

Non-violent civil resistance against military force: The experience of Lithuania in 1991

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Abstract

Evolving threats to national security have resulted in the adoption of comprehensive (total) defence concepts by a number of small and medium states. Civil resistance constitutes a considerable part of such concepts, complementing military defence. The historical experience of Lithuania proved the value of nonviolent resistance between 1988 and 1991 for regaining independence, and defending it in January 1991. The aim of this article is to analyse the role of non-violent civil resistance in the national defence system, based on the experience of 13 January 1991 in Lithuania and develop further discussion about the concept of civil resistance. The methodological approach of the article is based on historical and theoretical analysis. This allows the experience of Lithuania to be assessed on the basis of Lithuanian National Security and Defence Strategy and scientific research. Lithuanian non-violent civil resistance in 1988–1991 was successful in terms of strategy, leadership, organisation, planning, non-violence priorities and the number of citizens involved. The leaders of the movement were able to mobilise people into a widespread movement based on their moral authority and value orientations, strongly appealing to different groups in society. Lithuania's independence was achieved with minimal human sacrifice, preserving the country's resources and infrastructure. This experience of non-violent civil resistance came to be used by modern state institutions to create strategic documents of the state. In the current situation, it is necessary to focus not only on the knowledge required for state defence and civil resistance, but also on its moral aspects such as values, ethical behaviour, civic and human maturity.

Keywords:

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Introduction

1 3th January 1991 is a date that every Lithuanian knows, young and old, by those who remember the events of that bloody night and those who were not even born. I remember that night. I remember the sounds of explosions and bullets that seemed to spread all over the city, while ambulance sirens screamed incessantly in the streets. I remember the bullets flying over our quiet Vilnius district, next to the Lithuanian Television and Radio Committee. I remember the neighbours of our apartment block sitting quietly in their rooms listening to the radio. The only information it was broadcasting was the news that television and radio programmes had been interrupted due to the takeover of the Soviet militaries. I remember the phone sitting in the middle of the table, which used to be the only possible channel of information. Yet when the calls came, you would only hear one question - do you know what's going on? However, no one knew anything about what was going on. I remember both the terrible silence and the terrible ignorance that suddenly appeared when things calmed down. And then came the fear of ignorance, which was far greater than the fear felt when shots and explosions were heard all around. There was only one question on my mind - what should I do?

On the night of 13th January 1991, a series of cruel events took place in Vilnius, when the so-called National Salvation Committee tried to carry out a coup in Lithuania using the Soviet Union's (USSR) armed forces, the Ministry of the Interior, and the USSR State Security Committee (KGB) to restore Soviet political power in the Republic of Lithuania. It was on this night that the Soviet military forces attacked the Vilnius TV Tower and the Radio and Television Committee building, killing 14 civilians and injuring hundreds of unarmed people.

Did anybody expect peaceful citizens to be attacked by military force? The answer could be "yes", as thousands of people stood around the parliament, the TV tower and other important buildings, attempting to protect them from attacks by Soviet troops. Yet the answer could also be "no", as the Lithuanian Singing Revolution in 1988-1990 was highly successful, and in less than two years, the people of Lithuania were able to peacefully restore their independence on 11 March 1990, when the Act of the Re-Establishment of the State of Lithuania was declared.

The events of January 1991 are still alive in memories, and they are still the subject of public debate in Lithuania. Although a pre-trial investigation was launched immediately following these events, with some perpetrators of crimes being punished in 1999, the Lithuanian government, society and relatives of innocent victims continue to seek justice today. On 27 January 2016, the Vilnius trial began prosecuting 65 people for violating International Humanitarian Law ([Lietuvos teismai, 2016](#)).

The current Lithuanian military is trying to explore how the defence of key state buildings was organised in 1991 and what should be changed in the future. Lithuanian cadets organise an interactive educational event in the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania every year called "January 13. What can we learn from it?" ([LKA, 2020](#)). The purpose of this event is to prepare a plan of defence for the Lithuanian Parliament and to consider how the events of January 1991 could be useful for future military officers.

