

FACING THE FUTURE WITH NEW AWARENESS¹

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The Baltic challenge

The peoples of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania regained their independence from the intact Soviet Union primarily by nonviolent struggle. This makes their struggles of great importance to the whole world. Their achievements also are a continuing challenge to their own countries to face the future with full awareness of options that differ from those offered by the world's military giants.

These experiences join those of other peoples to demonstrate that there exists a powerful alternative to violent resistance. Over time and across cultures and political conditions, many peoples have waged this type of conflict and sometimes won.

The liberation struggles of the Baltic nations and the struggles by others are sufficiently important that both their peoples and many others can benefit

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from an examination of the type of struggle used and an exploration of its potential for the future.

It is not easy for victimized people to remove the oppression under which they suffer. Pleas for justice are usually ignored. The tools of elections, lobbying, and the like are almost never available or effective.

Violence against such oppression often appears to be the only available response. However, a closer look at such violence reveals a dubious record. By placing confidence in violent means, one has chosen the very type of struggle with which the oppressors nearly always have superiority. The oppressors normally have vast military weaponry and great police and prison capacity that can doom resistance violence to defeat. Sometimes violence becomes terrorism, which intensifies repression and alienates support without positive gains. Even when violence appears to be successful, one is often ensured of immense casualties. In other cases of resistance violence major internal violence or a new dictatorship may follow.

At other times, not knowing what to do against opponents with overwhelming military might, oppressed people have simply passively submitted.

Another history

There is another history, however, that is often neglected or trivialized.

Over time and across cultures, many people have engaged in struggles using social, economic, psychological, and political weapons. This technique is defined by what action is taken, and not by the simple rejection of violence or by the beliefs of the people participating.

At times, these people have generated significant power to achieve their aims, sometimes even in the face of brutal repression. These alternative means are sometimes called nonviolent action, and the cases where they have been used have been called nonviolent struggles.

Nonviolent action is not the mere absence of violence, that can indicate passive submission, cowardice, and acceptance of great evil. Nonviolent action is a technique of wielding great power, so much so that violence is not needed, and can even be counterproductive.

Although nonviolent means of conducting conflicts have been widely used in the past, they have not been well understood. They have often been confused with other phenomena. This confusion has benefited the opponents against whose regime or policies the struggle was directed. If this type of struggle is falsely identified with weakness and passivity, confused with pacifism, lumped with rioting or guerrilla warfare, or viewed as easy without careful preparations, then this alternative technique may not even be attempted, or, if it is, it will likely not be effective.

The technique of nonviolent action consists of many methods of symbolic protest, social, economic, and political noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention. It has been used and proposed as an alternative to violence in conflicts over many issues, including those conflicts in which at least one side will not compromise. The fact that the opponents attempt to repress nonviolent struggles is evidence of its power.

Misconceptions about nonviolent action

A widespread series of misconceptions have plagued the understanding of nonviolent struggle.

- It does not require any religious beliefs.
- Violence does not always work quickly and sometimes nonviolent struggle does.
- Nonviolent struggle can be very powerful.
- It does not need a charismatic leader.
- It is a cross-cultural phenomenon.
- It is not the same as religious or ethical nonviolence.
- The opponents may respond with repression, including imprisonment, beatings, injuries, and deaths (although casualties tend to be far fewer than in a violent conflict).
- It is not a recent invention but is ancient, minimally.
- It is neither culturally primarily “Eastern” nor “Western” but has

occurred in many human societies and periods of history.

- This technique has succeeded even against brutal regimes and dictatorships.
- It can be coercive and even disintegrate extreme dictatorships.

The nature of nonviolent action

Nonviolent action is a way to wield power and to confront the power of opponents. It is a technique of waging active conflict and as a sanction used to achieve certain objectives.

Nonviolent struggle is used when milder types of action—such as negotiations, conciliation, arbitration, persuasion, and the like—are not available, are not expected to be effective, or have failed. In its stronger forms of noncooperation and intervention, nonviolent action is therefore the counterpart of violent action, an alternative means of last resort.

Even in acute conflicts, nonviolent struggle can potentially undermine the power of oppressors. Very rarely, nonviolent action wins by converting the opponents, so they believe they ought to accept the claims of the resisters. Far more often, the resistance causes the opponents to compromise with the resisters and each side gains part of its objectives. Some issues, however, are not suitable for compromise. In those situations, sometimes the power of the

opponents has been sufficiently undermined that they are nonviolently coerced and the resisters achieve their goals. In a few situations, noncooperation by the resisting population is so widespread and firm that it causes the hostile regime simply to disintegrate.

