Nonviolent international support of social empowerment processes

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Abstract

During the last decades, there has been an expansion of new forms of global citizenship throughout the world which are concerned with the violence used to deal with conflicts. One of the expressions of these new forms of global citizenship is nonviolent international interventions, which support local empowerment processes developed by people who are resisting in nonviolent way and standing to defend their human rights advocacy initiatives in cases of impunity, land rights violations, environmental degradation or labour rights abuses, among other issues. This article presents the phenomenon of the nonviolent international interventions and explores how this phenomenon contributes to empower social local processes working on conflict transformation. I analyse the strategies used to support these processes and the results achieved in cases where disputes are characterized by high degrees of violence. The paper examines the case of Peace Brigade International to illustrate how this kind of global civil society organizations can support nonviolent struggles against authoritarian regimes in the context of the "Arab Spring".

Key words: *Arab Spring, nonviolent, international intervention, empowerment.*

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Introduction

The label "Arab Spring" offered scholars in the field of political science and sociology to a new format of analysis of political and social movements since 2011. The development of multiple civil mobilizations through expressions such as protest movements, popular uprisings, or revolutions, showed the great fracture existing between the regimes and their societies and the existence of deep conflicts within the Arab societies. Many different actors took part in those mobilizations (youth and women organizations, political parties, trade unions, urban bourgeoisie, tribal groups, and others sectors). In fact, most actors   shared common demands that include economic, social, and political reforms, democracy, freedoms, equality and fighting against corruption. The effect of this wave of events was the change of the political scenario in many countries of North Africa, Middle East and the Gulf. Arab Civil society overcame the fear to repression and violence from authoritarian regimes and was able to re-conquer the public space for acting and developing empowerment processes to deal with the realities where they are inserted. There are two essential features in this phenomenon: the strengthening of the civil society in the Arab world during the last three decades and the significance of non-violence in many of the civil society mobilizations against authoritarian systems (Alvarez-Ossorio, 2011).

As the "Arab Spring" shows, struggles against authoritarian regimes have to face closed political spaces created to avoid the activity of opposite groups. Within such framework, civil society organizations have various of difficulties to carry out their activities and their opportunities to promote changes which contribute to the transformation of the conflicts where they are involved. This situation is not unique to the Arab countries. There are many historical and current examples in all continents where the civil society faces the same problems and tries to implement empowerment processes to change the conflict patterns.

Nonviolence researchers and activists developed multiple initiatives to deal with these challenges in the 20th century. The research gave rise to the creation of different approaches for contributing to conflict transformation without the use of violence. Nowadays, after many experiments, a set of nonviolent strategies and tools are available, ready to be adapted and used across borders to empower social organizations and vulnerable groups working in violent contexts. Fortunately, more

and more actors from the civil society and from the international community are not only promoting but also using them.

The aim of this article is to contribute to the general debate about the possibilities which nonviolent struggle can offers in situations like the "Arab Spring". In particular, it presents the phenomenon of nonviolent international interventions and explores how this phenomenon contributes to protect and empower local social processes by working on conflict transformation in cases where disputes are characterized by high degrees of violence. It will focus on Peace Brigades International (PBI) to analyse the strategies that this organization implements to support those processes and the impact it had on violent conflicts.

The article has four sections. In the first section will present a brief historical overview of the nonviolent international intervention as a global phenomenon. The second will analyse the main features of these interventions, and the third section will focus on the case of PBI, as part of the experience, and the protection that provides to human rights defenders. The final section highlights some reflections and conclusions about the potential which the nonviolent international interventions have for the "Arab Spring".

Historical overview of the nonviolent international support for conflict transformation

Nowadays, there is an increasing phenomenon in the international arena which is offering nonviolent support for conflict transformation across borders. It is an expression from that part of the global civil society which shares some common values around solidarity, human rights and democracy, and argues for the peaceful management of conflicts. This phenomenon emerged from the experience accumulated by peace activists working through nonviolent means in violence prevention and conflict resolution activities worldwide. In this section I will expose the origins and development of the nonviolent international interventions.