While the militaries are preparing defence and resistance plans in the event of aggression, 42.2 percent of Lithuanian people expressed their readiness to defend the independence of the country and 60.1 percent of citizens are ready to participate in civil resistance using violent and non-violent forms of resistance if the country is occupied ([Ramonaitė et al., 2018](#)). It is the highest cumulative level of willingness to resist among populations

in the Baltic states ([Andžāns and Sprūds, 2020](#)). This positive could be another of the important consequences of the events of January 1991. Those researching the civil resistance suggest that non-violent resistance campaigns are more successful than armed rebellions (and can be defended solely through non-violent forms of civil resistance ([Sharp, 1975](#); [Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011](#); [Bayer, Bethke and Lambach, 2016](#); [Bartkowski, 2013](#)). This statement was approved by the non-violent resistance of Lithuanian citizens in 1991. Could the participation of citizens in national defence in the face of modern threats also receive approval?

The aim of this article is to analyse the role of non-violent civil resistance in the national defence system, based on the experience of 13th January 1991 in Lithuania, and to discuss how this experience influenced Lithuania's attitude towards the concept of civic resistance.

The methodological approach of the article is based on biographical research and historical analyses. This allows the events of January 1991 in Lithuania to be assessed not only on the basis of official documents of that period, but also on the basis of personal memories of ordinary residents and public figures as well. Such a research strategy aims to find a link between the social context and individual assumptions. This approach allowed the content of the case study to be analysed from a holistic point of view. In addition, the case of Lithuanian civic resistance will be analysed on the basis of literature about non-violent resistance ([Sharp, 1973](#); [Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011](#)) to understand how the use of non-violent means is superior to armed resistance to autocratic regimes and how this form of civic resistance increases the consolidation of democratic society.

January 1991 in Lithuania: what happened?

In 1985, USSR leader Mikhail Gorbachev started transformation reforms of the state and society, which paved the way for changes in the political and social life of Lithuania. The Lithuanian transformation movement, called *Sąjūdis*, was formed in the summer of 1988 and united the most authoritative people in various fields in Lithuania, ultimately becoming a mass movement for the peaceful liberation of society from the Soviet system. This movement was called the "Singing Lithuanian Revolution". The main step towards independence was initiated following the elections of the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian SSR in February 1990. The *Sąjūdis* and the Lithuanian Communist Party competed in these elections, where 133 deputies were elected and 96 of them were supported by the *Sąjūdis*. On 11 March 1990, the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian SSR had been announced to restore Lithuania's independence. At that time, the USSR still existed as a state, and no states recognised Lithuania's independence. The Soviet government therefore wanted to force the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania to renounce the Act of Independence by various means. Economic sanctions were initially imposed, and from 20 April until 2 July 1990, the Soviet government cut off supplies of oil and other raw materials to Lithuania. When these sanctions were not successful, Soviet officials began to suggest other methods.

In 1989, the anti-*Sąjūdis* movement called *Vienybė-Jedinstvo-Jednosc* was organised. This organisation was focused on representatives of national minorities, mainly Poles and Russians. The aims of this movement were initially related to the fear of proclaiming Lithuanian as the state language (at that time, many Poles and Russians did not speak Lithuanian), and later it became an aspiration for national autonomy in Southern Lithuania ([Janusauskas, 2008](#)). At the beginning of January, this organisation initiated mass protests by the population over the jump in commodity prices and ethnic discrimination. Of course, the economy, energy shortages, and inflation, which grew rapidly, were used by pro-Soviet forces fighting against the independence of the new state.

On 8 January 1991, the Jedinstvo movement, supported by the Lithuanian Communist Party on the CPSU platform (Soviet Communist party loyalist), organised about 20,000 people who protested against the rise in commodity prices in front of the Supreme Council of Lithuania (Kasperavicius, 2019). During a radio and television address, protesters tried to storm the parliament building but were driven away by unarmed security forces and independence supporters. Vytautas Landsbergis (the chair of the Supreme Council of Lithuania) then addressed the Lithuanian people who supported the independence of the radio, urging them to gather around and protect the main governmental and infrastructural buildings: “Come and support your government, otherwise you may have foreign rule” (Landsbergis, 1992, p. 36).