Nonviolent action is quite simply a technique of socio-political action for applying power in a conflict by means other than violence.

The methods of nonviolent action

Nonviolent action consists of protest, resistance, and intervention without physical violence by: (a) *acts of omission*—that is, the participants refuse to perform acts which they usually perform, are expected by custom to perform, or are required by law or regulation to perform; or (b) *acts of commission*—that is, the participants perform acts which they usually do not perform, are not expected by custom to perform, or are forbidden by law or regulation from performing; or (c) *a combination of both*.

The specific methods of this technique are grouped into three main classes: *nonviolent protest and persuasion*, *noncooperation*, and *nonviolent intervention*.

These methods are identified and categorized by the type of action applied, not by the motives or beliefs of the people applying it. Very importantly,

this technique has been applied by people of diverse beliefs and clearly does not require a belief in ethical or religious nonviolence, which is a very different phenomenon, although such believers may assist it. Most often, the resisters using this technique have refrained from violence because it was understood to be both unnecessary and counterproductive.

Nearly two hundred specific methods of this technique have been identified, but clearly there exist many more and new ones are continually being invented. All of these specific methods can be classified under three broad classes.

The mildest of these is *nonviolent protest and persuasion*. This class contains symbolic acts, and not simply words, that are intended to communicate protest against some action, policy, or condition. These include such methods as distribution of leaflets, holding vigils, conducting a march, and maintaining silence. These are the weaker methods of the technique but, depending on the situation and on how they are implemented, they can make a major impact in the conflict.

The second, more powerful, class is *noncooperation*. The methods of noncooperation wield greater power by withdrawing or withholding (usually temporarily) forms of cooperation that enabled the social, economic, or political relationships to function as they did previously. This halt to cooperation potentially makes a much greater impact on the conflict than do purely symbolic

acts. The slowing or severing of the previous cooperation by people and institutions can be disruptive or even paralyzing for the opponents.

This class contains three sub-classes. *Social noncooperation* includes cessation of cooperation on the social level, by applying such forms as social boycotts and boycotts of social occasions and functions. The impact of social boycotts is primarily psychological, especially on those boycotted. The impact may also be symbolic of broader opposition, as in refusing to attend ceremonies sponsored by the opponents.

Economic noncooperation includes both economic boycotts and labor strikes. There are many forms of both of these types. Their impact depends on such factors as the numbers of people participating, their previous economic roles in the society, and the opponents' need for such cooperation.

Political noncooperation includes many methods by which groups or individuals refuse to initiate or to continue any of many forms of cooperation in political matters with an opponent group, usually a government. The many specific methods of action included here vary widely. Among them are boycott of rigged elections, walking out of government bodies, civil disobedience, and a work stoppage by civil servants. Again, as with economic noncooperation, the impact will largely depend on the numbers of people, groups, and individuals withholding their cooperation, on which individual methods are used, and the political roles of the resisters. On a small scale the action may be primarily

symbolic, but on a large scale such action by these groups may paralyze or even dissolve a political system.

The third broad class is *nonviolent intervention*. These are methods which actively disrupt the normal workings of the system. The intervention may take psychological, physical, social, economic, and political forms. The strength of these methods depends in large degree on the scale on which they are practiced and the discipline and persistence of the practitioners. The widely diverse types of action include hunger strikes, sit-ins, creating new social, economic, or political institutions, establishing new forms of social behavior, and parallel government. Some of these methods of action, such as sit-ins, may at times make possible a strong impact by a relatively small number of people. Other methods, such as forming new institutions and a parallel government, require the strong backing of very large numbers of participants.

The technique of nonviolent action is defined by this broad range of methods.

Repression and defiance

Any of these many methods may on occasion be met with repression. It should be noted, however, that because of their sharp challenge to the system the methods of nonviolent intervention are often met with especially sharp repression. Highly disciplined behavior is therefore often required in the use of

those methods that are especially disruptive even though some of these may be conducted by relatively small numbers of resisters.

Because nonviolent action is a complex technique, the methods to be used need to be chosen with great care and good judgment. The various methods, and the ways they are applied, can have various influences on how the course of the conflict develops and whether the power of the resisters and of the opponents grows or shrinks.