In our opinion, there were two sources of inspiration for those first activists who wished the use of nonviolent civilian alternatives to conflict management: William James and Mahatma K. Gandhi. At the beginning of the 20th century, when the world

was preparing itself for the First World War, James promoted the development of a civil peace service as substitute of war and militarism due to their disastrous consequences for human beings and the society (James, 1906). His idea was to create a moral alternative to the war and it became a recurrent aspiration for the peace movement since that moment. Some years after, but in the same sense, Gandhi defended the creation of the "Shanti Sena", a peace army, as the equivalent to the traditional conscription while he showed to everybody how nonviolence could achieve political goals (Cortright, 2008).

The first attempts to materialize those ideas were carried out during the Interwar Period, when British activists tried to organize a Peace Army to develop a nonviolent international intervention to stops the war in Asia between Japan and China (Keyes, 1978: 3-4). Finally the intervention was not implemented but it started a debate which intellectually nurtured the British peace movement about the real possibility to use nonviolent tools for preventing or ending wars.

After the Second World War, there were some other projects advocating for the implementation of large scale non-violent interventions by Peace Armies as tools to avoid conflicts between states. Most of them tried to be integrated in the legal framework created by the new international system during the post-war period, as part of the United Nations. However, these ventures were not considered inside United Nations and were dropped in favour of more conventional ways to deal with conflicts, such as the deployment of troops under its rule or the development of the concept of "United Nations Peacekeeping Operations" (Weber, 1993).

Furthermore, there were other proposals to take up some international interventions for nonviolent conflict transformation on smaller scale, either taking the form of more or less long-lasting organizations but focused on long-term work such as Eirene, or setting up spontaneous movements or projects with a shorter-term approach such as Wold Peace Brigade. The results until the early 80's were irregular, with a mix of successes and failures. However, the situation changed with the expansion of violent conflicts in Central America in the 80's and with the attention that the peace movement dedicated to that area. Thereby, the experience and knowledge accumulated until then by many groups and activists started to facilitate the appearance of some grass-roots organizations whose goal was working for conflict

transformation through the deployment of peace teams in the region. Thus, organizations such as the Peace Brigades International (1981), the Witness for Peace (1981), the Christian Peacemaker Teams (1986), and the Pastors for Peace (1988), were born and developed into entities that subsequently applied their experience to other international scenarios where they continued their activities.

This new phase of development of nonviolent international interventions had its continuation after the end of the Cold War and this phenomenon was expanded. There were three facts behind this process: the changes occurring in the international society, the experience gathered by many activists that carried out such interventions and the multiplier effect that generated the achievements of their work. The conflicts in Eastern Europe during the 90's offered new opportunities for action and that was the place where the mobilization of international peace movement led to the birth of new organizations to develop nonviolent strategies for conflict transformation. In addition to Eastern Europe, there were nonviolent international interventions in the Middle East and Latin America. This type of intervention, although to a lesser degree, was also implemented in conflicts both in Oceania and Asia.[1]

The analysis of those initiatives that have designed and implemented nonviolent international interventions shows a boom of this phenomenon in the most recent decades. It can be explained by two factors that stimulated increasingly the broad sectors of the international community to bet for conflict transformation through the use of lower levels of violence and the greater participation in these processes showed by the civil society.

The first of those factors is the set of transformations that the international society experienced and these transformations facilitated society's greater inclination to use lower levels of violence to deal with conflicts. Thus, the traditional concept of security, understood as exclusively military, was replaced by a new multidimensional conception of security, and there were also noted changes in the nature of conflicts in the international community. Indeed, this challenged the traditional way of managing conflicts and it became necessary to find more comprehensive approaches for

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[1] The research of Moser-Puangsuwan (2000), Weber (1996), Schirch (2006, and the feasibility study of Nonviolent Peaceforce (Schweitzer et al., 2001), complete this brief historical review of non-violent international interventions and document the progress and achievements obtained by those actions.

addressing the management of international conflicts and threats to security. For this reason, the international community began to use the conflict prevention approach, the focus on human security, the development of peacekeeping missions with a greater emphasis on peace building activities and conflict transformation, as well as greater prominence given to civilians in these missions. In addition, the development of the responsibility to protect principle and its contributions to the reformulation of the sovereignty concept which encouraged and gave international legitimacy to interventions lead by civil society actors (Checa Hidalgo & Ghica, 2007). These changes, as Catherine Barnes notes, favoured the greater civilian participation in international conflict management and reduced the tolerance for the use of violence in these processes (Barnes, 2006: 7). Furthermore, given the greater integration of the world thanks to advances in transportation and communication technologies, the number of actors who are able to intervene beyond national borders continues growing.

