

Basic statement of the Truthforce Working Group

What is the subject of truthforce research?

by Martin Arnold

For various reasons there are major problems with violence as a method of dealing with conflict. In particular the use of violence often tends to provoke a violent response, so that it can easily create a destructive spiral of violence and counter-violence.

The purpose of truthforce research is to identify possible ways of **preventing or reducing violence, bringing violence to an end**, de-escalating destructive conflicts, promoting reconciliation and rebuilding war-torn societies.

Truthforce research is based on the premise that in conflict situations particular forms of communication produce better outcomes than others - both for those engaged in conflict and for the societies in which they live.

The personal experiences of many people and historical events in many different countries provide important examples of methods of dealing with conflict. The campaigns of Mohandas K. Gandhi in South Africa and India and Martin Luther King in the USA are, perhaps, the best known examples. Until now, these methods, usually referred to as “nonviolence”, have been well known only within limited circles. And various terms with various connotations and sometimes their own jargon have been used to describe them (Quakers: “transforming power”; Martin Luther King: “strength to love”; Mohandas K. Gandhi: “satyagraha”). **The aim of truthforce research is to make it possible to get these methods across to ordinary people so that they are credible and understandable. Examples of the use of these methods are being collected and analysed and the methods developed further.** This is intended as a contribution to the development of conflict skills in society and politics as is being sought by the UN and the World Council of Churches in their decades, 2001 to 2010, “to overcome violence and for a culture of peace and nonviolence for the children of the world”.

The question raised in the title of this paper, “What is the subject of truthforce research?” can be interpreted as a question about the *field of research*, in which answers are to be found, or about the *subject of research*, which is to be investigated. Or it can be interpreted as a specific *inquiry* into the purpose of research in this particular field. This paper is an attempt to answer all three questions.

The subject matter is perceived and understood in various ways depending on the situation in which it is observed as a practical phenomenon. It is in fact a many-faceted phenomenon. In order to analyse it, a variety of methodologies are required. And people from a variety of disciplines need to be involved in what should preferably be a cooperative effort as far as possible. The Truthforce Working Group has therefore drafted a description of the *field of research* and, as a result, laid the basis for a particular *approach to research into truthforce*. The Working Group has produced - with its definition of “truthforce-ful behaviour” - a brief description of the *subject of research*.

A Truthforce not yet defined

The term “truthforce” is used in the first place to refer to a particular pattern of behaviour between people (“pattern of interaction” - not defined here), secondly to

refer to a particular method of dealing with conflict which is intended to stimulate or promote such a process of interaction, and finally to refer to an inherent potential in every human being to behave in this way. (This is a statement of where we have got to with the term “truthforce”, rather than a definition.)

In some situations where truthforce is put into operation, many people put their faith in it and experience it (although it is usually called something else). But there is also a widespread view that truthforce is unreliable, because its effectiveness can be promoted but cannot be guaranteed. It seems evident that there are times when the effects of truthforce cannot be predicted, because particular events cannot be investigated - for reasons to do with the subject matter itself or the systemic context. Truthforce is thought not to be scientifically tangible in the usual sense. Indeed, it may not even be possible to define it.

No attempt is made here to arrive at a proper definition of “truthforce”. The short description at the end – with a definition of “truthforce-ful” forms of behaviour rather than “truthforce” itself – is sufficient to meet the requirements of social psychology for a description of the subject of research.

Whether it will be possible to arrive at an adequate definition of “truthforce” will depend on the results of the research. But perhaps it is not necessary to define “truthforce” because:

Truthforce research is practically oriented.

This is true in several respects:

- The primary aim of truthforce research is an improvement in the behaviour of individuals in social and political conflicts. Even when truthforce research sometimes verges on fundamental research, it does not have a purely academic purpose.
- Observation of “truthforce-ful” behaviour is the most important source of data for research.
- The results of research can be evaluated only in terms of their usefulness in informing praxis: Theories which have been tried and tested in practice can stand as valid conclusions. Mohandas K. Gandhi has provided an example for us to follow with his “Experiments with Truth”. Anyone can undertake such experiments. There is now a wealth of diverse experiences with “truthforce-ful” praxis. This provides a great deal of data which needs to be collected and maintained. This data is available for academic study and further research.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding: In the following, the *descriptions* of methods of behaviour are to be understood not as prescriptive instructions for action but rather as normative observations, even though they may in certain cases seem to be prescriptive. In these cases they are the self-understanding of actors and their understanding of their activities.