The methods to be used need to be chosen with great care. They can be focussed directly on the issues at stake. At times the methods may be aimed at the sources of the opponents' power with the intention of weakening their regime further and of bringing about its collapse, if that is the objective.

The use of a considerable number of these methods, carefully chosen, persistently applied on a large scale, wielded in the context of a wise strategy and appropriate tactics, by trained civilians, is likely to cause any illegitimate regime severe problems. This applies even to occupations and extreme dictatorships.

When seriously challenged by nonviolent struggle, it should be expected that the oppressing regime will respond in anger and with repression. Repression of nonviolent struggle is evidence of its power.

However, repression, and even brutalities, do not always produce a resumption of the extent of submission and cooperation that will permit the regime to function and survive.

Harsher repression does not necessarily bring victory to the oppressors. This insight is not new. In Italy in the 16th century, Niccolo Machiavelli, argued that the ruler ". . . who has the public as a whole for his enemy can never make himself secure; and the greater his cruelty, the weaker does his regime become."²

In order to be effective the resisters need both to persist in their resistance and maintain nonviolent discipline. This requires courage and orderly conduct. This combination of defiance and courage increases the chances of achieving both the objective of the struggle and also keeping casualties to the minimum. Nonviolent struggle both requires and tends to produce a greater control, or even loss, of the fear of the opponents' repression.

The power of noncooperation and civil institutions

A great deal of the power of nonviolent action comes through the various forms of noncooperation that weaken or sever the opponents' sources of power. Many acts of noncooperation, of enough people, groups, and institutions over enough time can undermine the opponents' power through restricting or severing

² Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Discourses of Niccolo Machiavelli* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950) p. 254.

the sources of power that they require. This is true even of dictatorships. These dynamics operate primarily in struggles when the objective is to pressure or coerce opponents to do or not to do something, or when the objective is to disintegrate the regime.

The ability of the population to conduct nonviolent struggle and to weaken or remove the sources of power will be highly influenced by the existence, strength, or absence of non-state social groups and institutions in the society. These may be called *loci* of power. These are places in the society where power is located and by which it can be wielded. These may be families, social classes, religious groups, cultural and nationality groups, occupational groups, villages, towns, cities, provinces and regions, smaller governmental bodies, voluntary organizations, economic groups, and political parties. Most often these are traditional, established, formal social groups and institutions, but sometimes they may be less formal and even recently created or revitalized in the course of the conflict, as has occurred in several situations.

The opponents' difficulties in dealing with nonviolent action are primarily associated with the special dynamics and processes of this technique. Nonviolent struggle is designed to operate against opponents who are able and willing to use violent sanctions. However, political struggle by nonviolent action against violent repression creates a special, asymmetrical, conflict situation.

Under some circumstances, but not in every case, severe repression

against disciplined nonviolent resisters may initiate a special process called “political jiu-jitsu.” The nonviolent resisters can use the asymmetry of nonviolent means versus violent action in order to apply to their opponents a political operation analogous to the Japanese martial art of jiu-jitsu. The contrast in types of action throws the opponents off balance politically, causing their repression to rebound against their position and weaken their power. By remaining nonviolent while continuing the struggle, the resisters will improve their own power position.

Political jiu-jitsu causes increased alienation from the opponents by any or all of three possible groups: members of the opponent group itself, members of the population affected by the issues, and third parties not directly involved in the conflict. Such alienation can result in the growth of internal opposition in the opponents’ camp. It can also increase the numbers of resisters and the extent of resistance. It also often turns third parties against the opponents and in favor of the resisters.

Vulnerable sources of power

The most important reason why nonviolent action can be effective in many cases despite repression is that all political structures have sources of their power that can be vulnerable to noncooperation.

Nonviolent action is a technique of action by which the population can restrict and sever the sources of power of their rulers or other oppressors and

mobilize their own power potential into effective power. The technique of nonviolent action is based on a basic understanding of political power.

All regimes depend for their necessary sources of power on the populations and the constituent or subordinate groups and institutions over which they claim dominance. The power of any regime will be determined by the extent and degree to which it has free access to these needed sources of power, as discussed below.

This nonviolent technique can operate effectively against otherwise powerful opponents and established regimes because of its ability to mobilize power of previously dominated populations and to undermine the power of oppressive systems and governments. It empowers people by providing them with a technique of group action that they can use as an alternative to military capacity. This mobilized strength can then be targeted to undermine the power of the opponents. This targeting is possible because this technique can affect the sources of the opponents' power.

