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The Role of Deterrence in Buddhist Peace-building¹

Damien Keown²

Abstract

This article proposes that military deterrence can be a legitimate Buddhist strategy for peace. It suggests that such a strategy can provide a “middle way” between the extremes of victory and defeat. Drawing on evidence from the Pāli canon, notably the concept of the Cakkavatti, it argues that the Buddha did not object to kingship, armies or military service, and that military deterrence is a valid means to achieve the social and political stability Buddhism values.

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I want to consider a strategy for peace that is not commonly associated with Buddhism, namely military deterrence. So far as I am aware, this topic has received little attention from students of Buddhism and peace. My argument in this article will be that deterrence is not ruled out by Buddhism's pacifist teachings, and appears to be accepted even in early Buddhism as a morally acceptable strategy for the avoidance of conflict. My claim essentially comes down to this: Buddhism does not teach that the threat of the use of force for defensive purposes by state authorities is in conflict with the Dharma. Note that I am speaking here of the *threat* of the use of force rather than the *actual* use of force. I am not concerned to defend the actual use of military force at this time; although I believe a case can be made for this, it would require a longer discussion and is not my aim in this article.

Of course, there are many schools of Buddhism and many strands of Buddhist teachings. Discordant voices speak to us from diverse sources like the Pāli canon, historical chronicles like the *Mahāvamsa*, Mahāyāna sūtras and numerous commentaries. Deciding which is the authentic voice of Buddhism is problematic. Using Mahāyāna sources such as the *Upāyakauśalyasūtra*, the *Satyakaparivarta*, the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa Sūtra* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*—to name but a few—it is relatively easy to show that not only deterrence but the outright use of violent force is sanctioned by influential Buddhist scriptures. Here, however, I will restrict myself to the evidence of the Pāli canon, which is generally regarded as representing a consistently pacifist body of literature. As Peter Harvey puts it, “Within the Theravāda, no canonical text can be found justifying violence” (255). Accordingly, the Pāli Canon will present the strongest test of my thesis that a policy of military deterrence is not in conflict with the teachings of early Buddhism.

I define deterrence as a military strategy used by state authorities with the aim of dissuading an adversary from undertaking hostile action.

The reference to *military* strategy and *state* authorities is to distinguish deterrence by lawful authorities acting for the common good from the actions of groups who act outside the law and against the public interest, such as terrorists and criminal gangs. Deterrence will normally be for defensive purposes as a means of keeping the peace, and this is primarily the context I have in mind here (call this “defensive deterrence”); but it could also form part of a more aggressive policy, for example when used by an invading power to ensure compliance and deter retaliation (call this “offensive deterrence”). In all cases, successful deterrence convinces its target not to engage in hostile action by raising the stakes to the point where the price of aggressive action becomes too high. Deterrence is thus an attempt to achieve an objective without the use of force, and additionally can provide an opportunity for negotiation and reconciliation.

In some respects deterrence is the mirror image of what Gene Sharp has termed “nonviolent coercion.” Sharp is described by Sallie King as “arguably the foremost theoretician of nonviolent power in the world today” and “an established friend of both the Burmese and Tibetan Engaged Buddhists” (105). Nonviolent coercion is the third of four scenarios Sharp sketches by which political change can occur through non-violent means. It differs from deterrence in that nonviolent coercion is typically used *against* the state in campaigns of civil disobedience. To this extent it is arguably more aggressive in that it involves intentionally crippling the state by cutting off resources it needs to function. Deterrence, by contrast, normally aims at the *preservation* of the status quo and need not involve an intention to cause damage or harm. If this analysis is correct it follows that a strategy of defensive deterrence is, in principle at least, in keeping with the values of Engaged Buddhism.