B Success stories of “truthforce-ful” action.

This section is omitted, because the reader is assumed to have knowledge of examples (e.g. Mohandas K. Gandhi’s mode of action).

C Truthforce research

The field of research is defined by *particular*

- interactions and *communication*
- the associated *attitudes* and
- the associated actions and *behaviour* of actors.

Actors develop – consciously or unconsciously – a variety of structures, methods and traditions according to the various social and personal situations in which they find themselves.

The forms of communication, the attitudes and the behaviour which are to be studied have been evident in the political action and other activities of Mohandas K. Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jean Goss and Hildegard Goss-Mayr, Lanza del Vasto, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, the Berrigan brothers and a great many others who have worked with them or have acted independently but in the same spirit. Closer analysis suggests that interaction in conflict follows identifiable patterns in which attitudes and behaviour are each in accord with particular forms of communication. We therefore talk about *patterns of interaction*.

It is usually difficult to tell what is going on *between* protagonists. But there are documents written by various actors which indicate the methodologies which they sought to use. These methodologies can therefore be analysed more easily than the resulting patterns of interaction. It is therefore primarily the *methodologies* which are described in truthforce research.

Truthforce research investigates these patterns of interaction and methodologies for conducting conflict.

The main tasks of truthforce research are to identify the methodologies and the patterns of interaction and to investigate and further develop these in conjunction with each particular tradition, paying special attention to the *consequences* for those involved.

D The methods: “truthforce”, “truthforce + pressure” “non-violent coercion”

1.) Preliminary remarks.

The following description of three approaches to dealing with conflict is not a description of “truthforce”, but rather a staking out of the field in which “truthforce” may be discovered amongst other phenomena.

The word “*conflict*” is used in the broad colloquial sense, not according to any particular conflict theory. (This means that social conflicts resulting from conflicting interests are included, amongst others.) The aim of dealing with conflict may be to resolve conflict in the sense of bringing it to an end or to regulate conflict by establishing a process which benefits all those involved.

The approaches outlined here have all been developed from the point of view of participants in conflict rather than from the point of view of a third party. We therefore talk about the *conduct* of conflict. (There are other ways of dealing with conflict, e.g. mediation.) The approaches are nevertheless clearly of great significance in relation to the behaviour of third parties.

The parties to a conflict are referred to here as “the actor” and “the opponent”, regardless of whether they are male or female, an individual, a group or an organisation, and whether or not more than one such party is involved. “**The actor**” is

the party which behaves according to the particular approach to conflict which is under discussion. **“The opponent”** may behave in all sorts of ways. No assumptions are made here about the behaviour of opponents (who can of course act in the course of conflict). In any conflict the context in which it takes place, the history and additional people, groups or circumstances are important. Other people and groups should not be ignored just because they have not been identified as parties to the conflict.

Denoting the conflict parties according to their actions on the one hand (actors) and according to their formal role on the other hand (opponents) does not imply any asymmetry so far as research is concerned or in relations between the conflict parties. The only reason for denoting the conflict parties in this way is that truthforce research is particularly concerned with cases in which one of the parties to the conflict operates according to particular approaches to conflict. No assumptions are made about the other conflict party, referred to here as the opponent, except that they are a party to the conflict.

The terms “nonviolence” and “non-violence”, etc. are used in very different ways, both in common usage and amongst those who practise it.

- In Germany all models of action which rule out physically harming people used to be described by practitioners as **“non-violent”**. But the general public came to understand “non-violent” simply to refer to any action in which there is no use of violence, whether or not there is any conscious method behind such action. Towards the end of the sixties Theodor Ebert suggested making a **distinction between “nonviolence” (Gewaltfreiheit) and “non-violence” (Gewaltlosigkeit)**. He wanted to distinguish between principled and tactical reasons for not using violence. In order to show that this non-use of violence meant active engagement for peace and justice and did not mean passivity, the word “active”/“action” was added: “active nonviolence”, “nonviolent action”. Although not doing harm is integral to this concept, it is the particular form of activity which is significant.
- Nowadays hardly any distinction is made in public discourse between **“nonviolent” (gewaltfrei)** and the term “non-violent” (gewaltlos) which was used in the sixties. Once again the meaning of the word has become watered down. (The word itself implies the simple negative meaning: not violent.)