On 10 January 1991, the President of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, demanded that the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet immediately and completely restore the validity of the Constitution of the USSR and repeal the act of 11 March. Historian Gediminas Rudis remembers, that Moscow angrily demanded the immediate revocation of “unconstitutional” actions. Additional units of the Soviet Armed forces were transferred to Lithuania, and unusual movements of armoured equipment columns began (Rudis, 2002). He also remembers that on 11th January 1991, the Lithuanian Communist Party on the platform of the CPSU organised the National Salvation Committee. This committee had announced it would take over power in Lithuania and, with the support of the Jedinstvo movement and units of the Soviet army, was committed to restoring the Soviet constitutional order. The USSR Armed Forces began highly intensive operations in Vilnius. Soviet combat vehicles were moving along the streets of Vilnius at night; tanks and armoured personnel occupied the building of the National Defense Department, the Press House (where firearms were used for the first time against unarmed guards and several were injured), and some other buildings. With the help of armoured vehicles, the centre of the railway dispatcher of Vilnius Railway Station was attacked and train movement was stopped. The CPSU organisation of Vilnius Airport and the leaders of Jedinstvo organised a meeting and went on strike in the airport. The Sąjūdis and the Lithuanian government organised non-violent resistance against military power. Over 20,000 people gathered near the Supreme Council building in Independence Square in support of the Parliament. Thousands of people gathered from all over the country to stand by the other important state buildings, such as the Radio and Television Centre and the television tower (Rudis, 2002). The people stood around these buildings for several nights and days in the cold, singing folk and modern patriotic songs, listening to the radio, sharing the news and their views. Bonfires were burned and tea was brewed. They had no guns, but a very strong sense of freedom. The Supreme Council thanked all Lithuanian people for their “dedication and loyalty to Lithuania’s independence” (LR Seimas, 1991a).

On 12th January 1991, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, protesting against the government of the Soviet Union, noted that the permanent USSR armed forces continued to expand their operations: weapons were confiscated, state structures and law enforcement institutions were destroyed; roads, transport and communications were blocked; there were dead, wounded and kidnapped people in the country. Assessing the nature and scale of the events, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania decided to determine the actions of the Soviet Union against the Republic of Lithuania as open military aggression and formed an interim defence leadership of the Republic of Lithuania to lead the resistance against the attackers (LR Seimas, 1991b). The decision to resist the aggression was taken late, just before the night of 13th January, which was the cruellest night in the history of the modern Lithuanian state.

On 13th January, just after midnight, Soviet Army tanks, armoured vehicles and armed soldiers attacked the television tower and the Lithuanian radio and television building in

Vilnius. We can envision the events that unfolded near the television tower by reading the diary of one of the participants of those ([Kligienė, 2011](#)):

Foggy and not very cold evening. ... About 11 p.m. we ascend to the very top of the hill, to the tower. People walk quietly, some even with young children. A little further on, teenagers burn bonfires. Inside the tower there are two TV receivers, it is possible to watch two programmes through the windows, people are standing; who is watching TV, who is listening to the radio? The company from Druskininkai, which appeared at noon while we were here, attracts folk songs because they are mostly elderly people. Well, and the youth, not the youth, organised a disco. ... At about the first hour of the night, I notice security guards running restlessly inside the tower... The music is muted and we are asked to stand around the tower with our hands clasped. The siren is masked, but the people are calm – they had lined up several times last night and broke up again, some even a little disappointed that nothing had happened then. ... Suddenly the sky shines and we hear “babach” for a few seconds. One, two, three or four times – we are still trying to count the shots... A green rocket is stuck near our hill. Of course, this is a signal for the storming of our tower. The tanks roar to the slope on our side, along the fence. Lord, how many of them!... But there is no fear, everything is so unreal, absurd and unbelievable that even fear seems to be nothing. Like a nightmare, like a theatre of the absurd, so unreal. ... The tanks, turning the fence, turn into the field in front of us... And on each tank you can see a couple of soldiers with prepared guns in their hands. They drive past us around the entire tower, some are spinning and shooting right here, probably intimidating with empty projectiles, then I thought... We stood and sang “Mary, Mary” as the machine gun spilled from the tanks without any warning. The song fell silent, bullets whistled over their heads. One volley, the second, the third. None of us get struck, does the ammunition seem to be empty? – I’m thinking. Time has turned to infinity... Pieces of glass are falling on their heads – thick, massive. We cover our heads with our hands. Apparently, the ammunition is no longer empty if the glass shatters, or maybe the paratroopers are scratching from the inside, because there they already seem to have invaded from the other side of the tower. People are slowly retreating from the crumbling glass wall, and at one point I realise that there are no people left behind us, and there are shooting soldiers in front of us. ... It is full of tanks everywhere - at the foot of the hill and on the bridge, they spin hell pipes, searchlights move across the sky and the tower, gun and cannon shots continue until we reach the house.