The second factor consists of the collective consciousness which created the peace movement throughout the twentieth century. It has a substrate of experiences which, as noted by the scholar Mario López Martínez, points to the emergence of new alternative initiatives to traditional ways of dealing with conflicts (2000). I would add, furthermore, it is encouraging the expansion of international interventions that do not resort to violence for conflict transformation. So we can say that the traditional opposition to war and the different types of violence in the peace movement throughout the 20th century facilitated the creation of different nonviolent proposals to promote social and political transformation in four areas: colonial emancipation, struggles against dictatorial and totalitarian regimes, expansion of democratic rights and freedoms, and the adoption of new paradigms and policies in opposition or alternative to the dominant (López Martínez, 2001).

Thus, both the transformations occurring in the international society and the substrate generated by the peace movement fostered the development of the phenomenon of nonviolent interventions. They increased its prominence by expanding the activities of the organizations that were working in this area at the end of the 20th century, allowing the proliferation of new initiatives, and the improvement of their methodologies for action.

Main features of the nonviolent international interventions for conflict transformation

The review of existing experiences of nonviolent international interventions for conflict transformation demonstrates the existence of several elements that characterize them. Thus, the main features of this phenomenon are its international character, the main role of civilians, a grassroots approach, its work for peace building in a broad sense, their position on the weak side and a strong commitment to nonviolence (Checa Hidalgo, 2011).

The first component of this category of interventions is the international character. This international character has two aspects in practice: the action may require the physical presence of the activists in the conflict zone, but it may also include efforts without the need of presence and, however, take effect in a conflict developed in a different place than the site where activists are located (Rigby, 1995: 453). These interventions can be performed both by international activists from different countries and transnational organizations. In both cases, participants share a set of values and ethical principles, regardless of their national identity. As such, these activists are heirs of the internationalist thinking and they are also exponents of the existence of a transnational civil society that wants to participate in the conflict management system.

Furthermore, nonviolent international interventions for conflict transformation reflect an internationalist way to understand peace, conflict, violence and security. So the participants in this phenomenon understand violence as a factor that tends to decrease the levels of peace in the world. Therefore, this violence is experienced by all the world inhabitants in different degrees and its consequences affect several security dimensions. So, the limitation of violence and the management of conflicts across borders are relevant issues for the global civil society. This fact does not mean, however, that the external action becomes a substitute for the mobilization capabilities of local groups. The primacy of action belongs to local civil society activists.

The second feature of the category of nonviolent international interventions is the main role that civilians play on it. These interventions are performed by civilians aware of the world around them. They are ordinary people committed and involved in the new social movements of their time. This feature is the product of the global civil

society. A global civil society, as pointed by Martínez Guzmán, that aims to overcome the *Westphalia* world order based on nation states and claims for a bottom-up globalism. This global civil society tries to make explicit the shared fate of the human species and its compatibility with the feelings of local identity (Martínez Guzmán, 2001). This global civil society is built on a civic moral shared by cosmopolitan citizens, according to Adela Cortina. This civic moral consists of a common respect for the first, second and third generation human rights, the values of freedom, equality and solidarity, and finally, the active tolerance of those who want to understand the others (Cortina, 1994). There is an ethical requirement for the political community which shares this civic moral: to have as reference the world citizens.

The third element this interventions is the grassroots activism that practice the contentious collective action.[2] In these initiatives predominates a grassroots activism, with a non-hierarchical leadership, a participatory democratic organization and an ascription based on the involvement. Grassroots organizations, in addition, are benefited from the organizational innovations developed after the technological and social changes occurred worldwide. These changes offer to the grassroots organizations the possibility to exploit new resources and to spread their action scope (Tarrow, 2005: 163-168). This activism from the new social movements supports the nonviolent international interventions and determines the main features, methods of action, and organizational system of this phenomenon. It is possible to say that grassroots activism contributes to shape the nonviolent international interventions as a new form of exercise citizenship.