The sources of power of all governments include *authority*, or legitimacy. Authority is perhaps the most important single source of power since belief in the regime's right to rule helps to provide other important sources of power. There are five additional sources:

Human resources means the number of persons and institutions that

obey, cooperate with, and assist the regime. The *skills and knowledge* provided by these persons and institutions are also very important. They fuel the regime. *Intangible factors* involve the population's habits and attitudes toward obedience and submission. *Material resources* include natural and financial resources, the economic system, communication, and transportation. The regime inflicts *sanctions* (punishments) by police and military action to enforce obedience. If the regime receives a plentiful supply of these six sources of power it remains strong.

However, nonviolent action can be aimed to undermine the supply of each of these sources of power. The regime is weakened when the supply of these is sharply restricted. When the supply is severed, the regime is paralyzed or disintegrates.

If the regime does not receive sufficient acceptance of its right to rule, if the required skills and knowledge are not available, if the needed support of institutions and the civil service is not forthcoming, if the regime does not retain control of economic resources (including finances, communications and transportation), if the population does not submit even in face of repression, if the police and troops do not obey orders efficiently or even mutiny, then the regime's power is gone.

Each of these sources of power is in turn closely related to, or directly dependent upon, the degree of cooperation, submission, obedience, and

assistance that the rulers are able to obtain from their subjects. These subjects include the general population, the paid “helpers” and agents, and the relevant groups and institutions. The groups and institutions that supply the necessary sources of power are called “pillars of support”.

The power of rulers and of hierarchical systems, no matter how dictatorial, depends directly on the obedience and cooperation of the population. Such obedience and cooperation in turn, depend on the willingness of the population and a multitude of assistants to consent by their actions or inaction to the rulers. People may obey and cooperate because they approve of the rulers or their orders, or they may obey and cooperate because they are intimidated into submission by the fear of punishment.

That dependence of the regime on cooperation and obedience makes it possible, under certain circumstances, for the population to reduce the availability of these necessary sources of power or to withdraw them completely, by reducing or ending their necessary cooperation and obedience.

Acts of protest, disobedience, and noncooperation have occurred frequently in many societies. Sometimes, these have been of major significance. If the withdrawal of acceptance, submission, and assistance can be maintained in face of the rulers’ punishments for noncooperation and disobedience, then the end of the regime is in sight.

The groups and institutions that supply the needed sources of power to the ruler serve as pillars of support for it. When the pillars of support are weakened or removed, and thereby the sources of power of the regime are weakened or removed, then the regime must also weaken or collapse.

How change may occur

Nonviolent struggle produces change, when it succeeds, by four possible mechanisms.

1. Conversion: This occurs when members of the opponent group are emotionally or rationally convinced that the resisters' cause is just. Sometimes this happens, but it is rare.

2. Accommodation: When the issues are not fundamental, the settlement may be produced by compromise. Striking workers may settle for half of their demanded wage increase, for example.

3. Nonviolent coercion: Mass noncooperation and defiance can so change power relationships, that the opponents' ability to control the economic, social, and political processes of government and the society is taken away. The military forces may no longer obey orders to repress resisters, for example.

Although the government leaders remain in their official positions, their

ability to act has been taken away from them and demands of the resisters can no longer be refused.

4. *Disintegration*: Due to the mass noncooperation and defiance, the regime loses all ability to act and its own structure of power disintegrates.

The previous help and cooperation from all pillars of support, including the general public, the bureaucracy, police, and military has dissolved. The former officials do not even have the power to surrender. The regime simply falls to pieces.

Of course, not all cases of nonviolent struggle are successful. If the requirements for effectiveness are absent, if the resistance collapses in face of repression or the population resorts to violence, if the potential resisters are too weak or frightened to act strongly, if a poor strategy has been selected or there was none, and if various other unfavorable conditions are present, then success cannot be expected until those conditions are changed.

Success and failure

The choice to use this type of struggle is not a guarantee of success, just as the use of violence is not a guarantee of success. There are requirements for achieving success with this technique, just as there are with violence. Simply refraining from violence and speaking the word “nonviolent” do not produce the

desired results.

Some past cases of nonviolent action failed to accomplish their objectives. Some won only limited victories. Sometimes a victory was short-lived because people did not then use it to consolidate and perhaps institutionalize their gains, nor did they effectively resist new threats to their liberties. In other instances, victory in a single campaign won concessions, but new struggles were required to achieve the full objectives and they never occurred.

