



# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

This report describes the lessons learned from past nonviolent campaigns and ways in which these lessons might be applied in the future. It is a product of a conference co-sponsored by the United States Institute of Peace and the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC). Participants included prominent leaders and organizers from past nonviolent struggles in South Africa, Serbia, Mongolia, Kosovo, Chile, Poland, and the U.S. civil rights movement; advocates of nonviolent change in Belarus, Zimbabwe, Burma, and the Kurdish region of Iraq; and a number of analysts and observers with expertise on the subject. They reviewed and compared their experiences with the strategic use of nonviolent conflict to promote human rights and democratic political change in conflicts with unjust authority and repressive regimes. The conference was held from January 9–11, 2002, at Airlie House in Warrenton, Va.

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## Strategic Nonviolent Conflict

### Lessons from the Past, Ideas for the Future

#### Briefly . . .

- Nonviolent strategies for overturning oppression and combating repression have been used effectively against some of the most brutal regimes. Yet these strategies are often misunderstood as passive, reactive, or reliant only on protests.
- Strategic nonviolent action is applicable in a wide variety of circumstances and across many different cultures and societies. Through a comparison of these experiences, nonviolent strategies for producing democracy or human rights can be refined and improved.
- Nonviolent movements are most effective when they adopt clear-cut strategies to achieve realistic goals. They must assess both the human and material resources that are potentially available for launching and sustaining a movement, as well as the strategic weaknesses of the regime that stands in the way of democratic change.
- One of the key insights of nonviolent strategists is that governments rely on routine cooperation and obedience from their populations. When nonviolent movements convince people to withdraw this consent on a sufficiently large scale, the regime's efforts to maintain power become much more difficult.
- By forcing the hand of unjust regimes—that is, by subverting their security forces and by demonstrating the regime's inability to govern legitimately—nonviolent movements have often defeated rulers who were otherwise considered invincible.
- The international community has played a significant role in the success of nonviolent movements in a variety of different ways, most notably by providing financial support to these movements, adopting international boycotts and other coercive sanctions, focusing global attention on nonviolent struggles and repressive action, and disseminating the ideas and values of democratic change in societies which are heavily controlled by unjust authorities.
- There is need for a fuller appreciation within governments, international organizations, and the news media of the dynamics and potential of strategic nonviolent conflict. An understanding of how these methods work and how nonviolent movements operate improves the ability of the international community to assist them effectively and to incorporate them into global efforts to promote democracy.

## Introduction

Authoritarian leaders and repressive regimes deploy the resources of states to neutralize opponents; intimidate, harass, or terrorize citizens; and amass huge fortunes for themselves and their allies while neglecting the basic needs of food, shelter, health care, security, and economic development. Not surprisingly, such brutal policies designed to control a population frequently set in motion counter-forces in support of violent rebellion. Denied space for political opposition, and unaware of the potential effectiveness of nonviolent strategies, many resort to violence to resist oppression.

What is the international community to do when faced with these regimes? Advocating the violent overthrow of a government or using military intervention, either unilateral or multilateral, are options that often have unanticipated consequences or outcomes. Indeed, organized violence may worsen the situation, by provoking the government to greater brutality and fostering a protracted war between state and guerrilla armies on the battleground of cities and across the countryside. As a tactic for successful transition to democracy, civil war has had a mixed record of success. And while guerrilla armies or militias may sometimes be effective vehicles for protecting a community from repressive violence or unseating a dictator, they are typically undemocratic in their organization and often are unsuitable candidates for democratic leadership after the old regime is gone. At the same time, advocating peace above all else in such circumstances may condemn a population to exploitation, injustice, and repression. Dictators appear to force a choice between costly rebellion and phony stability.

Nonviolent conflict provides a way out of this dilemma, if a regime's opponents adopt a strategy of pressuring it to change without sliding into a spiral of violence and civil war. The objective of these methods is not to avoid conflict but to alter the way in which it is conducted. The number of cases in which strategies of nonviolent action have been used continues to rise across the globe. Indeed, some of the most dramatic and celebrated political confrontations in recent history have arisen during nonviolent protest and direct action campaigns that pitted masses of citizens against unjust policies or despotic rulers: the U.S. civil rights movement, Poland's Solidarity movement in 1981, the Philippines' "people power" campaign in 1986, Czechoslovakia's "velvet revolution" in 1989, South Africa's "defiance campaign" in 1990, and the Serbian campaign to oust Slobodan Milosevic in 2000.