The fourth characteristic shared by these interventions is the willingness to contribute to building peace. In that sense, it is necessary to prevent or stop violence, to fight against unjust structures, and, even, to promote social changes in favour of the oppressed. Since nonviolent international interventions plan to build a lasting and sustainable peace, they need to act, as Galtung affirms, over all forms of violence (direct, structural and cultural) and to transform conflicts creatively (Galtung, 1996).

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[2] This contentious collective action, according to the scholar Sydney Tarrow, is the basis of social movements. It is the consequence of the action "used by people who lack regular access to institutions, act on behalf of new or unaccepted claims, and who behave in a way that constitutes a fundamental threat to others or the authorities" (2004, p.24).

The final aim for these interventions is to generate changes in the long term and transform a violent system to another one based on a culture of peace. The actions of the nonviolent international interventions phenomenon, due to its fourth characteristic, cover a wide range. There are actions to prevent the emergence of violence in conflicts, to separate the warring parties when they use direct violence to settle their differences, or to act against political, economic, social or cultural situations that legitimize oppression or inequality. Thus, these actions seek to modify the different dimensions of the conflict, focus on the need to overcome the root causes that originate, and strengthen relations between the parties through long-term processes. Therefore, nonviolent international interventions contribute to conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

The fifth component of this category is a position in favour of the weak. The nonviolent international interventions are aimed to protect and to empower the most vulnerable parties in conflicts. These interventions support processes driven by activists and organizations in struggles for human rights defence, social justice or environmental protection among other issues, and they also support the resistance to violence by non-combatants amid armed conflict. This support tries to correct the power imbalances among the conflict parties and it tries to reduce the structural violence that oppresses the weaker party. Participants in these actions take sides and, therefore, there are not impartial interventions since they sympathize and support those who suffer violence or struggle against it. The nonviolent international interventions express solidarity from religious and spiritual positions, and also from ethical positions universally shared by that new citizenship mentioned above. In this sense, these interventions are expressions of solidarity from part of the political community. These interventions can act, according to Lisa Schirch, as triggers for social change through the empowerment of local groups which work to transform violent structures (2006: 57). In this way, when the nonviolent international interventions encourage the local work for conflict transformation, they overcome possible accusations of imperialism because these actions don't pretend to force significant cultural transformations justified on humanitarian aid or human rights, but the empowerment of the local processes.

The last key component of this category of interventions in conflict is the commitment to the principles of nonviolence. Nonviolence can be understood as a political philosophy or as a strategy for social transformation that is based on respect for life and dignity, which results in the search for conflict management without the use of any forms of violence as identified by Galtung. Thus, nonviolence does not try simply to avoid the emergence of violence in disputes. Nonviolence acts on the different dimensions present in the conflicts to contribute to its transformation by implementing a political ethic and a nonviolent action.

Therefore nonviolent interventions are not passive, but use nonviolent strategies to modify the dynamics between the conflict parties and to change the unjust conditions that sustain such relations. These changes aim to transform the nature of the conflict and to facilitate the creation of new relations to the better understanding between the parties. The commitment to nonviolent conflict transformation means, in the words of Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack, a conscious design for a strategy of action and also the accurate choice of those methods and tools that can meet the objectives of the intervention (2001).

The case of Peace Brigades International protecting human rights defenders.

One of the most representative organizations of the phenomenon involving nonviolent international interventions is Peace Brigades International (PBI). This Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), active in the field of human rights protection, supports many activists, organizations and communities threatened by violence through actions and methodologies without violence. This organization uses a series of nonviolent action strategies which deter the exercise of violence against local human rights defenders and allow for the expansion of political space available for them to remain active following their own pace and interests, without being influenced by violence. Thus, the work of PBI manages to increase the security levels of those individuals and vulnerable populations for contributing to conflict transformation and the extension of justice and peace culture.