There have been some major defeats of attempted nonviolent struggle. In other cases, however, major victories were achieved that would have been impossible by resistance with violence. The victories of the Baltic nations in 1991 are cases in point. In order to better understand these outcomes, it is necessary to understand the nature of this technique.

Although the ways nonviolent struggle “works” differ widely from case to case, it is important to identify two crucial special processes that may be present in certain nonviolent conflicts, but not in every one. These are: (1) an ability to defy, maintain nonviolent discipline, and at times to reverse the effects of repression, and (2) an ability to undermine and sever the sources of power of the opponents.

Since nonviolent struggle and violence operate in fundamentally different

ways, even limited resistance violence during a nonviolent struggle campaign will be counterproductive and give advantage to the opponents. The regime may deliberately seek to provoke the resisters to use violence.

Strategists need to remember that the struggle using nonviolent action is a constantly changing field of conflict with continuing interplay of moves and countermoves. Nothing is static. Power relationships, both absolute and comparative, are subject to constant and rapid changes.

Advantages of nonviolent action

Nonviolent action has several advantages when compared to violent struggle, including:

- It does not accept that the outcome will be decided by the means of fighting chosen by the opponents.
- It is difficult for the regime to combat.
- It can uniquely aggravate weaknesses of a dictatorship and can sever its sources of power.
- It can in action be widely dispersed but can also be concentrated on a limited objective.
- It leads to errors of judgment and action by the opponents.
- It can effectively use the population as a whole and the society's groups and institutions in the struggle to end the

domination by the few.

- It helps to spread the distribution of effective power in the society, making the establishment and maintenance of a democratic society more possible.

Widespread pragmatic practice

The historical record of the achievements of nonviolent struggle—which we are only beginning to discover—appears already so impressive as to reverse many of the assumptions and preconceptions which people (including advocates) have had about nonviolent alternatives.

Nonviolent action has been predominantly practiced for pragmatic reasons. It has been believed to offer greater chances of success than other options, as violence or passivity. Nonviolent action is commonly chosen to be used in a conflict because it is believed to be the most likely in the circumstances to achieve the objectives. The users of the technique often do not have the resources to wage strong violent struggle, especially as their opponents are commonly a regime with vast military capacity. Or, the resisters may see that the nonviolent technique will likely avoid much of the destruction and casualties of the use of violence. In some situations, the pragmatic grounds for the choice of nonviolent means have been mixed with a relative moral or religious preference for nonviolent means. In a very small number of cases, the conflict has been waged by groups which reject violence completely on grounds of principle.

Nonviolent action has occurred in widely differing cultures, periods of history, and political conditions, prominently including those of extreme oppression and repression. Nonviolent action has happened in industrialized countries and nonindustrialized countries. It has been practiced under conditions of constitutional democracy and under empires, foreign occupations, and dictatorial systems.

Nonviolent action has been used for many purposes by a great variety of groups. The issues at stake have been diverse. They have included social, economic, ethnic, religious, national, humanitarian, and political matters, and have ranged from the trivial to the fundamental. This technique has been used to prevent, as well as to promote, change. Its use has sometimes been mixed with limited violence.

The technique of nonviolent action has been applied in quite diverse conflicts. These include social and economic conflicts that have little or nothing to do with the government. Cases include efforts to impose or resist pressures for social conformity and labor-management conflicts. Nonviolent action has also been used in ethnic and religious conflicts. There are also other types of conflict situations, such as between students and university administrations, and many other situations. However, conflicts between the civil population and controllers of the state apparatus have also occurred very widely and at times have been very important.

Nonviolent action has even been used for objectives that many people would reject. However, the consequences of those types of uses can be viewed as preferable to the consequences of the use of violence for the same purpose.

Important conflicts between the civilian population and governments where the population has employed nonviolent action have also occurred very widely. Many of the following examples are of this type.

An historical sketch

Although historians have generally neglected this type of struggle, it is clearly a very old phenomenon. Most of the history of this technique has doubtless been lost, and much of what has survived has been largely ignored.

From the late eighteenth century through the twentieth century, the technique of nonviolent action was widely used in highly diverse conflicts: colonial rebellions, international political and economic conflicts, religious conflicts, and anti-slavery resistance. This technique has been aimed to secure workers' right to organize, women's rights, universal manhood suffrage, and woman suffrage. This type of struggle has been used to gain national independence, to generate economic gains, to resist genocide, to undermine dictatorships, to gain civil rights, to end segregation, and to resist foreign occupations and coups d'état.