At the same time, thousands of people stood around the parliament building trying to defend this building, the Lithuanian government and the independence of their state. In his memoirs, one of the defenders remembers what was going on at the Supreme Council of Lithuania that night ([Kavarskas, 2006](#)):

I was bothered by the cold of winter and strengthened by the noble feeling of fighting for the Freedom of Lithuania, which I cherished. <...> It was already an hour after midnight. It was only half an hour later when the shots were heard... There... Near... At the TV Tower... Extremely painful feelings were experienced by the people. People wiped away tears, found strength, and looked up boldly. We heard somebody say that there were wounded and killed... We will win – we knew and believed. <...> Maybe an hour passed and the shots fell silent, everything calmed down, and thousands of defenders of the Lithuanian Parliament remained strong in their belief in Lithuania and hope. People stayed to defend Parliament, the heart of Lithuania. We defended, even though it was infinitely difficult, even though we were very tired.

In their memoirs, the Defenders of Independence remember the events of January very emotionally. Everything was mixed in their minds and feelings: both fear and uncertainty,

but there was a strong conviction that they needed to defend their expressed will – a democratically elected Lithuanian parliament and a restored independent state. Meanwhile, the Lithuanian government survived the events of that night (Ozolas, 2010, pp. 163-166):

I already thought it would be quiet. An hour ago, Gintaras called: TV and radio were taken. As I ran, the tanks fired while shooting, people chanting at the Supreme Council. It was quiet here. Ministers gathered. Called Misiukonis: the days were mixed with the nights, there would be a curfew, five corpses were brought. < ... > It was phone calls from various places of Vilnius and it was reported on the situation in the places of attacks. There are already many victims. Lots of injured. There are five victims. It's already seven. The TV broadcast has stopped. The radio no longer works. The connection with Lithuania via Kaunas Radio is soon restored. I am making a couple of statements: the situation is under control, we will endure.

On the night of 13 January 1991, the military units of the USSR occupied the Lithuanian Radio and Television Committee, the television tower. This resulted in the deaths of 14 civilians and one Soviet military, with 604 unarmed people being injured, and much material loss (Kasperavičius, 2019). A group of individuals calling themselves the Lithuanian National Salvation Committee announced that they had taken power. Despite this, most of the Lithuanian governmental institutions, municipalities and the majority of the population remained loyal to the legitimate Lithuanian government. The Soviet military didn't attack the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian Republic, trying to avoid thousands of casualties, as thousands of people had formed a human shield around the parliament building; with security guards and poorly armed or unarmed volunteers inside, the USSR's political leadership was reluctant to issue an order to storm the building.

Many human casualties would have caused great outrage around the world. On that same day, even more patriotic citizens from all over Lithuania came to Vilnius. The leaders of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Russian President Boris Yeltsin jointly protested and expressed solidarity with the United Nations Secretary-General. The patriotism of the Lithuanian people at that time thwarted the Soviet governments' plan to abolish Lithuania's independence. Prior to Lithuania's independence, the activities of hostile forces complicated the processes of restoration and consolidation of the independent state; however, it failed to stop them. Iceland, which had supported Lithuania since the first days of the restoration of Lithuania's independence, was the first to recognise the state of Lithuania on 11th February, 1991. Other states recognised Lithuania's independence after the collapse of the August 1991 coup in Moscow.

The events of January 1991 were truly dramatic and significant for the young Lithuanian state that had declared independence several months ago. It was an attempt to carry out a coup, because "the ultimate aim of this brutal Soviet attack could have been to supplant the elected Lithuanian government with puppet rulers directed by the Kremlin" (Cosman, 1991). These events demonstrated the power of the citizens of the state, ready to stand up to the military power for freedom and sovereignty. This case is also an opportunity to re-examine the importance and significance of civil resistance in the context of national security and defence in order to understand the strengths and weaknesses of non-violent civil resistance.

The experience of Lithuanian civil resistance in 1988-1991: theory and practice

Lithuania's independence was achieved through non-violent civil resistance, and civil resistance is a relevant concept that is constantly discussed by the academic community, politicians, the military and society as a whole.