Mindful of this dilemma and of our mandate to explore all options for the peaceful resolution of conflict internationally, the U.S. Institute of Peace collaborated with the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict to convene a meeting to consider some of the common themes among these cases in which the strategic use of nonviolent action was pivotal. The major objective of the conference was to bring together practitioners of nonviolent conflict throughout the world in order to share their experiences with each other and the international community.

Many of the participants were leaders and activists in the struggle for democracy against the repressive regimes that ruled their countries. These were not guerrilla warriors or violent insurrectionaries but organizers of popular campaigns of direct action, including strikes, demonstrations, boycotts, and other forms of nonviolent disruption. In some cases, they represented efforts that were successful, as for instance in Poland against the Soviet-backed communist party, in South Africa against the apartheid regime, in Chile against Pinochet's dictatorship, and in Serbia against the ultra-nationalist Slobodan Milosevic. In other cases, nonviolent strategies had mixed success, as among the Kosovar Albanians against Serbian oppression, the Burmese opposition to the military junta, and Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation in the 1980s. And some of the participants represented liberation struggles that have not thus far adopted nonviolent strategies on a large scale, such as the Kurdish movement in Iraq and the opposition to the undemocratic regime in Belarus.

The discussions were organized around three distinct and critical phases of civilian-

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based movements: (1) the development of a strategy for achieving the movement's goals, (2) the implementation of the strategy, and (3) defense of the movement against repression from the authorities. The participants identified common themes and important differences within each of these phases among the diverse movements represented at the conference.

## Developing a Strategy

Participants agreed that any nonviolent movement requires a strategy to guide the movement and that there are several key elements of a strategy: the identification of goals, an assessment of the strategic resources available to the movement, and analysis of the vulnerabilities of the opponent.

### *Settling on Goals*

For many participants, the most important element of a successful strategy is a clear, agreed-upon set of goals. Goals vary in their scope and their clarity. Most agreed that in the early stages of a movement, it was important to adopt specific, realistic goals. As one participant observed, "loading on too many goals may lead to fragmentation" within the coalition of supporters of the movement, and simple goals "clarify the expectations that supporters have about how they should behave."

Some organizers found that a regime's decision to hold elections provided an opportunity to set goals that could build support for democratic change. Elections entail obvious beginning and end dates for a campaign, precise activities and targets on which to focus movement energies, and clear markers for success or failure. Pressuring a government to hold free and fair elections or getting the international community to demand that it honor the outcome of free and fair elections were two benchmarks for many of the successful movements.

As movements seek to broaden support, goals that command public consensus are essential. Many noted that they chose to incorporate patriotic symbols into the movement's message in order to enhance their appeal. In the Chilean "No" campaign, the organizers moderated their message in radio broadcasts through a process of trial and error. The public who listened to these broadcasts and other appeals for their support had long been frightened by the government and saw risks if they lent their support to the campaign. The search for acceptable messages was an essential element in the effort to convince fence-sitters that nonviolent action was worth the risk.

The search for message clarity may require certain tradeoffs. For instance, elections may not comprehensively address the problems facing a society under authoritarian rule. However, the idea of free and fair elections is fast approaching the status of a universal norm among states, and elections are predicated on simple principles that many citizens understand intuitively. For instance, principles like "free and fair" or "one person, one vote" are easily communicated by organizers and require little justification to the public when compared to more complex and divisive issues, such as redistribution of land. Organizers involved in the effort to promote elections in Serbia noted the importance of publicizing explicit standards for fairness prior to the vote. Publicizing these "rules of the game" improved the movement's ability to hold the Milosevic regime accountable when it ignored the electoral outcome.

No strategy is without risk, and participants realized that elections might inadvertently lend a veneer of legitimacy to a corrupt regime. In countries like Zimbabwe, for instance, some expressed concern that elections would be unfair no matter how the opposition behaved and that the outcome could reinforce an undemocratic leader's hold on power. An election boycott in some cases might be a more appropriate goal.

Also discussed were the benefits of having positive messages in nonviolent

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campaigns rather than negative ones, though what constitutes a “negative” or “positive” message is not always obvious. In Chile, coordinators of the “No” campaign against Pinochet chose not to focus on the regime’s past crimes, but instead on positive possibilities for the future of Chile. By persuading people that their vote could create a better future for Chile, the “No” coordinators successfully engaged the broader public in their campaign. The student-led Otpor campaign to mobilize the vote against Milosevic adopted the slogan “He’s finished” (Gotov je). Though negative in tone, the slogan struck a chord with the public and encouraged many to see their vote as the opportunity to be done with a repressive and unresponsive ruler.