Since the mid 1990s the term **“truthforce” (Guetekraft)** and the adjective “truthforce-ful” (guetekraeftig) have been used to denote positively the essential nature of intentional active nonviolence. “Truthforce” denotes in the first place a *pattern of interaction*, which may also happen spontaneously without premeditation, secondly a *method of action*, which seeks to attain this pattern of interaction and includes skills which can be learnt, and thirdly the *potential for such behaviour* which is innate in every human being.

2.) Systematic analysis:

a) The description of and distinction between various methods or programmes of conflict resolution is conceptual (following Max Weber): Praxis is not simply described. And, for the sake of clarity, some details are left out and there is some simplification in accordance with the (presumed) thinking of the activists concerned. In practice the methods (including method A) rarely occur in pure form. And when many people are involved as activists, it may well be the case that they are operating according to a variety of methods of behaviour. The activists may also change their

behaviour. (The behaviour of the opponents may change as well. Indeed this is one of the objectives of nonviolent action.)

b) Where interaction is concerned, every aspect of the *behaviour* (things that are done and things that are not done) of parties to a conflict is significant.

c) Truthforce research is concerned with programmes and processes which are characterised by:

(1) **Forms of behaviour** (and their consequences) which the actors themselves hope will affect a conflict positively.

(2) The actors **rule out** a particular form of behaviour in conflict, namely **doing physical harm** to the opponent.

d) The question, “How do actors expect a conflict to develop positively from their point of view?” can be answered in relation to three ways of conducting conflict:

How does the actor expect a conflict to develop positively?	is the basis for	Method for the conduct of conflict
The opponent is thought to be potentially sensitive to the needs of the actor or to the desirability of community and/or justice, etc. It is possible to awaken or to appeal to this sensitivity. This may create a basis of trust leading to agreement, and may even be a source of sympathy and mutual understanding. If necessary, there may be a change of heart on the part of the opponent.	→	Method A “truthforce” (“Gueteskraft”) “active nonviolence”
Agreement is to be sought. If agreement is not possible, it is assumed that the opponent will seek to avoid disadvantageous consequences. Pressure will be exerted on the opponent.	→	Method B “truthforce” (“Gueteskraft”) + pressure”
It is assumed that the opponent will wish to avoid harm or disadvantageous consequences. The basis of this process is not trust, but fear . This depends on the exertion of pressure or coercion (e.g. by means of sanctions, other than direct physical harm, or the threat of sanctions).	→	Method C “non-violent coercion”

Table 1: The three methods for conducting conflict, developed on the basis of the processes which actors expect to operate.

e) “**Pressure**” means imposing or threatening negative consequences for the opponent. In contrast with “**coercion**”, the opponent’s basic needs (human rights) are not compromised in any way.

- The distinction here between “pressure” and “coercion” is not a simple one. It is not assumed to have general validity. It is nevertheless important from the point of view of the actors’ self-understanding, because it is related to the question of respect for the opponent. It is of such fundamental importance to some people that they come to the conclusion that truthforce and coercion are incompatible.

- Behind the term “non-violent coercion” is the extremely narrow definition of violence as direct physical harm.

f) Alongside the distinction between pressure and coercion there is also another important distinction regarding the attitude towards the opponent, which is based on one’s view of human beings. Depending on their attitude, the actor may seek a friendly relationship with the opponent and therefore seek a win-win outcome to the conflict. Alternatively the actor may intend or condone long-term harm to the opponent or seek to make the opponent lose out in a win-lose outcome. Both alternatives may employ pressure or coercion - possibly without the exertion of physical violence. Regardless of whether pressure or coercion is employed, the **intention to do harm** (and striving for a win-lose outcome) is incompatible with truthforce..