Nuclear Deterrence

In modern times, deterrence has been most commonly associated with the use of nuclear weapons, and it is necessary to say a word about that before proceeding. It has been argued that the possession of nuclear weapons during the cold war preserved the peace of the world over many decades. While this may be true, there is a particular danger associated with nuclear weapons insofar as they maintain the balance of power through the certainty of “mutually assured destruction (MAD).” They raise the stakes to an unacceptably high level, and the consequence of their use, either deliberately or accidentally, would have catastrophic consequences for humanity. Some commentators have suggested, rightly in my view, that rather than make the world a safer place the possession of these weapons actually makes it more dangerous.

Furthermore, there are two features of nuclear weapons that make their use morally problematic from the perspective of just war theory. The first is that there is no way to use this deterrent proportionately. It is all or nothing. A conventional army, on the other hand, can be deployed flexibly and in the numbers required in different situations in proportion to the threat presented. The second is that with nuclear weaponry there is no way to preserve any semblance of non-combatant immunity since a nuclear explosion will destroy combatants and non-combatants indiscriminately.³ Accordingly, I am not endorsing a policy of nuclear deterrence and my remarks apply only to deterrence involving the use of conventional weapons.

³ On the ethics of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD) see Lee (165–86). For Buddhist perspectives see Chappell, and Swearer.

A “Middle Way”

As a military policy, defensive deterrence is aimed at neither victory nor defeat, but the avoidance of both. As such, it seems to offer a “middle way” that avoids the problems associated with both “extremes.” Defeat involves the negative outcome that one side loses, with all the social, economic and psychological damage that entails. And victory is also not free of problems for it is always purchased at a price, sometimes an extremely high one when measured in terms of loss of life and economic cost. There is also the risk of a spiral of revenge and retaliation, as the defeated party yearns for vengeance against the victors. As the Buddha puts it, “The slayer gets a slayer in his turn, the conqueror gets a conqueror” (S.i.185).

We see evidence of this cycle of retaliation in the Pāli canon. The *Samyutta Nikāya* (i.82f) recounts how battles were fought between King Pasenadi and King Ajātasattu. In the first Pasenadi is defeated, but he later returns to defeat Ajātasattu. The matter did not end there, and Ajātasattu subsequently attacked and conquered the kingdom of Kosala. Perhaps it was these very events that caused the Buddha to reflect during a sojourn in Kosala on a question very close to the one we are discussing now. He asked himself: “Is it possible to exercise rulership without killing or causing others to kill, without conquering or causing others to conquer, without sorrowing or causing others sorrow—righteously?”⁴ Unfortunately, before the Buddha answers this crucial question Māra intervenes tempting the Buddha to become a ruler himself in a manner reminiscent of Satan’s temptation of Christ (Luke iv.5-8). Had the Buddha answered, however, he might have considered deterrence as a possible solution to the dilemma posed in his question.

⁴ *Sakkā nu kho rajjaṃ kāretuṃ ahanam aghātayaṃ ajinaṃ ajāpayaṃ asocaṃ asocayaṃ dhammenā ti* (S.i.116).

Buddhism and Pacifism

Perhaps the suggestion that Buddhism would approve of even the threat of military force sounds incongruous given the widely-held stereotype of Buddhism as a religion of peace. As recent scholarly studies and contemporary events have shown, however, this stereotype is no longer sustainable. In the course of its long history, Buddhism has been involved in violent conflict in almost every part of Asia. Peter Harvey notes that history does not seem to record any Buddhist king who did *not* seek to repel invaders by force (243).

Supporters of Buddhist pacifism may claim that the historical and contemporary examples of conflict show only that Buddhists—like followers of other faiths—have, at certain times and places, fallen short of the high moral standards of their religion. After all, Buddhists are only human. Of course this is true, but it has also been suggested that there is a deeper ambivalence in Buddhist teachings regarding the use of force.⁵ On the one hand, Buddhism apparently teaches that the use of violent force is wrong, but on the other, appears to accept, tacitly at least, that force is necessary to secure social order, a good that Buddhism strongly supports.