Peace Brigades International's work supports local initiatives that seek to transform conflicts without violence and promote a culture of peace and justice. This organization is focused on human rights protection, and its actions are guided by a

number of principles that include nonviolent performance, internationalism, non-interference and horizontal decision-making process. These components make PBI a clear example of the category of nonviolent international interventions for conflict transformation.

Thus, Peace Brigades International does not believe in the use of violence to achieve sustainable and lasting solutions to conflicts, thereby it carries out nonviolent strategies for conflict transformation even in the context of high violence. This leads PBI to work only with organizations and groups that use nonviolent means in defence of human rights, in their struggle for social change, and in the development of civil society. PBI has an internationalist character expressed through its global conception of peace, conflict and violence. As a transnational organization, believes essential to strengthen peace through intervening in specific conflict situations. However, it is organized horizontally and uses a decision-making process decentralized based on consensus. This approach allows to all the members of the organization either in projects or national groups, to be involved in the process, to contribute to discussions, and to share the responsibility for them.

PBI also considers the non-interference principle very important, together with no-partisanship. According to this principle, the organization tries to avoid the involvement in the internal operation of the accompanied groups or, even, in the official policies of the state where it operates. The goal is to prevent the alignment with any of the parties to the conflict and the subordination of the PBI's work to political or ideological attachments. This model for nonviolent intervention minimizes external intervention while maintaining independence from the parties involved in the conflict. It only pursues to generate the necessary protection for those local movements that suffer the effects of violence and to allow them continuing their normal activities. This principle protects PBI from the trend of paternalism showed sometimes by international organizations with regards to local actors in order to avert possible dependency relations among them.

We should clarify at this point that when PBI respect those principles of non-interference and non-partisanship, it does not mean that the organization is passive or neutral in situations of injustice and human rights violations. PBI, in its effort to halt violence and build peace, as Mahony and Eguren state, "is ready to offer its services

to groups and individuals of any political tendency, according to the single criterion of assuming a commitment to unarmed struggle for human rights and justice" (1997: 236-237).

PBI's work is implemented through a methodology of nonviolent action consolidated over its 30 year history.[3] This methodology, which follows the principles already mentioned, can be summarized in four key strategies: accompaniment and international presence, nonviolent civil diplomacy, alternative information and communication channels and rebuilding social fabric weakened by violence.

If we consider the simultaneous deployment that PBI does with those strategies we have to notice that the interventions carried out by the projects of the organization cut across the strategies contained in the United Nations conflict management approach structured by Boutros-Ghali in his Agenda for Peace (Boutros-Ghali, 1992).[4] Thus, we can include the PBI actions of presence, monitoring and observation, in order to control violence and provide protection, under the concept of peacekeeping. Also included in this category are those activities for monitoring and accompanying investigation missions that promote the creation of trust between the parties and the verification of situations. Moreover, we have to refer to peacemaking when we analyse the work of PBI in the field of dialogue with the authorities and its participation in coordination networks with international agencies and other international NGOs, actions recognized in the concepts of nonviolent civil diplomacy and citizen diplomacy. Finally, and following the scheme designed for Boutros-Ghali, the organization does other activities aimed to strength the civil society, such as the development of training workshops for local entities in the field of psychosocial rehabilitation, the reconstruction of the social fabric, the provision of training and advising to civil society organizations. These activities can be labelled as peacebuilding because they are designed for the empowerment of the civil society and for capacity building. This strategy also includes the public reports and advocacy work that PBI carries out with governments and international organizations, in order

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[3] The book of Liam Mahony and Luis Enrique Eguren (1997) widely discusses the experience of PBI and shows how the different methodologies used by PBI interact and contribute to the protection of human rights defenders.

[4] Previous work on nonviolent international interventions (Checa Hidalgo, 2011) sample more broadly the tools that these initiatives offer to the conflict management system used in the framework of United Nations.

to analyze conflicts, neutralize and denounce violence, seek moral sanction for the perpetrators of violence and broaden political support for PBI and the accompanied organizations. These actions are focused on the facilitation of reconciliation processes addressed to build a just and sustainable peace.