Civil resistance is a very complex societal phenomenon, which can be described differently as a social movement, human power, civil resistance, unarmed resistance, or non-violent resistance. These varied terms have different political meanings and goals; they can have different forms and social meaning (Sharp, 1973; Zunes, 1994, p. 403; Dudouet, 2013). Although there are many differences, there is one common feature of this phenomenon: civil resistance is the movement of people against a government or a system that governs a country. According to Gene Sharp, “one can see that a government or system depends on the good will, decisions and support of the people” and that when people for some reason do not want to maintain power, they can use their will against it (Sharp, 1973, p. 8). Despite the many different perspectives on civic resistance, almost all researchers recognise that civic resistance is an extremely important and influential phenomenon found in different epochs, situations, cultures, and countries. Moreover, most scholars agree that non-violent resistance, unlike violent resistance, is more likely to steer the state and society towards further democratic governance. Examining non-violent resistance and the regimes that followed, E. Chenoweth and M. Stephan conducted a comparative study that analysed reliable data from 259 civic resistance campaigns, of which 80 were instances of non-violent resistance. Research has shown that the success of non-violent resistance is significantly higher than that of violence-based campaigns (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011, p. 7).

Gene Sharp gives three main reasons why non-violent resistance is superior to violent forms of resistance. First, the disobedience and non-humility of the citizens will take away power from any government. Second, if citizens do not use violence and the government resorts to it, the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of the public and the international community falls. Third, non-violent resistance can be practised by anyone, and such citizens are treated as the legitimate voice of the nation (Sharp, 1973).

The experience of Lithuanian civic resistance in 1988–1991 confirmed this theoretical approach. It had been a non-violent civic movement since its inception on 3 June 1988, when the initiative group of the Lithuanian Reform Movement (Sąjūdis) was established until the autumn of 1991, when Lithuania was recognised as an independent state. The first two protest meetings organised by the Sąjūdis in July and August gathered around 100 to 250 thousand people. Thus, from the very start, the activities of the Sąjūdis attracted thousands of Lithuanians who demonstrated their disobedience towards the Soviet regime. From the very beginning, the Sąjūdis movement was supported by very different people from various regions of the country. The first Sąjūdis Congress was attended by 1,026 delegates representing 1,000 local organisations and 180,000 members. These delegates represented various social groups (scientists, artists, students, agricultural and industrial workers, civil servants, etc.) with different levels of education (639 visiting delegates had higher education, others had secondary or higher technical education). The non-violent Lithuanian people’s movement initiated by the Sąjūdis supported both Lithuanian society and the international community. Positive public opinion (in the country, within the USSR, and around the world) increased further following the incident on 13 January, when the Soviet army used military force against unarmed citizens who tried to protect the most important state buildings – the parliament, the TV tower and the Lithuanian Television and Radio Committee.

An important contribution of Gene Sharp, as a leading scholar in this area, is the theoretical elucidation of the activities of civil resistance, which sets out the necessary conditions for it, the principles of practical organisation of civil resistance, and the criteria for success. By providing practical examples, Gene Sharp concludes that the minimum conditions for civil resistance are strategy, leadership, discipline, organisation, planning, non-violence, and the number of citizens who can take part. Gene Sharp has identified the strategy of non-violent resistance as the most important part of civil resistance, argu-

ing that in order to defeat a bigger and stronger opponent in any way, a good understanding of the situation is needed ([Sharp, 1973, p. 493–496](#)). In the case of Lithuania, this theoretical statement was also confirmed.

The leaders of the movement had their own strategic goals, yet they were able to assess the situation and implement these goals step-by-step. Sajūdis began its activities as a movement to support the reforms of the Soviet Union initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev, and in the beginning sought to democratise the Soviet Union and transform it into a Commonwealth of sovereign states. Later, with the strengthening and popularisation of the movement, Sajūdis forced the Lithuanian Communist Party to declare the Lithuanian language as the state language and legalise the tricolour national flag, and following this, to adopt laws on citizenship, referendum, the economic independence of Lithuania and to legalise the multi-party system. Only from 16th February 1989 did Sajūdis begin to demand the independence of Lithuania. Of course, the Lithuanian civil movement was a success because of the political situation in the USSR (Lietuvos Sajūdis). Perestroika and Glasnost, as reforms of democratisation, opened the doors for freedom in Soviet society. Another positive circumstance was the Sajūdis influence on the Communist Party of Lithuania. Some members of the Sajūdis were communists themselves and this also affected the Lithuanian Communist Party, which finally decided to secede from the CPSU at the 20th Congress of the Party on 19 - 23 December 1989. The Communist activists of the Sajūdis were elected to the leadership of LCP ([MELC, 2018](#)).

The success of Lithuania's civil resistance can be attributed to effective leadership. The leadership group that initiated the creation of the Sajūdis, and ultimately led the resistance movement, was made up of scholars, famous artists and journalists. Even before the creation of Sajūdis, these people were the intellectual and moral leaders of Lithuanian society. Their moral authority helped Sajūdis gain political weight and mobilise people for non-violent resistance. On the other hand, as an intellectual part of society, this group of leaders was able to create a well-organised and planned movement.