The Buddha lived in a time of political upheaval, and understood very well both the value and fragility of social order. He knew that this order would not survive without the rule of law backed up by the power to enforce it, and, as a famous Western pacifist, Erasmus, would say many centuries later, if you accept the sword of the magistrate, you accept the sword of the prince. We see in the *Aggañña Sutta* how “the sword of the prince” is chosen as a means to combat crime, disorder and anarchy. The sutta tells us that the people elected from the best and most ca-

⁵ For example, by Steven Collins and Elizabeth Harris. A critique of Collins’s view is provided by Ven. Pandita (2012).

pable among them a certain being who would be wrathful when indignation was appropriate, who would censure that which deserved censure, and banish those who deserved to be banished (D.iii.93). When supported by an army such a king is the embodiment of coercive authority and a deterrent to crime, social disorder, and invasion.

Political stability and social order are viewed by Buddhism as desirable for many reasons, not least because without them it is very difficult to follow the religious life. In addition to a basic need for security, monks depend economically on the laity, and the laity need law and order to pursue their careers and professions. In later history, the sangha looked to kings as guarantors of political stability, and one of the traditional roles of Buddhist kings was the protection and purification of the sangha. Tambiah sums up the triadic relationship between king, sangha and people as follows:

Kingship as the crux of order in society provides the conditions and the context for the survival of sasana (religion). They need each other: religion in being supported by an ordered and prosperous society is able to act as the “field of merit” in which merit making can be enacted and its fruits enjoyed, while the king as the foremost merit maker needs the sangha to make and realize his merit and fulfil his kingship. (41)

Deterrence and the Cakkavatti

The primary evidence for my claim that the use of military deterrence is morally legitimate is shown in the figure of the Cakkavatti, a figure

whose appearance marks the origin of Buddhist political theory.⁶ The Cakkavatti is, so to speak, the secular counterpart of the Buddha, if the use of the term “secular” is not anachronistic in the context of ancient India. The Buddha and the Cakkavatti represent the “two wheels of Dhamma,” one supreme in religious matters and the other in the political sphere. The two career pathways of “World Conqueror” and “World Renouncer” are both legitimate options for a wise and virtuous individual, and at times the distinction between them blurs.

The Buddha tells us he was a Cakkavatti in “many times seven” lives,⁷ and he is sometimes referred to in militaristic terms as “Conqueror” and “Vanquisher,” for example, in the first chapter of the *Mahāvamsa* where he is said to have hovered over the assembled *yakkhas* striking terror into their hearts. In his last birth the prophecy was made that he would become either a Buddha or a Cakkavatti, both of whom are recognized as mahapuruṣas in the *Lakkhaṇa Sutta*. The careers of the two are often compared in suttas like the *Mahāpadāna Sutta*, and they are portrayed as two sides of the same coin, and as having both complementary and symmetrical roles. The Cakkavatti concerns himself mainly with worldly affairs, but when his reign is concluded he retires from the world to devote himself to religious practice. In later history it was common for Buddhist kings to take the title of “bodhisattva” and declare themselves as incarnations of Maitreya, the future Buddha (Yabuuchi 108-111). Again, at death both Buddha and Cakkavatti are said to be worthy of a stūpa to enshrine their remains (D.ii.141f).

In sum, we can say that the Buddhist ideal is a symbiotic relationship based on a division of labor in terms of which both the spiritual and

⁶ Sadly, this theory never developed beyond a rudimentary stage, perhaps due to the Buddha’s concern to avoid conflict with kings as mentioned below.

⁷ *Anekasattakhattum rājā ahoṣiṃ cakkavattī dhammiko dhammarājā* (A.iv.89).

material dimensions of life are properly integrated and regulated. This close linkage indicates that whatever a Cakkavatti does is in accordance with the Dhamma, and I take this as basic to my argument. The *Traibhūmikathā* says of Cakkavatti kings, “When they speak words or utter commands they do it in accordance with the Dharma” (159).