The achievements of PBI are relevant in three areas of the conflict resolution and international management of violent conflicts fields: protection of human rights activists, social empowerment, and human security strengthening. In this article we focus only on the protection that PBI generates over human rights activists working in conflict contexts affected by violence. The aim of this paper is to highlight the great possibilities that the protection of nonviolent international intervention offers to those organizations and groups who face repression and violence from authoritarian regimes as in the case of the "Arab Spring" mobilizations.

PBI protects social activists and human rights organizations threatened by the combined use of the nonviolent strategies mentioned above. These strategies contribute to deter violence and visualize the activities of the supported organizations. In this way, PBI saves lives and improves the life and work conditions of many people. The set of strategies and methodologies used by PBI is able to generate a political protection in contexts of high violence where human rights activists and their organizations are threatened or even suffer direct attacks because of their activities.

The work of PBI increases the security levels of the human rights defenders supported and decreases the incidence of violence on them. When protection is effective, the risks for the development of their work activities go down, fear of violence is reduced, and the security situation improves. Thus, this protection benefits social organizations because they are able to continue their organizational processes, it preserves their human capital, and maintains, or even increases, their activity in conflicts where there are high levels of violence against them. Therefore, PBI supports social empowerment processes.

In this sense, as Patrick Coy (1993), Liam Mahony and Luis Enrique Eguren (1997) have shown, PBI is able to increase the political space where human rights defenders and their organizations can operate without fear of violence. Its action limits the

aggressors' options for resorting to violence or for using repression, and, furthermore, expands the range of choices available to human rights activists (Coy, 1997: 99).

PBI's protection also provides to the social organizations with deep situation analysis produced through the study of the data and information collected. These analyses contribute to prevent violence because they enable the assessment of the risk of the possible actions and help in the making-decision processes. When PBI shares its analysis with other organizations, it promotes the development of their own security assessments to generate self-protection strategies and other measures to increase the security level of the organizations and prevent violence.

Although the protection generated by PBI is primarily focused on activists and organizations which it supports directly, it seems clear that this protection also extends, although not as the same coverage, to other social organizations which work in the area of human rights advocacy. This effect is produced due to the wide role that PBI plays to visualize the general problem of human rights defenders through its work for lobbying, political dialogue and communication.

However, it must be remembered that the protection of PBI needs to meet certain contexts with a set of conditions. First, there are four conditions to create the context needed to implement an effective accompaniment as a tool to the deterrence of violence: the potential aggressor has to be known, the actions considered unacceptable should be communicated in advance, the way that accompaniment works and the consequences of an aggression have to be explained, and the potential aggressor has to consider an international reaction credible (Mahony & Eguren, 1997). Given those conditions, the decision of the potential aggressor to run an attack or not depends on the results of calculating the difference between the costs it may incur as a result of carrying out an attack, and the benefits it could bring.

Second, the PBI's work for the protection of human rights defenders and their organizations is based on the idea that the state has a fundamental responsibility for the violence against them, either through the police and security forces, civil or judicial authority or improper application of laws and administrative rules, as stated the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2004: 18-19). Amnesty International claims in its report on human rights defenders

in Americas that, "the authors of the high number of murders and acts of violence and intimidation against human rights defenders are often members of state security forces, paramilitary groups, death squads or armed groups". Furthermore, it adds that in many cases, "the attacks have been ordered or perpetrated by landowners and local political leaders according to semi-official power structures based on a system of political patronage" (Amnesty International, 2003: 4). OHCHR also notes that non-state actors, ranging from armed groups to national and transnational companies, cause violent attacks against human rights defenders. However, this situation does not exclude that the primary responsibility to protect human rights defenders rests with the State (OHCHR, 2004: 19).

Thus, PBI works in contexts where violence against human rights defenders is exercised directly, indirectly or permitted by state institutions due to the threat of social movements that struggle against the status quo, such as "movements calling for the redistribution society resources, resisting the usurpation of civil freedoms, criticizing the limited possibilities for social or economic development, or disputing ethnic discrimination policies from states" (Mahony & Eguren, 1997: 88). The protective effect that PBI provides, for this reason, requires the existence of a state with two features: it has to be likely affected by the political costs generated by the international pressure after the attacks against human rights defenders and it should have enough capacity to control their agents and prevent their independent acting. This means that PBI for example is able to work in Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico, but it would not be able to work in China, Iran or Sudan. However, PBI considers that its work prevents violence by illegal groups connected in different ways to states, as paramilitary groups and "death squads", but this work fails to do so with illegal groups that face the State. The case of Colombia illustrates this position, because PBI does not recognize its deterrent capability against guerrillas. Despite this position, many activists and organizations assert that its work also provides protection against the actions of all kind of illegal actors.