Resistance comprises a wide range of actions taken to change a particular government, power, order, or regime, while the adjective "civic" presupposes that it is a civilian population, i.e. public action, non-military and nonviolent. The Sajūdis had a strict, centralised structure: the Congress as the main representing body, a wide network of local organisations, and the Council as the executive body. Such a structure allowed Sajūdis to organise and coordinate a wide variety of non-violent actions throughout the years of 1988-1989: mass meetings in Lithuania, the Baltic Road, protest notes, participation in referendums and Soviet elections, etc. The Sajūdis had its own newspaper, which was highly useful in spreading the ideas of independence throughout the country, within the USSR, and abroad. Sajūdis' leaders, being well-known scholars, artists, writers and journalists, had quite a number of contacts abroad, which allowed Sajūdis to share information regarding Lithuanian civil resistance with foreign public figures and politicians in support of the movement's ideas.

Lithuanian civil resistance to the Soviet occupation in 1988-1991 was certainly non-violent. The leaders of this movement were humanitarians - philosophers, writers, poets, composers, artists, directors, actors and others. The Sajūdis' strategy and leadership were therefore based on universal human values, such as freedom, respect and equality, thus the methods of Sajūdis' activity were also solely peaceful and truly civil. All these aspects of the movement gave moral priority to the Lithuanian people, their resistance, their leaders, and ultimately guaranteed its success.

During the events of January 1991, brutal military violence was used against peaceful, non-violent people. Did the leaders of the Sajūdis expect such a scenario during the Lithuanian

independence movement? They probably did not expect such an aggressive attack by pro-Soviet forces, primarily because of their humanistic nature. Within a year and a half of non-violent resistance, Sąjūdis managed to achieve an incredible result – to declare Lithuania's independence. Therefore, such success convinced the movement's leaders and participants that everything would ensue peacefully in the future. In addition, the belief in Perestroika was quite strong, because until the very last moment, the leaders of independent Lithuania tried to reach an agreement with the leader of the Soviet Union to find a peaceful solution to the conflict: on January 8, Lithuanian Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskienė visited Mikhail Gorbachev in Moscow, and the Chairman of the Supreme Council, Vytautas Landsbergis, called the President of the USSR several times. In fact, there was great disbelief in Lithuanian society and among the leaders when a crowd of angry dissatisfied people appeared around the parliament, when tanks and military vehicles began to drive through the streets of Vilnius, and armed Soviet soldiers began to enter buildings by force. However, the decision to continue non-violent actions in the face of aggression was approved of, as the experienced violence increased the people's power against the Soviet regime and strengthened the support towards an independent Lithuanian government. This aligned with Erica Chenoweth's and Maria Stephan's statement that a regime's forced violence against the civilian population may turn against the regime itself and become a driving force for civil resistance. According to them, the probability of success increases by about 22% when, through the use of violence and force by the regime, civil resistance continues to pursue non-violent strategies and measures in a disciplined manner in seeking common goals using the same tools, methods, and exploiting the regime's repression ([Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011, p. 51](#)).

The Sąjūdis continued to follow a strategy of non-violent resistance after the tragic events of 13 January 1991 and used the accumulated experience of the past. Such actions consolidated the society in non-collaboration and non-participation with pro-Soviet aggressors, while using the power of the people and the moral priority of non-violent resistance against the National Salvation Committee, which carried out a coup but did not achieve a victory.

Reconsidering the concept of civil resistance in Lithuania

The tragic experience of 13 January 1991 had a major impact on the concept of civic resistance in Lithuania, changing the nature of this phenomenon and incorporating it into the state policy of national defence.

In Lithuania's contemporary national security and defence strategy, an especially important role is assigned not only to the country's armed forces, but also to the resistance of the civilian population. According to the law of National Security of the Republic of Lithuania (1996), the state's defence power is based on the determination of the nation to resist aggression, with solidarity from NATO allies, universal compulsory military service, preparation and armaments of the army and its active reserve, as well as the readiness of citizens for global armed and unarmed resistance and civil defence ([LR Seimas, 1996](#)). This document, which was approved by the Lithuanian Seimas (i.e. parliament), provided a legal basis for civil resistance. It not only states the principle of universal and unconditional defence as a basis for civil resistance, but also the main determinants of the success of civil resistance, such as the will and determination of the nation to fight for its freedom, with the readiness of every citizen to resist in all possible ways and to contribute to the defence of Lithuania.