Cases of the use of this technique in the early twentieth century included major elements of the Russian 1905 Revolution. In various countries the growing trade unions widely used strikes and economic boycotts. Chinese boycotts of Japanese products occurred in 1908, 1915, and 1919. Germans used nonviolent action against the Kapp *Putsch* in 1920 and against the French and Belgian occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. In the 1920s and 1930s, Indian nationalists used nonviolent action in their struggles against British rule, often under the leadership of Mohandas K. Gandhi. In the Northwest Frontier Province of British India an autonomous predominantly Muslim movement shook British control.

From 1940 to 1945 in various European countries people, especially in Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands, used nonviolent struggle to resist Nazi occupation and rule. Nonviolent action was used to save Jews from the Holocaust in Berlin, Bulgaria, Denmark, and elsewhere. The military dictators of El Salvador and Guatemala were ousted in brief nonviolent struggles in the spring of 1944. The American civil rights struggles against racial segregation and discrimination, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, changed laws and long-established policies in the United States South. In April 1961 noncooperation by French conscript soldiers in the French colony of Algeria combined with popular demonstrations in France and defiance by the Debré - de Gaulle government defeated the coup d'état in Algiers before a related coup in Paris could be launched.

In 1968 and 1969, following the Warsaw Pact invasion, Czechs and Slovaks held off full Soviet control for eight months with improvised nonviolent struggle and refusal of collaboration. From 1953 to 1990 dissidents in Communist-ruled countries in Eastern Europe, especially in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and the Baltic countries, repeatedly used nonviolent struggles for increased freedom. The sophisticated Solidarity struggle in Poland began in 1980 with strikes to support the demand of a legal free trade union, and concluded in 1989 with the end of the Polish Communist regime. The attempted “hard-line” coup d'état in Moscow in 1991 was defeated by noncooperation and defiance. Nonviolent protests and mass resistance were highly important in undermining the *Apartheid* policies and European domination in South Africa, especially between 1950 and 1990. The Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines was destroyed by a nonviolent uprising in 1986.

In July and August 1988 Burmese democrats protested against the military dictatorship with marches and defiance, brought down three governments. Finally the struggle succumbed to leadership problems, a new military coup d'état, and mass slaughter. In 1989 Chinese students and others in over three hundred cities (including in Tiananmen Square, Beijing) conducted symbolic protests against government corruption and oppression, but the protests finally ended following massive killings by the military.

Nonviolent struggle brought about the end of Communist dictatorships in Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1989 and in East Germany, Estonia, Latvia, and

Lithuania in 1991.

Starting in November 1996 Serbs conducted daily parades and protests in Belgrade and other cities against the autocratic governance of President Milosovic, and secured correction of electoral fraud in mid-January 1997. Serb democrats, however, at the time lacked a strategy to continue the struggle and failed to launch a campaign to bring down the Milosovic dictatorship.

In Kosovo the Albanian population between 1990 and 1999 conducted a noncooperation campaign against repressive Serbian rule. When the de facto Kosovo government lacked a nonviolent strategy for gaining de jure independence, a guerrilla Kosovo Liberation Army initiated violence. This was followed by extreme Serbian repression and massive slaughters by so-called “ethnic cleansing,” which led to NATO bombing and intervention.

Democrats rose up against Milosovic in early October 2000 in a carefully planned nonviolent struggle and the dictatorship collapsed. In early 2001 Philippine President Estrada, who had been accused of corruption, was ousted by Filipinos in a “People Power Two” campaign.

Remarkable additional struggles to oust authoritarian regimes succeeded following Serbia in 2000, in Georgia in 2003, and in Ukraine in 2004. There have been many additional very important cases.

Such struggles of the past need to be studied and analyzed carefully, but they ought not to be simply imitated. Many of these serve as firm evidence that a record of major achievements of nonviolent struggle exists is difficult to deny, although there are doctrinal believers in the omnipotence of violence who try.

From improvisation to increased effectiveness

Past uses of the technique of nonviolent action have mostly been improvised to meet a specific immediate need and were not the result of careful planning and preparations. The fact that highly important successes have nevertheless occurred in past cases of the use of this technique is remarkable.

