

Ethics and Military Defections in Nonviolent Resistance Campaigns

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Abstract : Military and security personnel defections during nonviolent resistance (NVR) campaigns are recognized as an effective way of undermining the regime's power, but they also may generate moral dilemmas that contradict the moral standing of NVR tactics. NVR campaigns have been primarily praised for their adherence to moral and legal norms, yet some of NVR tactics raise serious ethical concerns. This paper focuses on NVR tactics that seek to promote defections and disobedience within military and security personnel to sustain their campaign. Academic literature regarding NVR tactics indicates that compared to violent forms of resistance, defections are more likely to occur when security forces confront nonviolent activists. Indeed, defections play a strategically fundamental role in nonviolent campaigns, particularly against authoritarian regimes, as it enables activists to undermine the regime's central pillars of support. This study examines the events of the Arab Spring and discusses the ethical problems that arise in nonviolent activists' promotion of defections and disobedience. The cases of Syria and Egypt suggest that the strategic promotion of defections and disobedience was significantly effective in sustaining the campaign. Yet, while such defections enhance nonviolent activists' resilience, how they are promoted can be morally contentious and the consequences can be dire. Defections are encouraged by social, moral and emotional appeals that use the power disparities between unarmed civilians and powerful regimes to affect soldiers and security personnel's process of decision-making. In what is commonly referred to as dilemma action, nonviolent activists deliberately entangle security forces in a moral dilemma that compels them to follow a moral code to protect unarmed civilians. In this way, activists sustain their struggle and even gain protection. Nonviolent activists are likely to be completely defeated when confronted with armed forces. Therefore they rely on the military and security personnel's moral conscious of convincing them to refrain from using force against them. While this is effective, it also leaves soldiers and security forces exposed to the implications and punishments that might follow their disobedience or defection. As long as they remain nonviolent, activists enjoy civilian immunity despite using morally contentious tactics. But the severe implications brought upon defectors. As a result, demand a deep examination of this tactic's moral permissibility and a discussion that assesses culpability for the moral implications of its application.

Keywords : culpability, defections, nonviolence, permissibility

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