The concept of civil resistance was revealed and developed in other strategic documents of Lithuanian government institutions. The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania confirms that the necessary condition of national security is the contribution

of civic-minded citizens to the country's security and welfare, as well as their preparedness to contribute to its defence in critical circumstances ([LR Seimas, 2017](#)). One of the main tasks of the Lithuanian military strategy is to train citizens for state defence and unarmed civil resistance, to develop the will and resistance of citizens to information attacks and their ability to fully resist the aggressor, while enabling the acquisition and improvement of military readiness to defend the state with weapons, forms and methods of unarmed resistance ([LR KAM, 2016](#)). On the other hand, it is pointed out that civil resistance is the defence strategy of citizens (not the armed forces), enacted using civilian rather than military or semi-military means of warfare to draw the world's attention and to influence an opponent, aggressor or enemy to give up their goals without giving it an excuse to use a weapon ([LR KAM, 2016](#)).

It is obvious that the concept of civil resistance is very closely related not only to the concept of national security and state defence, but also to the concept of civil defence. Both in official documents and in public speeches, the terms 'civil resistance' and 'civil defence' are sometimes used synonymously, which can lead to some misunderstandings within the academic community, but not in civil or military society. However, this is explained by the fact that, according to Gražina Miniotaitė (2002, pp. 196–198), Lithuania not only applied the strategy of civil resistance in the struggle for independence, but also officially called it the method of state defence and thus avoided some inconsistency in Lithuania due to the concepts of civil resistance and civil defence. This unique concept of Lithuanian civic resistance is based on historical experience and the current situation in the country. First of all, throughout the history of the country, Lithuanian civil resistance had traditionally been organised against the occupiers, i.e. against the external government. Secondly, the concept of civil resistance is also based on Lithuania's experience in 1991, when nonviolent civil resistance became civil defence, as the young independent state did not have any military forces to join the country's defence against the aggressive armed forces carrying out the coup. The third reason influencing the concept is the power of the state. Lithuania is not a large country, neither in its territory or in terms of population; therefore, only citizens who are motivated and ready for the state's defence can let a potential aggressor understand that he will face not only the resistance of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, but also the resistance of the whole nation.

Under these circumstances, governmental institutions play a key role in the preparation, education and training of Lithuanian citizens for civil resistance. Today, the Lithuanian legal framework stipulates that the activities of the citizens of the Republic against aggression and occupation must be carried out in all accessible and non-prohibited forms of universally recognised norms of international law: military defence, guerrilla war actions, disobedience of civilians and other means of civil resistance. The education and training of the society to defend the homeland, to develop citizens' commitment to universal defence, citizenship and patriotism, as well as other tasks and functions, are performed by the Department of Mobilisation and Civil Resistance under the Ministry of National Defence established by the Government ([LR Seimas, 2000](#)).

In 2014, researchers from the Department of Humanities (General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania) ran a survey aimed at exploring the militaries' opinions about the issues of Lithuanian national security. The survey was given to professional militaries (officers and professional soldiers) and cadets. Despite the differences in views, one section of the survey had almost the same result: both of the respondent groups (47 percent of professional militaries and 48 percent of the cadets) mentioned the passivity of citizens as a threat to the state's security and defence system ([LKA, 2014](#)). According to the survey results, civil resistance is recognised by Lithuanian militaries as a very important factor in the system of national security and defence.

And what does society think about the civil defence of the country? Will citizens take part in civil resistance when an aggressor threatens Lithuania? According to the 2017 Lithuanian society test results, 42 percent of respondents answered “yes” when asked if they would personally contribute to Lithuania’s defence (Ramonaitė *et al.*, 2018). Perhaps the result is not as high as Lithuanian officials might expect, yet it is not so bad because it shows there are positive opinions in the society. According to Aine Ramonaite, 61 percent of the population was patriotic and determined to defend the homeland in 1990, but later this determination declined sharply and only 32 percent of such population remained in 2005 (Alkas, 2015). In fact, the readiness of Lithuanian society for defence depends on the level of the threat and danger. This is perfectly normal, due to the fact that the safer a person feels, the less he or she cares about matters of defence or resistance. The 2017 test results showed a more dangerous situation and weaknesses in the public’s readiness for civil defence, as 47 percent of respondents did not know what to do in the event of a military conflict. This result shows that 30 years after the events of January 1991, nothing has changed at all and most of Lithuanian society still does not know what to do in the face of aggression, in any extraordinary situation or other danger.

