

Can Force Ever be Justified?

- There may be a distinction between force and violence, i.e. violence may be considered to be physical whereas a speech may be said to be forceful.
- Violence may be justified when a struggle against occupation.
- It may be more justifiable when directed against an organisation rather than an individual, though the question of how to separate organisations and individuals remains unresolved.
- It may be justified when in self defence, i.e. as a reaction. Also, anticipatory self defence may be justified, as opposed to 'out of the blue' aggression.
- Whether it is justified may depend on the impact it has on the chances of success in any such struggle.
- There may need to be a tight definition of self defence, i.e. what exactly is it justified to defend against?
- It should be remembered that acts of violence come down to a person or people trying to get something that they want.
- What impact does our reaction to violent solidarity movements have? If we say "non-violence" is the only way, do we undermine freedom movements that believe violence is necessary?
- It should be remembered that the rights we now enjoy, which allow us to protest peacefully, were gained through violence.
- Is violence justified if there is an alternative?
- This may depend on its effectiveness in getting a positive outcome. Obviously, both 'effectiveness' and 'positive outcome' require definitions as the latter may be considered to be one in which less violence is used.
- It seems generally accepted that violence is justifiable when there is no other option, or in extreme circumstances, though, again, there is a problem of definition.
- A distinction needs to be drawn between violent acts that are planned in advance and those that are instinctive or on the spur of the moment.
- Acts of resistance to an invasion may be on the spur of the moment, e.g. a child throwing a stone at an armoured vehicle. The important thing to note here is not necessarily the action itself but the statement that it makes. It is a symbol of resistance, a statement that "I am not passive". Though the ultimate goal of the action (i.e. liberation) may not be achieved by the act, it can also represent an ongoing movement. Despite these associations, it may not be a conscious decision, rather a reaction to circumstances. Crucially, such a decision, conscious or unconscious, will not be taken by all in similar circumstances.
- There may not always be an alternative to violence as it cannot always be known what is going to happen. Self defence, violence, may be the only option.
- The worry may be that an act of violence could perpetuate further violence. This is especially problematic if the initial act is seen as pointless (e.g. throwing a stone at an armoured vehicle). However, again, such an act may not be pointless if it contributes to morale, the small acts may be needed as a sign of popular resistance (which can be an effective tool).
- Even if such acts seem pointless in the face of overwhelming power they may be a

reflection of constant repression, representing literally the only option to the oppressed.

- Importantly, it was acts such as throwing stones, as practised by masses of people, that helped to overthrow Britain in its colonies.
- It may be difficult to recognise the history of violence in otherwise peaceful societies, and especially to consider loss of the privileges that allow us to live without violence.
- If it was right for those oppressed by apartheid to resist it violently in South Africa would it not have been right for citizens of other countries to violently resist governments and companies that supported and funded the system? Could a person truly be said to be opposing apartheid if all they did was stop buying South African fruit, i.e. if they stayed within the law? In other words, in a case of such oppression, is it not the duty of others to break the law in order to show their support?
- If one has the freedom to demonstrate peacefully should the opportunity not be taken? Or, if oppression may be suffered in the course of protest, does it not further the cause to remain peaceful and expose the brutality of the oppressors? Similarly, does violent protest not run the risk of alienating those that may otherwise support the cause, unless a change in public opinion has already occurred?
- It needs to be born in mind that there is no constant right answer, although methods of protest may have failed in the past they may succeed in the future.
- In some circumstances, it may be the case that oppression cannot be ended without violence.
- Again, the symbolic meaning of the actions is key, they may not get direct results but they show the anger of the oppressed.
- At what point can one say that there is no other option but violence?
- Is a society in which everyone has committed acts of violence (e.g. to gain their liberation) desirable?
- Again, protesters may not use violence because of the bad public image but it is also because they have the rights that allow them to avoid violence. If one has nothing else, then violence may be the only thing that can be resorted to.
- As an example, should we be expected to adhere to sections 132-137 of the Serious and Organised Crime and Policing Act (SOCPA), which restrict our right to protest?
- If resistance to oppression within a country is understood and, perhaps, accepted, can it be so when citizens of that country attack another, e.g. in terrorist attacks? If those people see their oppressor not as a government but as an ideology are they not justified in attacking institutions connected with that ideology in any country?
- The degree of violence is important, a child throwing stones at an armoured vehicle is a whole different story from 9/11 or 7/7.
- Perhaps violence can only be justified when it is specific and targeted. It may be unjustified to kill "innocent" civilians but this should be the same, for example, for the United States and Al Qaeda.
- Accountability may be difficult when relating to violence, who justifies such acts?
- For instance, if it is justified for Iraqis to resist occupation in Iraq, and we support Stop The War, is it justifiable for us to attack British soldiers that may be deployed in Iraq? Are the same actions, directed towards the same ends, justifiable here, or do different circumstance change what is justifiable? Is this to do with the fact that we are subject to UK law or because of our proximity (or lack of) to the conflict itself? Can we separate our responsibility to each other, or does solidarity have to be seen as part of a universal struggle?