There are references to Cakkavattis throughout the Pāli canon and the Jātakas, but the *locus classicus* is the *Cakkavatti-sihanāda-sutta* or “Discourse on the Lion’s Roar of the World Conqueror.” The sutta speaks approvingly of the Cakkavatti as “a righteous king, ruling in righteousness, lord of the four quarters of the earth, conqueror, the protector of his people.” His many sons were “heroes, vigorous of frame, crushers of the hosts of the enemy.” The king achieved his conquests by following the magical wheel that led him to each of the four continents in turn. The text tells us that:

. . . the Celestial Wheel rolled onwards towards the region of the East, and after it went the Wheel-turning king, and with him his army, horses and chariots and elephants and men. And in whatever place, brethren, the wheel stopped, there the king, the victorious war-lord, took up his abode, and with him his fourfold army. Then all the rival kings in the region of the East came to the sovran king and said: Come, O mighty king! Welcome, O mighty king! All is thine, O mighty king! Teach us, O mighty king! (Rhys Davids 63)

This somewhat utopian scenario (which comes close to providing a justification for colonialism) describes how opposition to the Cakkavatti disappears as his fourfold army advances. The use of force was, therefore, not necessary as a means of conquest. But what persuaded the peoples of the four regions to accept the Cakkavatti as their new ruler? It is hard to

avoid the conclusion that the massed ranks of his army advancing into their territory had something to do with it.

A less cynical view, and the one promoted in the text, is that it was purely the moral character of the king that won people over. But in that case what purpose did the army serve? The king could easily have visited each continent with a small diplomatic mission and won the inhabitants over by his charisma, righteous conduct and teachings, a task one imagines made easier in the absence of the threatening presence of a vast army equipped, according to the *Traibhūmikathā*, with “bows and arrows, lances, swords and javelins” (171).

I suspect, however, that without his army the king would have found it much harder to win hearts and minds. The *Traibhūmikathā*, which has a good deal to say about Cakkavattis, injects a note of realism when it tells us that not all the lords and princes of the four continents, each with their five hundred vassals, rejoiced equally in the Cakkavatti’s teachings (189), suggesting that in the absence of his army the Cakkavatti’s conquest would not have been so easy.⁸ In this case the conquering army functioned to deter retaliation, which seems to constitute offensive rather than defensive deterrence, but in either mode of deterrence the Cakkavatti’s army poses a threat to those both inside and outside his kingdom who might seek to undermine its stability. The *Traibhūmikathā* mentions that the Cakkavatti’s bejeweled wheel or cakkaratana is known both as the “precious wheel” and “the tamer of enemies” (177), and let us not forget that the Cakkavatti’s heroic and manly sons are approvingly termed “crushers of the hosts of the enemy” (*para-senappamaddanā*).

⁸ Schmithausen (55) notes that the *Abhidharmakośa* refers to threats of violence by or on behalf of the Cakkavatti on some occasions.

The Cakkavatti's Dilemma

So far I have suggested that the existence of the Cakkavatti's army is evidence that early Buddhism endorses a policy of military deterrence. Let me now consider some evidence that seems problematic for my thesis. This arises from the pacifist teachings found throughout the canon that seem to suggest that any hint of the use of force is immoral and inevitably produces bad karma. This, of course, places the king in a "catch-22" situation whereby in seeking the good ends of stability, social order, and protection of his subjects, he inevitably does wrong in using force as a means.