Although the past successes of nonviolent struggle have often been impressive, greater effectiveness at lower cost is desirable. Success in nonviolent struggle is not a matter of chance nor is it determined by purity of beliefs. Instead, the results are tied to the existence of favorable external conditions, to changes in the conflict situation, and to the pre-conflict relative strengths of the contending groups. In the future the nonviolent resisters can have an impact on all these conditions and can change the established power relationships.

However, the fact remains that the past lack of planning and preparations meant that the participants were unprepared for the future situations they would face and the roles they might play. Very often, neither the actionists nor the

leaders (if any), understood even the major characteristics of the technique of action they were employing and what was required if they were to have a chance of success, instead of excessive suffering followed by defeat.

While spontaneity has some positive qualities, more often it has had disadvantages. Frequently, the nonviolent resisters have not anticipated the brutalities inflicted by their opponents so that they not only suffered gravely but also the resistance collapsed. At times the lack of planning has left crucial decisions to chance, with disastrous results. Even when the oppressive system was brought down, the absence of planning on how to handle the transition to a better system has contributed to the emergence of a new dictatorship or other oppression.

Past resisters have usually launched nonviolent action without careful planning that could make the resistance as effective as possible. Poor planning, lack of a carefully developed strategy, and unwise use of resources, meant reduced chances of success.

Nevertheless, increasingly this technique is being recognized to be a type of action requiring understanding, courage, tenacity, discipline, organizational capacity, and great strategic skill.

There is another option in place of improvisation and spontaneity: deliberate steps to increase the effectiveness of nonviolent action. This option

requires increased understanding of its major characteristics, capacity, requirements, and strategic principles. This makes possible wise strategic planning—that is determining the characteristics of the present situation, what needs to be done, why, when, and how to do it, and how to counter the opponents' actions and repression.

Beneficial changes in the conditions of the conflict, and in the relative power of the contending groups, can be produced by actions of the nonviolent struggle group. These can be achieved principally through the skillful choice and application of wise strategy. Wise strategy can greatly increase the effectiveness of nonviolent struggle and its capacity to undermine oppression.

Strategic nonviolent resistance is aimed to apply the strengths of the population against the weaknesses of the oppressors in an effort to shift power relationships. The oppressed population can be strengthened, the domination can be undermined, and even highly repressive regimes can be weakened. As the population's strength grows, it becomes possible for them to move from small victories to larger ones.

Whether or not this technique of nonviolent struggle is, or can be made to be, a major contribution to the resolution of the broader problem of violence in society and politics, hinges to a high degree on the answers to such questions as: (1) Can it help to reduce the widespread reliance on violence in acute conflicts? (2) Can it be made sufficiently effective so as to be more often used in

acute conflicts in place of violence? The answers will likely depend upon the judgment of the degree to which nonviolent struggle can provide an effective substitute for violent conflict in acute conflicts.

It is possible to learn how to make this type of struggle more effective than it has been in past improvised applications. This can be done by increasing our knowledge of the requirements of this technique, spreading this knowledge widely, and increasing our understanding of this technique and how to apply it effectively, and expanding our skills in general and specific strategic planning for using this technique in future acute conflicts.³

Research and policy studies

We need to develop satisfactory solutions to the general problems of oppression and violence. We also need to advance the political development of nonviolent struggle. Both of these goals require that we understand well the present conflicts and anticipate the potential future roles of this nonviolent technique. Achieving these goals will be greatly assisted by major research and policy studies. These are especially important in those acute conflicts in which many people and governments believe that military means and other violence are required. The issues are: (1) to what extent we can understand and refine this technique, and (2) how far it can be effectively substituted for violence.

³ See Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential*. Boston: Porter Sargent Publishers, 2005. And Robert L. Helvey, *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: Thinking About the Fundamentals*. Boston: Albert Einstein Institution, 2004.

Resources will need to be made available. Strategists will need to have analyzed how nonviolent struggle can be most effectively applied. This process has already begun, but it has a long way to go.

Major advances have already been made in our knowledge of this technique of nonviolent struggle, what makes it succeed and what makes it fail. We also now have clear ideas of how effective strategies can be formulated to increase the chances of future nonviolent struggles succeeding.

If we try, this type of struggle can be made more effective than in the past. It can be refined and adapted to replace institutionalized political violence for humane purposes. When it is so developed and becomes, and is seen to be, at least equally effective for given objectives as violence, it will be possible to make specific phased substitutions.