Does this mean therefore that state institutions, which play an important role in the country’s security and defence system, are not performing the tasks assigned to them? Are they doing a weak job of preparing the society for the defence of the country? Or perhaps they do this well but it is still not enough? The Ministry of National Defence is trying to publish educational materials, such as schoolbooks for children and teachers on national security and defence issues, on methods of violent and non-violent resistance, methods of personal protection, and so on. However, they are keeping the focus more on educational tasks, thus imparting knowledge rather than forming values. But is one institution able to shape the value orientation of society? Of course not, and this is a key issue of civil resistance, as values are a central element in the consolidation and mobilisation of society from threats, and values can be a deconstructive factor in a country’s security and defence system as well. The authorities emphasise the importance of values in ensuring national security in their strategic documents, yet in practice this is not so easy to do.

Modern threats to national security and national defence are becoming increasingly complex and hybrid. Hybrid threats are directed at the consciousness of individuals and society because of their moral weakness. The current situation shows that the human factor is a major risk and a major threat to national security because of the complexity and diversity of the postmodern world. This is the biggest challenge for nation states and their governmental institutions. Morality is the most important issue in preparing society for civil resistance and, in particular, non-violent civil resistance.

There are two main traditions of the concept of non-violent civil resistance: pacifist and pragmatic. The pacifist concept of non-violent civil defence is based on moral arguments and is an alternative to the military concept of defence. This concept denies any other strategy in which coercion as a means of resolving conflicts is not justified by any, even the most noble, goals. The pragmatic concept is based on social, political, economic and other pragmatic arguments and argues that nonviolence as a form civil protection is more effective than the military in certain circumstances. In a pragmatic interpretation, non-violent civil defence is treated as an integral part of global defence, as an adjunct to military defence.

The concept of Lithuanian civic resistance is based on a pragmatic tradition. However, the pragmatic tradition does not deny the importance of the moral factor in non-violent resistance, as the form of the movement itself is, in its ethical sense, far superior to others. This view was confirmed in 1991 by the events of January 13, as well as the experience

of the non-violent civil movement for independence in Lithuania in 1988-1991. As the Lithuanian movement for independence had a moral priority in terms of its strategy, value system, methods of operation and leadership, this non-violent civic resistance helped the Lithuanian people to achieve victory.

Past experience calls for much more attention to be paid to the ethical aspects of civic resistance, such as a clear value system based on civic and co-human aspects, the moral authority of leaders, and diverse forms of non-violent resistance.

Conclusions

The tragic events of 13 January 1991 in Lithuania showed the moral power of the people who were ready to stand up to military power for the freedom and sovereignty of the state. This case was the most dramatic in Lithuania's struggle for independence between 1988 and 1991, yet it did not force the leaders of the Lithuanian independence movement to change either their strategy or their methods, which were based on the concept of non-violent civil resistance. The ability of the society to maintain non-violent discipline, without succumbing to the provocations of the opponent to respond to the violence, helped to gain Lithuania moral priority and earn the support of the world community in the fight against pro-Soviet forces and ultimately achieve victory.

Lithuania's independence was achieved with minimal human sacrifice, preserving the country's resources and infrastructure. Therefore, the experience of the Lithuanian independence movement confirms the effectiveness of non-violent resistance and reveals its perspectives in the system of national security and national defence. Lithuanian non-violent civil resistance was used as a means to create an independent state, and, therefore, the accumulated experience of resistance came to be used by modern state institutions as it gave these institutions direction and ideological substantiation in creating strategic documents of the state.

The experience of Lithuanian nonviolent civil resistance in 1988-1991 confirmed the theoretical approach of scholars in all aspects of this resistance. Lithuanian civic resistance was successful due to its priorities of strategy, leadership, discipline, organisation, planning, non-violence and the number of citizens participating. The leaders of the movement were able to mobilise people into a widespread movement based on their moral authority and value orientations, which appealed greatly to different groups in society.

In the face of current threats, non-violent civil resistance is becoming one of the most important deterrents in Lithuania's national security and defence strategy. However, in order to prepare modern civil society for effective resistance, it is necessary to focus not only on the knowledge required for state defence and civil resistance, but also on its moral aspects. Moral and civic values, ethical behaviour, civic and human maturity can lay the foundations for the development of both society and individuals, as well as presuppose the security and well-being of the state.

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