Tambiah describes how the dilemma arises, first of all highlighting the importance of Dhamma in kingship: ". . . the code of kingship embodying righteousness (*dharma*) has its source in this dharma and is ideally a concrete manifestation of it in the conduct of worldly affairs." He goes on, ". . . *dharma* informs and suffuses the code of conduct of the righteous ruler" and notes that when describing a Dhammarāja in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* the Buddha says:

Herein, monk, the *raja*, the wheel roller, the *Dhamma* man, the *Dhamma raja*, relies just on *Dhamma*, honours *Dhamma*, reveres *Dhamma*, esteems *Dhamma*; with *Dhamma* as his standard, with *Dhamma* as his banner, with *Dhamma* as his mandate, he sets a *Dhamma* watch and bar and ward for folk within his realm. (40)

It is this very emphasis on the priority of *Dharma* to politics that causes the conflict many writers have observed. Again, in the words of Tambiah:

It is this total application of *dharma* to politics that in theory insisted on the principle of nonviolence (*ahimsa*), non-injury and compassion (*karuna*) in statecraft, an ideal that

sometimes collided with the practicalities of statecraft. It is perhaps this tension that finds expression as an ‘identity crisis’ among the great kings of Buddhist polities—and its resolution in terms of the renunciation of violence *after* accomplishing conquest and empire building. (42)

Clearly, one way out of the dilemma is to kill first and repent later, as suggested above. However, the supposed conflict between statecraft and non-violence makes the Buddhist political ideal incoherent. It seems contradictory to say that according to Buddhist teachings a king has a duty to protect the social order while denying him the tools to do the job. If this were the case, it would follow that “only a fool becomes a king” as the title of a paper by Michael Zimmerman aptly describes it. Yet only an anarchist or total pacifist would believe that social order and security can be preserved in the absence of a coercive justice system backed up ultimately by military force. Even Gandhi did not call for the Indian army to be disbanded. It would be inconsistent of Buddhism, then, to leave such a contradiction at the heart of its social program. In my view the apparent conflict of ideals between *ahiṃsā* and national security is reconcilable, but it requires some reconstruction of what we commonly assume to be the Buddhist position on the use of force, a task I cannot enter into here. For now I will attempt to show simply that defensive deterrence does not conflict with even the standard pacifist interpretation of Buddhist teachings to the effect that any use of violence is wrong.

While the Pāli Canon shows a clear preference for peace, it does not seem to disapprove of kings having armies, as we have seen in the example of the Cakkavatti. Moreover, while the evidence overwhelmingly suggests he would prefer peace to conflict, nowhere do we see the Buddha mounting an anti-war crusade, or taking a principled stand

against the use of military force in general.⁹ Schmithausen notes that the Buddha “does not declare offensive war, let alone *any* war, to be immoral” (50). On one occasion in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha says that one of the five qualities that enables a king to rule abidingly wherever he has conquered is “his strength in the four divisions of his army, loyal and alert to commands.”¹⁰ If the existence of an army was in conflict with the Buddha’s teachings, we might have expected him to make this view known in the course of his many conversations with local rulers. The Buddha frequently held audiences with kings, and on one well-known occasion reported in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (D.ii.72ff) was explicitly asked for his opinion on Ajātasattu’s plans to attack the Vajjians. Rather than condemning any use of violent force, as we might expect had the Buddha been a total pacifist, he sent back only an oblique and somewhat cryptic response praising the customs of the Vajjians. The meaning of this utterance is still puzzling scholars (see Pandita).

One can surmise that for various reasons the Buddha did not wish to meddle too deeply in politics. Perhaps he feared for the existence of the sangha if the king should be angered by his response. Such concern may also be seen in his agreement to a request from king Bimbisāra, following the ordination of a group of serving soldiers (*yodha*), not to allow anyone in the king’s service (*rājabhaṭa*) to join the sangha (Vin.i.73f). Or, perhaps, as a member of the warrior caste himself he was simply a political realist who accepted the inevitability of conflict between states. Although coming from a republican tribe, his relations with the powerful kings of Magadha, Kosala, Vaṃsa, and Avanti suggests that he had no objection in principle to monarchy as a form of socio-

⁹ He intervened in specific disputes on only two occasions, both involving his own relatives (Pandita 135ff).