Though the importance for organizers of “staying on message” is paramount, many recommended that movements adopt a flexible position about intermediate goals and that they remain open to adopting new objectives, shifting priorities, and compromising or even dropping some goals. Nonviolent movements often unfold in a highly unpredictable environment, and organizers must take advantage of opportunities for alliance building, negotiation, and compromise. For instance, if the authorities crack down hard, shifting to more limited goals may help preserve space for further organizing.

Even when goals are narrow and limited, the process of establishing them may require a long and concerted effort in decision-making. The democratic opposition of Serbia did not agree on the goal of defeating Milosevic at the polls until a few months before the elections, after years of efforts to unify. The Polish workers who laid the foundations of Solidarity in the midst of a shipyard strike debated heatedly among themselves before agreeing to set aside long-cherished political goals and tie the movement to the simpler goal of free trade unions, which was more likely to be achieved. That enabled them to avoid early repression and gain legal status for their movement, which radically transformed Poland’s future.

### *Assessing Resources*

Every movement needs material resources for communicating with large audiences and protecting supporters. Money and the work of supporters are perhaps the most obvious resources, but there are others, like a leadership with strong communication skills or reliable technical means of communication. Some of these resources are found within the movement, within the society under authoritarian rule, or in external allies and the international community. Taking an accurate stock of its resources helps a nonviolent movement choose tactics that are feasible. Additionally, movement organizers should gather useful data about the conditions in which their conflict will play out: transportation networks, political districts, demography, climate and weather, and many other features of society.

There are many instances in which outside support was absolutely critical to a movement’s success. The support of northern white liberals for the southern civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s was one example. Not only did northern donors inject large amounts of cash into mostly underfunded civil rights organizations in the South, but collaboration between blacks and whites provided a model of inter-racial cooperation that exemplified the movement’s goals and helped to “nationalize” the conflict in a way that brought news coverage and public sympathy for the cause of desegregation. Opponents labeled this as “interference from outside agitators” and thereby tried, unsuccessfully, to discredit the civil rights movement. Authorities frequently use this tactic to try to discredit nonviolent movements, as when Milosevic decried the fact of external financial assistance to the Serbian opposition as supposed evidence that his opponents were stooges of the West and NATO. But so long as outside assistance is open and above board, it usually does not contaminate a movement.

The international community has also offered less direct forms of assistance to nonviolent movements. Some participants found that exposure to the international media and to democratic norms helped prepare the public to expect more from their govern-

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ment. For nonviolent movements advocating free and fair elections, elections have provided a news hook for foreign correspondents to justify reporting on countries that are not usually covered. Also, foreign election monitors can be valuable allies in the effort to assure accurate election results, especially if they came from countries with experience in successful transitions to democracy and were thus more likely to be sensitive to the problems that emerge in elections under repressive regimes. But everyone concurred that international donors had the most direct impact on the movements represented at the table, and that training in fundraising skills is an essential part of preparing leaders for action.

Participants also discussed several less tangible resources such as the cultural values underlying a struggle, which can influence a population's receptivity to nonviolent strategies. Some cultures appear to emphasize martial values or legitimize the use of violence more readily than others, and several activists noted that they had encountered a prevalent assumption that "nonviolence" denoted weakness and passivity and was thus an even more difficult strategy to advocate. It was widely believed in Serbian society that only violence would be effective in bringing down Milosevic and further that Serbs would be incapable of maintaining nonviolent discipline; both assumptions proved to be wrong. Others agreed that there is often a "hidden history" of nonviolent action in communities—an organizer from the U.S. civil rights movement noted that there were precedents for civil disobedience many decades prior to the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955 and that bringing this history to light was a boost to some in the movement. Similarly, one of the reasons that observers mistakenly assume that strategic nonviolent action is impossible in the Muslim world is that the precedents for successful action—such as Abdul Ghaffar Khan's nonviolent mobilization of Pashtuns against the British in the 1930s—are not sufficiently well known.

### ***Analyzing an Opponent's Vulnerabilities***

Every regime has vulnerabilities depending on the basis of its political power. An accurate understanding of these is essential for a sound strategy. In particular, organizers must identify the dictator's "pillars of support"—the most significant political constituencies, which often concentrate in certain professions or social classes, civil and military institutions, or religious and ethnic groups. By assessing a regime's vulnerabilities, movement leaders are better able to devise strategies that will drive a wedge between the regime and its key supporters.