The effectiveness of this protection also depends on two important aspects that affect the deterrent capability of PBI, and these aspects have to do with the perceptions of the perpetrator and the calculation of costs and benefits that may be incurred in case an attack takes place. First, we should keep in mind that deterrence does not work

properly if the aggressor doubt about the capacity of PBI or the will of the international community to react in front of certain attacks.

In this situation, the aggressor could assess that there are lower political costs to carry out an attack. Second, the protection provided by PBI would be ineffective on those occasions where potential perpetrators believe that the benefits of an attack outweigh the costs they incur. This problem means that PBI has to carefully consider where and how it implements its intervention to deter the commitment of violent acts to be truly protective. It also implies that PBI has to analyse continuously the conditions and context in which its intervention works, and, simultaneously, has to develop different strategies of action to generate suitable protection.

Although there is a high confidence in the ability of PBI to protect activists and social organizations, sometimes, despite its efforts, it is unable to generate the necessary deterrence to prevent violence and there are situations where the protection is not effective and human rights defenders are attacked. There also exists a big difficulty to assess the effectiveness of the protection that PBI is able to offer, especially because it is not possible to find a reliable way to know the final reasons behind the decision not to behave violently.

However, several points demonstrate the protective effects of the work of the PBI. First at all, there are many expressions of recognition and gratitude to the organization from activists and groups that have been accompanied by PBI. They perceive a reduction of their level of risk and exposure to violence as a consequence of the protection that PBI provides them, and some even claim that PBI save their lives.

Second, the continuous increase in the number of the support requests can be seen as a positive sign of evaluation for the effectiveness of the protection that PBI generates. There is a constant demand for the expansion of its work to protect more human rights activists and organizations, together with calls to raise the resources available for PBI to enlarge the protection that it provides. Third, we also must take into account the assessment of international organizations such as the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Program for Development or the European Commission, international NGOs such as the International Committee of the Red Cross or International Amnesty, as well as the diplomatic

representatives of many European countries in Mexico and Colombia, who value the work of PBI work and show a great recognition for the protection that is able to produce.

Conclusion

This article offers a brief introduction to the nonviolent international interventions as a resource to support social empowerment processes such as the "Arab Spring" mobilizations. Nonviolent international interventions are presented as a worldwide phenomenon that shows the existence of new forms of global citizenship concerned with the violence used to deal with conflicts and provides new approaches to manage them. Those approaches, which focus on violence prevention and peaceful management of conflicts, are built over common values shared among part of the civil society around solidarity, human rights, democracy, justice and peace.

In the context of the "Arab Spring", it is important to make visible the existence of successful experiences where the implementation of nonviolent tactics and strategies to the transformation of conflict situations could benefit from international support. The option to carry out nonviolent interventions is a tool that the Arab civil society organizations can use to support their struggles against authoritarian regimes.

The experience of NGOs as PBI is a good example to illustrate the kind of tasks that these interventions can implement even in conflicts with high degrees of violence. In this case, PBI generates protection over threatened human rights defenders through different nonviolent strategies. This protection enables the maintenance of open political spaces where those civil society actors mobilize to work in favour of conflict transformation. Thus, the protection that PBI provides to human rights defenders is very useful to support empowerment processes of local civil society groups.

There is a real potential of support in this new phenomenon which can be provided through different means in nonviolent struggles across the world. For this reason, local activists need to understand the dynamics of nonviolent international interventions, such as how they can be mobilized, what are their work patterns, and what the limits of their scope are. The understanding of those dynamics by civil society actors involved in processes like the "Arab Spring" will allow them to have an

access to the nonviolent international support of social empowerment processes for peaceful conflict transformation.

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