¹⁰ *Balavā kho pana hoti caturaṅginiyā senāya samannāgato assavāya ovādapāṭikarāya* (A.iii.151).

political organization. After all, as noted above, he claimed to have been a Cakkavatti himself who had “conquered the four ends of the earth, bringing stability to the country.”¹¹ Perhaps it would seem hypocritical now to tell another king not to do likewise. We can only speculate as to the Buddha’s motives on this occasion, but whatever they were he missed a golden opportunity to deliver a principled anti-war message at the highest political level. His muted stance contrasts with contemporary anti-war demonstrations led by Buddhist pacifist groups, and his silence on the use of force by kings suggests that *a fortiori* he would not oppose a milder strategy of simple deterrence.

Soldiery

In addition to the above, we nowhere find the Buddha condemning the profession of soldiery.¹² If he believed that war was intrinsically immoral he would surely have included soldiery in the list of professions that laymen should not undertake (A.iii.208). It must be acknowledged that this list of five commercial activities begins with trade in weapons (*sathavaṇijjā*), but the legitimate possession of weapons by officers of the state has little to do with trade or commercial activity. Soldiers use arms; they do not normally trade in them.

Nor do I think that being a soldier is anywhere included as a prohibited occupation under the “right livelihood” limb of the eightfold path. Indeed, in the *Āṅuttara Nikāya* the warrior is held up as model for monks to emulate. In one place, the Buddha draws a parallel between five kinds of warriors (*yodhājīva*) and five kinds of monks, the first four of

¹¹ *Caturanto vijitavījanapadatthāvariyaṃpatto.*

¹² Harvey discusses the position of the soldier (253-255).

whom are deficient in some respect in their professions. Of the fifth monk, however, it is said: “Monks, I tell you this person is just like the warrior who, taking up his sword and shield and strapping on his bow and quiver, goes down into the midst of the battle. After winning the battle, being victorious in battle, he comes out at the very head of the battle. Just like that, I say, is this person.”¹³ If the Buddha disapproved of soldiery he could easily have chosen another profession to illustrate the monastic virtues he admired. In many Buddhist societies, moreover, a military career is highly respected and military service is compulsory. In addition, monks or ex-monks are often attached to the military as chaplains.

Contrary Evidence

Certain canonical passages, however, seem to tell against the view expressed above and suggest that the profession of a soldier is intrinsically immoral. For example, when asked in a much-quoted passage about the fate of soldiers who die in battle, the Buddha says that they go not to heaven but to a special hell since at the moment of death their minds were full of hatred (S.iv.308f).¹⁴ I would make two points in reply: first, I am not defending the use of armed force in battle, so the guilt or karmic fate of soldiers who fight or die in battle has little direct relevance to my case concerning deterrence. Second, the state of mind of soldiers in battle and their intentions at the moment of death are probably many and varied. Some may be motivated by hatred of the enemy but others not.

¹³ *Seyyathā pi so bhikkhave yodhājīvo asicammaṃ gahevā dhanukalāpaṃ sannayhitvā viyūlham saṃgāmaṃ otarati. So tam saṃgāmaṃ abhivijinitvā vijitasamgāmo tam eva saṃgāmasīsaṃ ajjhāvasati, tathūpamāhaṃ bhikkhave imaṃ puggalaṃ vadāmi* (A.iii.100). Cf. A.i.284, A.ii.170, 202, Pug. 65-9.

¹⁴ This passage is discussed, for example, by Harris (94) and Schmithausen (48).