Many conference participants observed that some situations are more "ripe" than others for the adoption of nonviolent strategies. While no single factor defines ripeness, a regime that has problems maintaining its legitimacy indicates vulnerability to civilian resistance. The group identified several factors affecting ripeness: the regime's loss of an internal or external war, obvious internal divisions, or its failure to keep promises to the people. While some of these conditions are clearly out of the control of the movement, there was agreement that good strategists can create opportunities to provoke some of these developments and induce ripeness.

Chile's struggle against Pinochet is illustrative. Pinochet came to power through a military coup at a time of political polarization and violence. Though some resented the reduction of liberties that Pinochet brought, many in Chile were pleased that some resemblance of law and order had been restored. As torture and disappearances continued, many became restless and opposed to the regime's behavior, but still a majority looked the other way. As the government remained unresponsive, some opposition groups turned to violence. But when a nonviolent opposition emerged, civilians throughout the society were given ways to participate, ranging from monthly protests to campaigning against Pinochet in a plebiscite he called to reinforce his legitimacy. When it became clear that most Chileans wanted Pinochet out, his own military split, and he had to stand down.

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## Implementing the Strategy

Struggles against dictators usually start small, among a few groups or notable dissidents. As movements grow, the challenges for organizers grow exponentially: they must recruit and engage large numbers of supporters for action that reinforces their commitment to the movement's goals and its nonviolent strategy. They have to seek out institutional allies in the society and internationally as well as anticipate the sometimes deadly responses of the authorities. As one organizer put it, "we cover many fronts simultaneously."

The most effective nonviolent movements plan carefully before recruiting, mobilizing, and deploying their supporters. Leadership cadres at many levels of the movement have to be trained in the skills they will need to organize nonviolent action, including public speaking, managing people, preparing effective appeals for support, fundraising, and identifying and neutralizing informants and infiltrators. In some movements, organizers have conducted role-playing exercises to train those engaging in civil disobedience to anticipate police reactions and to avoid losing control of encounters with them. Some noted that given the high likelihood of harassment, repressive violence, imprisonment, solitary confinement, or even torture, leaders also need to be prepared with the basics of trauma management.

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One participant noted that "because struggles against dictators are essentially political problems, they require a political solution based on coalition-building—movements must simultaneously assemble an internal coalition as well as an external or international one." Many agreed, because coalition-building helps broaden the support of the people as a whole, which is the most critical factor in consolidating the strength of the movement. In some circumstances, coalition-building is thrust upon the movement by the nature of power in a society: the decentralized manner in which Kurdish communities in Turkey are organized, for example, means that democracy activists have to build relationships with many local leaders.

Building alliances with powerful constituencies helps expand the reach and power of an opposition movement. Schools and universities, labor unions, the business community, and religious groups are prime examples of institutions that can give pivotal support. Their leaders control significant resources, not the least of which is their authority within well-organized, pre-established networks of individuals—through which information about a movement's goals and actions can be disseminated. Depending upon local circumstances, these leaders command popular trust and have deep familiarity with the base of the movement. In South Africa, movement leaders encouraged the formation of student unions as a useful device to identify leaders and promote the long-term development of a youth constituency in support of the national campaign, quite apart from the specific local goals that the unions pursued.

In many cases, successful coalition-building shows opponents, potential supporters, and outside observers that the movement has momentum. The anti-Milosevic campaign in Serbia involved political parties, student groups, nongovernmental organizations, and other groups. Partly because of its tireless and effective coordination among these various supporters, the democratic opposition prevailed: the student group fostered a "winning atmosphere," nongovernmental organizations and political parties mobilized the vote, politicians established a unified opposition, and the Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID) organized the monitoring of elections. This distinct division of roles reduced confusion about responsibilities and encouraged cooperative rather than competitive relations within the coalition.

Establishing parallel institutions within nations in order to reduce the people's need to rely on services provided by regimes is another effective way to tighten the bond between the movement and the public. In Burma, for example, after a series of devastating floods, political and civic organizations rapidly stepped in to organize a relief effort before the Burmese government arrived on the scene. This greatly enhanced the

authority of these organizations and embarrassed the government by unveiling its sluggish and uncaring attitude. Sometimes parallel institutions can even amount to an alternative state, as in Kosovo during the 1990s. After Milosevic revoked the province's autonomy in 1989, the Albanians created an unofficial presidency, a foreign ministry, health care organizations, and educational institutions. As in Burma, these steps enhanced the legitimacy of provincial leaders, increased the distrust of Belgrade's authority, and implicitly demonstrated one of the nonviolent movement's key claims, that Kosovo was capable of managing its own affairs without Belgrade's interference. Twenty-five years earlier, Polish dissidents had called this activity the necessary "self-organization" that civilian opposition has to accomplish before it is ready to confront the state.