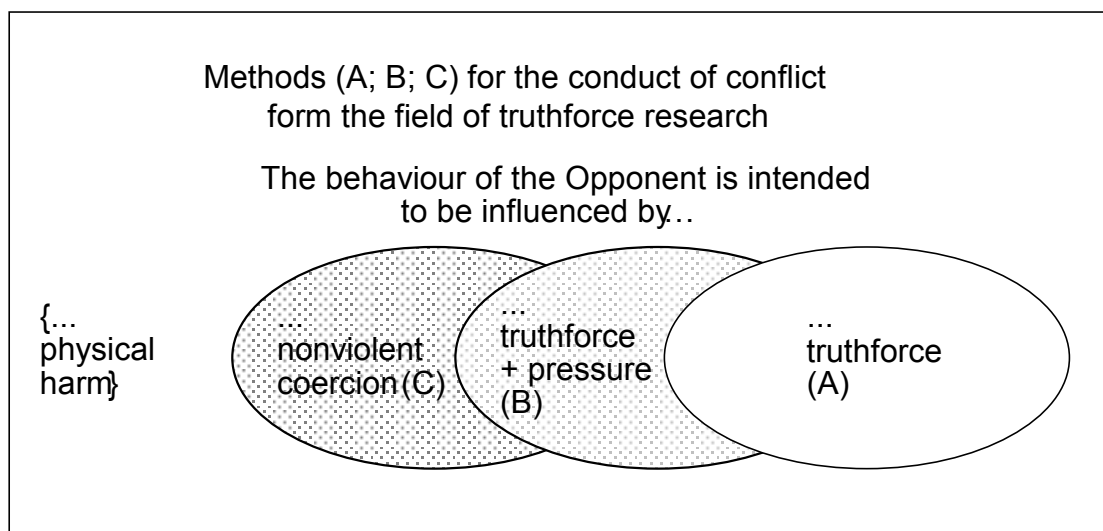


Figure 1: Methods for the conduct of conflict and the field of truthforce research.

g) The aim of “truthforce-ful” behaviour is to influence the opponent, so that they change their behaviour in the conflict towards method A, in so far as they are not already behaving in this way.

h) The parties to a conflict bring into it their own identities, positions, interests, desires, needs and values. When operating according to methods A, B or C, all of these are to be taken into account in so far as they are relevant.

i) The attitudes which underlie the behaviour of the conflict parties can and will of course have other consequences besides behaviour in conflict. It may be necessary to include such factors in research.

3.) An outline of the three methods of conducting conflict.

3.1 Method A: “Truthforce” (Guetekraft), “active nonviolence”.

a) Aims of the method of conducting conflict.

(1) The actor seeks an improvement in the quality of life of people in community. (This includes averting danger.) The aim is to facilitate better realisation of the dignity and equality of all people (possibly including future generations – ecology).

(2) This may involve pursuing the interests of oneself or one's own group, in so far as these are compatible with the overall ideal.

(3) Win-win outcomes are sought. All the parties to a conflict should benefit from the conduct of the conflict. This may include causing the opponent to give up power or possessions, but they can gain other things instead.

(4) All objectives which entail curtailment of the opponent's ability to meet their basic needs (human rights) are ruled out.

b) The actor.

(1) The actor has respect for their *own* strengths, abilities, needs, rights and limitations, and identifies themselves *in relation to everyone and everything around them*.

(2) The actor sees themselves as an individual or group with needs of their own and also recognises their responsibility for their fellow human beings and/or for the community.

(3) This includes the option to pursue the satisfaction of both one's own needs or interests and those of others.

(4) The actor recognises that they themselves also bring aspects of themselves to the conflict which are obstacles to an improvement in the quality of life together. They therefore make a genuine and serious effort to recognise these unhelpful aspects and to overcome them (e.g. to correct mistakes, to avoid indifference or to stop playing the role of victim or oppressor).

c) The opponent

(1) The opponent is *respected* as a human being with strengths, abilities, needs, rights and limitations, fundamentally *equal in worth* to the actor and *every other human being*.

(2) The opponent is therefore not harmed or threatened personally. This means that *psychological harm* (insults, slander, threats, blackmail) as well as *physical harm* are *ruled out*.

(3) The opponent is credited with the ability to build *relationships with others*.

(4) So far as the relationship is concerned, the actor always regards the opponent as a *potential friend* and addresses them accordingly, even when the opponent is consistently hostile.

(5) So far as the issues which are at stake in the conflict are concerned, the actor does not simply concentrate on matters which are the subject of dispute, but also looks for the valid and constructive aspects of the aims, attitudes and behaviour of the opponent, and pays attention to these in conducting the conflict.

d) How the conflict is conducted.