When the Buddha refers above to soldiers who die in battle going to hell, he explicitly links this to a particular “base” (*hīnaṃ*), “depraved” (*duggataṃ*) and “misdirected” (*duppaṇihitaṃ*) state of mind in which the central motivation is, “Let these beings be slain, slaughtered, annihilated, destroyed, or exterminated.”¹⁵

Contrary to the common pacifist assumption that all violence must be motivated by anger or hatred, however, not all soldiers share this motivation. On the contrary, there is good empirical evidence that soldiers in combat are motivated primarily by loyalty to their comrades, and far from lusting for blood would prefer to disable or capture the enemy rather than kill him. The kind of vindictive fury the Buddha describes may indeed be found on the battlefield, but it is certainly not the norm. It calls to mind, rather, cases of genocidal massacre such as happened in Rwanda in 1994 when Hutu tribesmen, describing their Tutsi victims as “cockroaches,” butchered them with machetes. The fact of the matter is that the whole spectrum of human emotions can be found in war, from dispassionate clinical professionalism to frenzied rage, and from bitter hatred to courage and love. What may or may not motivate a soldier in battle, therefore, or be in his thoughts at the moment of death, is a matter about which it is difficult to generalize. What we can say with some certainty, however, is that it would be empirically false to suggest that hatred is a universal and inevitable battlefield fact. What we must understand the Buddha as criticizing in this passage, then, is a more limited class of cases where killing proceeds from an evil motive and the aim is simply the extermination of the enemy.

The same point might be made about other criticisms of the use of force found in the Pāli canon. We are told again and again that the use

¹⁵ *Ime sattā haññantu vā bajjhantu vā ucchijjantu vā vinasantu vā mā ahesuṃ iti vā ti* (A.iv.309).

of force is wrong primarily because of the state of mind of the one who uses it. Peter Harvey reports, commenting on M.i.186f, “. . . the Buddha says that sense-pleasures lead on to desire for more sense-pleasures, which leads on to conflict between all kinds of people, including rulers, and thus conflict and war.” Hatred (D.ii.276f) and fear (D.iii.182) are also said to motivate violent actions, and citing Sn.766-975, Harvey notes “The Buddha also referred to the negative effect of attachment to speculative or fixed views . . . Grasping at views can be seen to have led to religious and ideological wars” (240).

Examples could be multiplied, but these critiques tell only against violence arising from negative motivation, and do not show that the use of force is morally wrong *in itself*.¹⁶ The Pāli Canon does not seem to consider the possibility of the use of force when disengaged from such negative states of mind. Is such a thing possible? Again, this seems to be a question for empirical investigation, but I can see no reason in principle why it should not be. For example, parents may sometimes resort to force when disciplining their children, but it would sound strange to say they do so out of hatred. Their motivation is more likely to be love and a desire to steer their child away from bad behavior. A similar distinction might apply in the case of police who forcibly restrain individuals intent on self-harm. Even when lethal force is used as a last resort, as when security forces shoot dead armed criminals or terrorists, it does not follow that the act is motivated by hatred.¹⁷

¹⁶ For this reason I would wish to qualify Schmithausen’s assertion that “a strict application of the Buddhist ethical principle of not killing cannot but lead to the rejection of *all* kinds of war, including defensive war” (51). This depends, of course, on how we understand ‘the Buddhist ethical principle of not killing’, a question raising complex issues of motivation, intention and responsibility.

¹⁷ According to Rupert Gethin’s reading of the *Abhidhamma*, an intention to kill must always be accompanied by hatred (166–202). While this may indeed be the *Abhi-*

If we can detach the use of force from negative psychological states, as the above examples suggest, the vast majority of objections to its use in the Pāli canon fall away. In the case of deterrence, furthermore, no force is actually used, and it is much easier to show that the psychology underlying it may not be of a negative kind. The Cakkavatti and the soldiers in his army do not appear to be motivated by hatred, for example. Nor, we could add, is there any reason to think their minds are defiled by greed, hatred and delusion as they pursue their conquest by Dharma, a conquest supported in part at least by a strategy of offensive deterrence, across the four continents. On the contrary, they seem to be inspired by noble ideals such as peace and brotherly love.¹⁸

The Jātakas

Turning from canonical sources for a moment, we find a variety of perspectives on the use of force by kings and the dilemmas they face in the Jātakas. Indeed, Stephen Jenkins describes the Jātakas as “perhaps the most important Buddhist source for statecraft.” He goes on, “The Jātakas frequently valorize intentions to capture the enemy alive or to win without bloodshed through intimidation” (67). This policy of winning without bloodshed through intimidation, while more offensive than defensive in nature, is also based on a strategy of deterrence.