## Defending the Movement

The response of authorities (governments, military, police forces) to civilian resistance always necessitates adjustments in a movement's nonviolent strategy if it is to maintain momentum. Nonviolent campaigns have not always coped effectively with repression, but they have just as frequently been successful, even in some cases against the most repressive of regimes. Many nonviolent movements find themselves engaged in alternating sequences of direct action followed by negotiation with the government. As one observer at the conference noted, "the contest between movement and regime is a kind of negotiation, whether implicit or explicit." Sometimes the bargaining may occur across a table, but in most cases, the movement and the authorities will make their moves by using coercive measures (for example, the threat of disruption from the movement and the threat of violence from the regime) and by competing for legitimate authority within society. How to defend the movement against violence from the regime, and pressures for violence from within the movement, are perhaps the most important challenges for avowedly nonviolent movements.

Participants concurred that there is no one, inflexible model for responding to repression. However, a smart strategy within a nonviolent movement strives to anticipate regime responses to mass mobilization. If successfully implemented, the activities discussed in the last section—coalition-building, training, building parallel institutions—construct a powerful alliance of opponents to the regime. The more powerful a movement becomes—the more constituencies it represents, the larger number of people it mobilizes, the wider its alliances with the international community—the more complicated the regime's decision about how to respond to a mass movement will be, and the more likely that regime violence will be a difficult or self-defeating counter-tactic.

### *Defending against the Authorities*

When regimes resort to repression, their objective is more to terrorize than to kill. Through counter-measures like making widespread arrests, banning organizations, seizing presses and closing down radio and TV stations, confiscating food, and blocking access to safe havens for activists, autocrats attempt to shut off nonviolent resistance. In these circumstances, movement organizers are pressed to come up with ways to reduce fear and otherwise minimize the effects of repression. One of the key insights of nonviolent strategists is that governments rely on routine cooperation and obedience from their populations. When nonviolent movements withdraw the consent of the governed on a large scale, they force the government to respond to non-cooperation on a scale that the police and military are not normally prepared to handle. As one presenter observed, "The genius of a nonviolent movement is that it distributes resistance to all parts of civil society, vastly complicating the requirements in manpower and material for the opponent to maintain power." Under the best circumstances, nonviolent movements

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*Under the best circumstances, nonviolent movements compel the authorities to stretch their security forces so thinly that they must use their least reliable cadres, those that are least willing to use violence against citizens and most likely to step aside, or sometimes switch sides.*

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compel the authorities to stretch their security forces so thinly that they must use their least reliable cadres, those that are least willing to use violence against citizens and most likely to step aside, or sometimes switch sides. The strategic use of nonviolent methods in this fashion turns repression on its head, making it a show of weakness, rather than strength.

Participants agreed that one of the greatest challenges that can face a movement is when the regime appears capable of making good on a threat to annihilate its opponents. The severity of repression in Burma, for instance, has made nonviolent protest extremely difficult and risky: citizens have feared the consequences of opposition and, over the years, civil society has atrophied and been unwilling to challenge the regime. Without confidence that action can produce results, participants in civilian opposition are hard to recruit. Even though the Burmese regime has limited the space for political action, however, the movement is not entirely without options. One organizer noted that an important survival strategy for the Burmese movement has been to search for small, less confrontational strategies that will build a network of supporters, sustain them during harsh times, and search for new opportunities when the regime makes mistakes, overreaches, or is pressed harder from abroad to engage with the opposition.

As the number of encounters with a regime increases, movement leaders gather more information about their opponents and learn more about how a regime makes decisions, who are its key supporters, how loyal are the police, and so forth. In many of the successful nonviolent movements, leaders took advantage of important divisions and factional struggles that became apparent within the regime. Participants recognized that some of these internal tensions and fissures existed prior to movement activities, but they could be leveraged by the movement. When a nonviolent movement sprang up against the communist regime in Mongolia in late 1989, the ruling politburo split between hardliners and moderates, and the latter gained the upper hand after a public hunger strike by movement leaders made a crackdown more difficult.