(1) *The methods of conducting the conflict are in harmony with the aims:* The actor's methods of conducting the conflict already help towards a better realisation of the vision of the equal worth of all human beings and an abundant life in community.

(2) The actor struggles *not against a person or people, but against particular forms of behaviour* on the part of the opponent or things that the opponent allows to happen.

(3) The actor does *not* allow themselves to be driven by *anger, desire for revenge or feelings which degrade the opponent*.

- (4) The actor is *willing to take the first step and make a personal contribution* in order to make the desired change possible.
- (5) The conflict is conducted primarily by means of dialogue, i.e. discussion and agreement with the opponent.
- (6) The aims in conducting the conflict and the purpose of the dialogue are: *to improve the relationship* between the conflict parties and *to seek a solution together*.
- (7) Dialogue entails both *trust building* and – *at the same time* – confrontation, “*standing up for oneself*” (Blaesi 2001).
- (8) The advantages of coming to an agreed resolution or regulation of the conflict are made clear - as are the disadvantages of failing to reach agreement.
- (9) Whenever possible, confrontation takes the form of or is accompanied by *constructive suggestions* and practical, constructive *steps which the actor takes themselves* (or helps the opponent to take).
- (10) If the opponent is not willing to take part in genuine negotiations, confrontation may entail *nonviolent, “truthforce-ful” escalation* of the conflict. This is likely to require determination and endurance. The purpose of the escalation is above all to *make clear* what the situation is and why the actor is appealing to the opponent, and to *win solidarity* in the struggle to improve the situation.
- (11) During dialogue the actor makes clear their understanding of conflict and their role in it. This is part of the trust-building process.
- (12) If genuine agreement is not possible, insults, threats or ridicule may be used in exceptional situations, e.g. when there is imminent danger, in order to avoid harm to the opponent and in order to make the opponent stop and think and to provoke them into engaging in negotiation.
- (13) In order to prevent imminent physical attack against individual persons, physical force may be employed in certain circumstances. It is essential to avoid hurting the attacker as far as possible.
- (14) The actor always acts from a long-term perspective and in such a way that their actions are helpful from their point of view (e.g. by being inherently constructive or by enabling learning to take place), even though the opponent may not yet be willing to make the desired changes.

e) How it works.

The actor’s push for an improvement in the situation - along the lines of the principles and goals outlined above - should be recognised and taken up by the opponent. Actor and opponent can then work together to create the desired improvement. The “push” or impetus needs to be rightly understood by the opponent. It is therefore made clear (perhaps by implementing a foretaste of the change that is sought) that the change desired by the actor is either necessary or a worthwhile and desirable goal, approach or sensory experience for the opponent as well. The opponent may therefore find it worth making sacrifices, if necessary. The opponent and – depending on the situation – other people need to be convinced of the desirability of change. A change of heart may be necessary. The opponent is thus motivated to cooperate with the actor. This method may be directed towards people upon whose loyalty or tolerance the destructive power of the opponent depends, so that, even though it may not be possible to convince the opponent, the opponent can no longer exercise power because of the non-cooperation of these people. It is not possible to convince someone or to bring about a change of heart by force.

3.2 Method B: “Truthforce” + pressure

a), b), c) as for method A.

d) How the conflict is conducted.

(1) Confrontation may entail inflicting disadvantages or other-than-physical harm on the opponent or making credible threats to do so.

(2) The actor does no physical harm or violence either to the opponent or to their allies and therefore does not kill anyone.

(3) The basic needs and rights of the opponent are respected.

(4) The purpose of various actions, such as public protest and attempts to win widespread support as in method A, may be to exert pressure on the opponent. Threats or blackmail may be used to this end, so long as the basic needs and rights of the opponent are not affected. Appeals may be made to judicial or other authorities or to political institutions.

e) How it works.

The opponent either becomes insecure, is won over by persuasion or is subject to psychological, social or political pressure to such an extent that they are *persuaded or even forced* to give way. In social or political conflicts, in which the opponent depends on the tolerance, acquiescence or support of large numbers of people in order to achieve their goals, the non-cooperation of these people can be an effective means of exerting pressure (Sharp 1973).

