readings. In addition to demonstrating an understanding of the main arguments and themes of the readings, you are encouraged to think critically about the readings (i.e., identify strengths and weaknesses), compare and contrast them to other readings or literatures, and make connections to ongoing social processes and current events.

Rapporteur: Beginning on February 11 one or more students will be designated as rapporteurs, who are responsible for: (1) e-mailing discussion questions to the seminar members at least 48 hours before the class meets (no later than Sunday at 5:30 p.m.), and (2) presenting to the class a concise summary of the main points and arguments of the readings (time limit: 20 minutes).

Essays: Five essay questions will be distributed throughout the semester. You are required to submit answers to four of the five essay questions. If you submit five essays, then the lowest score will be dropped. Details will be provided in separate handouts.

Paper & presentation: A paper is required on a topic of your choice that falls within the substantive domain of this course, such as a social movement organization (SMO), contentious political event, or relevant theoretical issue. You must get approval from the professor of your topic. After getting approval, submit a 2-page paper that describes your topic and includes a preliminary bibliography with at least 10 scholarly sources. This is due on at the beginning of class on March 4.

The paper is due at the beginning of class on April 29. The paper should be 15 to 20 double-spaced pages. Presentations will be scheduled for the last two classes on April 22 and April 29. The presentations should be no more than 10 minutes in length. Details will be provided in a separate handout.

Grading:

Participation in class discussions . . . . 12.5%
Rapporteur .......................... 12.5%
Essays ................................. 50%
Paper & presentation ............... 25%
TEXTS

**Books (available at Dana Library Reserves and NJ Books).**


**Articles/Chapters (available on Blackboard).**


SCHEDULE / READINGS

Tuesday, January 21
No class due to snowstorm.

Tuesday, January 28
Film: segments from *A Force More Powerful*.

Tuesday, February 4

Tuesday, February 11
Readings: Sharp (1973), part I.

*Essay 1 is due.*

Tuesday, February 18
Readings: Martin (1989); Summy (1994).

Tuesday, February 25
Readings: Abrahms (2006); Chenoweth & Stephan (2011), part I.

*Essay 2 is due.*

Tuesday, March 4
Readings: Chenoweth & Stephan (2011), parts II & III.

Brief description of paper topic and preliminary bibliography are due.

Tuesday, March 11
Readings: Carter (2013), parts I & II.

*Essay 3 is due.*

Tuesday, March 18
No class: spring break
Tuesday, March 25

No class.

Tuesday, April 1

Readings: Galtung (1989); Stephan & Mundy (2006); Carter (2013), part III.

Essay 4 is due.

Tuesday, April 8


Tuesday, April 15


Essay 5 is due.

Tuesday, April 22

Paper Presentations.

Tuesday, April 29

Paper Presentations.

Paper is due.
Seminar Format

This graduate course is organized as a seminar rather than a lecture. Although the professor may occasionally lecture on a topic, the basis of this course is the informed discussion of the readings.

In contrast to a passive lecture format, seminars emphasize class participation. A seminar is a place where readings are discussed, questions are raised and debates are conducted. Knowledge is gained through the creative insights that inevitably arise as a result of informed discussion. Although one or more rapporteurs will lead each week’s discussions, all students are expected to participate in the discussions.

Do not hesitate to participate in the class discussions. There are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers or contributions.

Please note, you should not take this course if you cannot commit to completing the required readings on time and participating in the class discussions of the readings.

Role of Rapporteur

1. As a rapporteur, you are required to e-mail a list of discussion questions to the seminar members no later than 5:30 p.m. on the Sunday before the class meets (i.e., 48 hours before the class).

2. When we meet in class, please re-distribute the list of discussion questions in a handout.

3. You are required to present to the class the main ideas of the readings. You are encouraged to identify strengths and weaknesses of the readings. Be concise. There is a 20-minute time limit.

4. If you like, you may use PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi, etc. for your presentation. Of course, it is not necessary to do so.