

**The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People** by Jonathan Schell. New York, Henry Holt and Company, 2003. 448 pp. \$27.50.

If concepts are tools for understanding and shaping the world, this book is an indispensable toolkit for political scientists, policy makers, and citizens in the twenty-first century. Jonathan Schell rethinks the meanings of war, power, sovereignty, and other concepts and forges an analytical instrument for understanding the historical transformations of the twentieth century and their significance for the future.

The author begins with the Clausewitz paradigm: that war is paradoxically both an instrument of politics and an arena in which purely military considerations are decisive. For war to serve its political function, there must first be military victory or the credible threat thereof. Second, such victory must compel the defeated population's cooperation with the victor's political agenda. Two developments in the twentieth century, according to Schell, undermined these assumptions.

First, nuclear-armed adversaries can no longer contemplate victory, only mutual annihilation. By nullifying victory, nuclear weapons nullify war, forcing politics back into other, nonviolent channels. This is why the United States cannot consider war with Pakistan, a leading proliferator of nuclear weapons technology, or with North Korea.

Second, "people's war" demonstrated that purely military considerations are *not* always decisive and that military victory does *not* always compel cooperation. The Chinese and Vietnamese communists, for example, compensated for conventional military weakness through a combination of guerilla tactics on the battlefield and political organization of the populace, enduring ongoing military defeats but never submitting to political control by the adversary. American colonists pioneered such methods against the British Empire, and Iraqis now deploy them against the United States.

Even as nuclear weapons and people's war increasingly paralyzed the war system, new forms of political action developed, Schell argues, notably, nonviolent campaigns such as Gandhi used to defeat the British Empire. In the 1980s, nonviolent renewals of civil society in Eastern Europe helped liberalize, then unravel the Soviet Empire, with the nonviolent cooperation of the Russian people themselves. Such events require a new concept of political power based on popular consent, not on control of the state's machinery of violence. Schell develops and then uses this concept to shed new light even on violent revolution, showing that nonviolent political change was the decisive factor in the American, French, and Russian revolutions.

What does this eclipse of the war system and ascendancy of civil society portend for international relations? Schell argues that the indivisibility of national sovereignty—the major stumbling block for collective security—is based implicitly on the conventional concept of power as coercion. But the new paradigm of power as popular consent opens the possibility of dividing sovereignty, as it is, in fact, divided in the U.S. Constitution between the states and the federal government and among the branches of government.

The United States today is at a crossroads, according to Schell, where it must generalize such power sharing to the field of international relations, either helping to create new and more effective multilateral institutions or destroying its own republican traditions and perhaps the world itself in the process of trying to institute a universal American empire. Schell's book assembles and brings into focus all of the reasons that only the first course can succeed in the twenty-first century.

The only gap worth mentioning in this remarkably comprehensive book is the failure to mention the pioneering work of Gene Sharp, who came to conclusions about the nature of political power similar to those of the author. To its great detriment, the field of political science mostly ignored Sharp and is now long overdue for a paradigm shift that can parallel the transformations of violence and politics that have actually occurred in the world. I know of no better statement of this new paradigm than *The Unconquerable World*.

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