3.3 Method C: “non-violent coercion”.

a) Aims of the method of conducting conflict.

(1) Possible aims: to assert one’s own individual or group interests or to improve the quality of life in community.

(2) The following aim may not be ruled out: to harm - not physically, but in social terms - the opponent or their allies, e.g. by removing the opponent from a position of power, confiscating property or expelling them. This may be an aim in itself or a side effect of achieving another aim.

b) The actor.

The actor sees themselves primarily as having interests or an identity which the opponent does not share.

c) The opponent.

(1) The opponent is perceived as someone with interests or an identity which are at odds with those of the actor.

(2) The opponent has to give way.

d) How the conflict is conducted.

(1) The actor uses all possible means against the opponent and their allies *except physical violence*. Lethal violence is therefore ruled out.

(2) Confrontation entails inflicting serious – perhaps even existential – disadvantages or other-than-physical harm on the opponent or making credible threats to do so.

(3) Various actions such as public protest or attempts to win widespread support may be employed, as in method A. Unlike method A, these means or *psychological harm* (insults, slander, threats or blackmail) may be employed in order to force the opponent to give way.

e) How it works.

Confrontation forces the opponent to give way in order to avoid serious disadvantages. Calling an end to the social consensus may be a means of exerting force against those who are in power (Sharp 1973).

E Consequences for research.

“Truthforce-ful” behaviour, actions, attitudes and interaction can be observed, understood and *researched in the context of method A*. If they are observed and analysed in the context of methods B or C they are likely to lose their clarity and power.

- The workings of truthforce are most easily recognisable in the context of method A, because pressure and coercion are excluded as significant factors. Method A serves as an observation point for a **view** of truthforce – or, if you like, as a pair of “spectacles” – which enables the researcher **to observe “truthforce-ful” activity when examining and researching social processes.**
- The effects of behaviour in conflict may be due - to a greater or lesser extent - to sympathy, respect, trust or understanding. These words indicate a connection. Truthforce as a pattern of interaction may be seen as the core of these processes. The dynamics of truthforce may be characterised by the priority given to goals such as: “to show the opponent that they have nothing to fear”; “not to regard each other as enemies”; “to encourage the opponent to communicate and cooperate”.
- “Truthforce-ful” behaviour excludes any intent to detract from the opponent’s basic needs or human rights. Method C therefore includes forms of action which are not “truthforce-ful”. Truthforce research is nevertheless concerned with method C because of the difficulty of drawing a line between pressure and coercion. Method C also excludes the intent to do physical harm – this is an absolute limit – so that such actions are therefore described by many in public discourse as “non-violent”.
- Methods B and C are compatible – and may be pursued in combination – with the “truthforce-ful” method A, only so long as the actor does not intend (long-term) harm to the opponent.

F “Truthforce-ful behaviour”: a working definition for empirical social sciences.

A synopsis of truthforce research.

Actions or behaviour of an individual or a group which is a party to a conflict,
the aim of which is to transform the conflict for the benefit of all parties
involved (win-win approach)
and to maintain or improve mutual relationships
without the use of coercion, bodily harm or lethal violence
and taking into account the possibility of being at fault oneself (through false
perceptions, prejudicial judgements or harmful behaviour) and therefore in
need of correction.

(definition of the phenomenon)

It is assumed that such behaviour depends above all on:

- the actor living according to moral principles and ultimate goals such as justice and universal welfare (“an abundant life for everyone”);
- the behaviour being securely grounded in the actor’s (religious or humanitarian) worldview;
- particular skills and abilities, such as the ability to empathise, communication skills, etc.;
- particular aspects of a mature personality, such as self-awareness and self-control;

- broad, detailed and precise knowledge of the situation.
(hypothetical conditions)

Such forms of behaviour are expected to contribute significantly to:

- de-escalation of destructive conflict;
- prevention, reduction and termination of violence;
- “conversion” of the opponent;
- reconciliation and rebuilding of societies which have been damaged by destructive conflict

(hypothetical functions)

Note:

The conditions and functions listed here are not to be regarded as part of the definition. Together with the narrow definition of the “truthforce” phenomenon they serve as a preliminary theory, which is to be tested and developed in future research.

Translated by Gordon Matthews, November 2002