Using the tools of historians, social scientists, philosophers, psychologists, economists, political researchers, and strategists, conducting massive basic and problem-solving research, we could multiply the effectiveness of this type of struggle. We would then have revealed before us a power capacity which is not merely equal to military means but greater.

Nonviolent struggle can potentially be adapted to serve particular purposes for which most people have assumed only violence ultimately can be effective. We can learn how to prepare for such substitutions, how large populations can be trained for emergency action, and what supportive social,

economic, and political changes may be needed to make nonviolent struggle most effective for particular purposes.

The planned and prepared substitution of nonviolent action for violent means has been recommended for the following purposes:

- Dismantling dictatorships;
- Blocking new coups d'état and preventing new dictatorships;
- Defending against foreign aggression and occupations;
- Lifting social and economic injustices;
- Developing, preserving and extending democratic practices
and human rights;
- Incorporating in additional ways nonviolent means into
democratic societies; and
- Preserving the existence and ways of life of indigenous
peoples.

Unplanned, improvised, cases of the application of nonviolent struggle for all these purposes already exist. Recent experiences suggest, that advance analyses, planning, and preparations can increase the capacity of this technique to be effective even under the extreme conditions.

In assessing the viability of nonviolent struggle in extreme circumstances, it is also important to examine critically the adequacy and problems of applying violent means, rather than assuming axiomatically their superior effectiveness.

Decisions and implementation

It must be remembered that nonviolent struggle is not free of dangers. However, through better understanding of its particular dynamics, wise planning, and careful strategic judgment, the risks to nonviolent actionists can be reduced, and the effectiveness of their actions and the chances of success can be dramatically increased.

Expanded knowledge gained through scholarly studies and strategic analyses and its spread in popularized forms is likely to contribute to increased substitutions of nonviolent struggle for violent action.

Individual case studies and research on the general technique of nonviolent action can be extremely helpful in the application of this type of conflict in a new situation. Additionally, serious examinations of how it can most skillfully be applied in a particular conflict can also be greatly aided by general and specific feasibility analyses. Some such general policy studies have already been conducted for bringing down dictatorships, and defending against coups d'état, foreign invasions and occupations.⁴

These policy analyses can have a significant impact on both the

⁴ See, for example, Gene Sharp, *Civilian Based Defense: A Post-Military Weapons System*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990 and Gene Sharp and Bruce Jenkins, *The Anti-Coup*. Boston: The Albert Einstein Institution, 2003.

consideration of whether to adopt nonviolent struggle to combat a serious danger and, if so, in planning how to conduct the struggle.

For example, page proofs of a forthcoming book on the nature and potential of nonviolent struggle for national defense⁵ played an important role, along with other influences, in the decision of the three Baltic independence-minded governments to rely heavily on nonviolent struggle and defiance in exiting the Soviet Union. The then Director General of National Defense of Lithuania, Audrius Butkevicius, for example, after scanning that book declared. “Ah! There is a system to this!” That civilian-based defense policy was then adopted and applied not only by Lithuania, but also by Latvia and Estonia.

However, a general endorsement of a nonviolent action policy without concrete preparations for implementation will be of little help in an emergency. Thailand is a case in point. Following a history of several decades of coups d'état, articles on preventing and resisting coups in prominent Bangkok newspapers and a hearing of a committee of the Thai parliament, Article 65 was inserted in the new 1997 Thai constitution: “A person shall have the right to resist peacefully any act committed for the acquisition of power to rule the country by a means which is not in accordance with the modes provided in this Constitution.”⁶

No program of implementation and preparations was developed,

5 These were page proofs of Gene Sharp, *Civilian Based Defense*.

6 Gene Sharp and Bruce Jenkins, *The Anti-Coup*.

however. As a result, when a new military coup occurred in 2006 in the midst of a difficult civilian government situation, there was no defense struggle on behalf of the constitutional government. One of the first acts of the new military rulers was to declare the 1997 constitution abolished.

Changing power relations

A major issue is whether nonviolent struggle is realistic and can be effective, especially against powerful opponents. In various cases this technique has already been demonstrated to have the capacity to alter power relationships significantly and to succeed against powerful opponents.

If the nature of this technique is accurately understood, its requirements for effectiveness are provided, and wise strategic planning and preparations are conducted, this technique can provide the basic form of action to empower oppressed people to free themselves.

The long-term effects of the expansion of the uses of this technique can be more far-reaching than are as yet fully understood.

Despite the violence of our age, we have at our disposal vast resources for developing alternatives to political violence and capacities for self-liberation.

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