At the same time, the Jātakas as a collection reveal an inconsistent attitude to the use of force by kings. As Jenkins notes, “the Jātakas

dhamma's opinion, it is widely contradicted by empirical evidence. For a more realistic evidence-based discussion of the motivation of soldiers in combat see Biggar, chapter 2.

¹⁸ The *Traibhūmikathā* says that in the Cakkavatti's entourage, “Everyone was happy and light-hearted. They had only good words for one another, praising and admiring each other's finery. They sang, and danced, and played about” (175).

tales are full of stories of Buddhist warriors, often the Buddha himself in a past life, and occasionally romanticize their heroic deaths in battle” (68). However, taking a diametrically opposite position, the *Seyya Jātaka* tells the story of a king who refuses to fight in defense of his kingdom because it will lead him to harm others. In this particular case all turns out well, and the king is subsequently released and his kingdom returned. In real life, however, such a fairy-tale ending is unlikely. When the Buddha’s relatives, the Sakiyas, refused to defend themselves they were massacred by king Viḍūḍabha. The Sakiyas, interestingly, saying they preferred to die rather than take the lives of others, fired their arrows at the spaces between the ranks of soldiers in the opposing army, apparently seeking to deter their advance (Burlingham and Lanman 44). In this case, the strategy of deterrence was not successful, but it seems the Sakiyas at least regarded it as compatible with the principle of *ahiṃsā*.

The Jātakas, incidentally, like the Buddha, seem to have no problem with the institution of kingship itself, comparing a realm (*rattha*) without a king to a woman without a husband, or a riverbed without water. “Just as the tree is the refuge of birds,” says Jātaka 432, “so is the king the refuge of his people.”

Conclusion

Up to now there has been no explicit consideration of military deterrence as a morally permissible method of Buddhist peace-building, and I think it is worth adding to the list of resources. I hope to have shown that as a form of “non-violent coercion” defensive deterrence has a place. This is not to claim very much in the light of the sangha’s historical acceptance of the direct use of force by kings on many occasions. Nor

does it go so far as the examples of offensive deterrence displayed by Cakkavattis and kings in the Jātakas.

We noted that the Buddha does not condemn kingship, armies, or military service. What he condemns are greed, hatred, and delusion. Whether such motivations underlie the use of force in particular instances is an empirical question that can only be decided on a case-by-case basis. If the Buddha regarded participation in the military profession as *inherently* immoral he would surely have denounced it as such and included it in his list of prohibited occupations. His silence on the matter is telling. Two modern commentators, at least, share the view that armies are essential in a Buddhist state. In a recent book on Engaged Buddhism and world peace, Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Tu writes:

It is further stated in Buddhism that the Wheel turning monarch has a powerful fourfold army (*caturanganisena*), including elephants, cavalry, chariots and infantry ... Only when armed with strong military, all the political rivalry and war for regional expansion will cease to exist. The Buddha sees clearly that strongly and skilled army (sic) justifies national defense, while economic progress and spiritual advancement is seen possible with political stability. (24)

And Aung San Suu Kyi, herself the daughter of a soldier, has stated “Armies are meant to defend the people, to protect the nation, to make sure that the peoples of the land enjoy all the rights of citizenship within the framework of a fair and just constitution” (Suu Kyi). It would be hard to find more clearly-worded support for a strong military, and nothing in the Pāli canon seems to contradict this view of its role. It seems to follow that approval of the existence of a state army carries with it at a minimum the recognition and acceptance of its deterrent power.

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