

Such an assessment gravely under- rates the power of the Mahatma, which, skilfully deployed, made him the most influential politician — arguably — of our time. To interpret non-violent resistance as the rejection of power is to misunderstand the nature of power. The attraction of *satyagraha*, as of later strategies derived from it (notably Martin Luther King's), is precisely the expectation of potency. Gandhi never doubted it. "Working under this new law of non-violence," he wrote in 1920, "it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire." So it proved. Gandhi exaggerated only the novelty of *satyagraha*, which a Judean freedom-fighter had no less skilfully employed against the Romans 2,000 years before him.

Pervasion denied

Nations as well as individuals deny that power pervades. Especially newly-independent nations, which are characteristically reluctant to accept the fact that their hard-won freedom is no more than a licence to hunt in the jungle of power. They look on themselves as above the fray, beyond the struggle, reject the cynical aphorisms of the worldly philosophers — Kautilya's definition of an enemy as the state that is on one's border and of a friend as the state that is on the border of one's enemy, Hobbes's depiction of nations "in the state and posture of gladiators". George Washington for the young United States, Leon Trotsky for the young Bolshevik Republic, Raoul Dandurand for the newly-independent Dominion of Canada alike believed that the principles of their respective policies transcended the sordid statecraft of older, debauched societies.

These attitudes are much the same as those that try to claim for a Jesus or a Gandhi an immunity to power, and rest on the same confusion. What distinguishes them is not their exemption from having to play the game of power but rather their style of play. They have not renounced power, which is no more capable of renunciation by statesmen than gravity is capable of renunciation by spacemen. Theirs is not a renunciation at all, but an enunciation of a particular method of pursuing power — the method that strives after power not by the display or resort to bruising force but by the influence that good behaviour may exert upon opinion. It may not work; but that is another matter.

Power eludes

Power pervades: there is no getting away from it. Power also eludes: there is no coming to grips with it. The elusiveness of

power is beginning to preoccupy both practitioners and theorists, and about time, to
"Our territory is large, our people are numerous, our geographical position is good . . . It will be intolerable if after several decades we are not the greatest nation on earth."

"If we are six feet tall, the Russians are three feet tall, and the Chinese six inches tall."

"If one's line is correct, even if one has not a single soldier at first, there will be soldiers, and even if there is no political power, power will be gained . . . The crux of the matter is line."

"One word of truth outweighs the whole world."

These four quotations — their authors respectively, are Mao Tse-tung, U.S. Senator William Proxmire, Chou En-lai and Alexander Solzhenitsyn — are all statements about power, assessments of the constituents of power. They cannot all be correct. Those of Chou and Solzhenitsyn come close to saying the same thing, those of Chou and Mao are greatly at variance, while those of Mao and Proxmire are mutually incompatible.

The formulae of Mao and Proxmire do have something in common, however. Both proceed from geopolitical assumptions.

Geopolitical assumptions hold that power is a function of a nation's might, that the might of nations may be calculated more or less precisely, and that in consequence comparisons are possible, nations can be ranked and graded. The American humourist Russell Baker wrote a column — "Let's Hear It for No. 7" — in which he argued, tongue only half-in-cheek, that "countries that are No. 11 or No. 17" (he cites Denmark and Kenya) "don't have to spend all their income to get ready to wipe themselves out" and "as a result are often very pleasant countries". He does not want the United States to drop from No. 1 to No. 17, but sees distinct advantages in seventh place.

Basis for calculation

But how to tell that seventh place — or fourth or fifth or sixth? If might is amenable to calculation, what makes the mighty mighty, what makes them mightier yet?

Geopoliticians' answers differed. Some said mighty populations — the state with the biggest battalions. Others said mighty reserves — the state with the greatest bul- lion. Some said control of the seas, others control of the land. Some said control of the air, others control of the firmament: "If the Soviets control space, they can control earth" — thus John F. Kennedy in

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