Many regimes exploit ethnic diversity by adopting “divide and conquer” strategies aimed at antagonizing ethnic tensions and forcing ethnic groups to compete for scarce resources. One especially notorious tactic is the use of security forces of one ethnicity to repress other ethnic groups, as is commonly the case in Burma. By pitting ethnic communities against one another, regimes strive to weaken a movement and keep a population fighting among itself, rather than resisting the regime. If inter-ethnic alliances are fragile and volatile, that can lead to significant divisions within a movement that an opponent is likely to exploit. By building strong alliances with ethnic minorities, movements can protect themselves from such divisive tactics, as well as enhance their credibility as legitimate representatives of public opinion. In addition, the set of skills that organizers must hone to build an alliance among a diverse constituency will be very useful in a democratic government after the departure of an authoritarian leader.

### ***Maintaining Internal Discipline***

Authoritarian regimes frequently play into the hands of a nonviolent movement by their arbitrary or inept use of violence against innocents. In some circumstances, they may be repeatedly provoked to “predictably stupid responses,” as one organizer from Serbia described Milosevic’s banning of demonstrations and beatings of peaceful protesters. This paved the way for one of Otpor’s most successful strategies, the skillful and relentless use of ridicule against Milosevic, which contributed to his loss of credibility. Predicting the impact of repressive violence on a nonviolent movement is not an easy matter, but it is clear that in many cases, arbitrary violence by the regime brought in many new supporters for the opposition and ultimately unraveled the regime’s grip on power.

However, the pressures for violent retaliation become very great when a regime represses a nonviolent movement. And as one participant observed, “Dictators prefer movements to use violence because it allows them to repress with some legitimacy.” Without a consis-



tent record of nonviolence during its activities, a movement may look erratic or divided, which not only makes it less attractive to potential supporters but may also invite more repression to exploit its divisions. Most agreed that responding quickly to violent repression helps to pre-empt violent forces within the movement. Leaders who are trained and experienced in the tactics of nonviolent action are an invaluable resource for countering violent agitators. Since repression inevitably incapacitates some leaders, it is crucial to train a second or third echelon of recruits who can step into leadership roles when needed.

One participant stressed the importance of setting specific guidelines as soon as possible for movement supporters about how they should interact with the regime. A movement that attacks and harasses government agents may inadvertently contribute to a “siege mentality” in society, which can have devastating consequences for citizens’ sense of security and their calculation of the risks of resistance. Also, there are often many in the regime who secretly identify with the movement but are unable to express their views publicly. A movement may increase its leverage by targeting key leaders or policies rather than broadly condemning everyone in the government and alienating potential supporters within it. Not everyone in the regime should be viewed as the “opponent.”

### *The Power of External Allies*

Defending a nonviolent movement under attack from a regime may also call for outside intervention. Many conference participants agreed that international support, coupled with condemnation of the acts of a repressive government, will greatly assist a movement. The international community can draw worldwide attention to the crimes of a regime and impose economic or other sanctions, as it did against the South African government during the anti-apartheid movement. Through above-ground and underground channels, international donors can continue to provide funding and resources for movements even when internal sources of funding have been seized or otherwise disrupted. Many pointed out that the opposition in Zimbabwe would benefit from this type of assistance, especially as the Mugabe regime constantly searches for ways to undermine it.

There are other roles that international actors have played in these movements. Some noted that outside allies have met with a regime’s representatives, collected information, or lobbied for a movement’s goals when the movement was not in a position to meet with the regime face-to-face. Some movement leaders found that appealing to international law, treaties, and principles of the United Nations as an “unbiased” basis for improving rights was a persuasive tactic in negotiations with the government.

### *When to Negotiate?*

One organizer concluded that the most important advice for nonviolent activists was, “You must know when to declare a victory.” Many participants concurred that sometimes the best strategy is to call off an action, to declare victory when intermediate gains have been made, or to agree to talks with the regime, and thus to forestall the likelihood of failing to win a premature showdown—as well as to conserve resources for a future round of confrontation. In South Africa and Chile, negotiations between the opposition and the government helped ensure nonviolent transitions of power and bolstered the standing of the movement. In both these cases, the use of negotiations also made the opposition appear moderate and served to increase public support for their goals. On the other hand, the risks of refusing to negotiate are perhaps most vividly illustrated in the failure of student democracy leaders in Tiananmen Square to exploit government overtures for compromise. Though many movement leaders supported negotiation (and debated it vigorously), those who advocated continued occupation of the square and further expansion of goals won out. In light of the tragic loss of life and the long-term chilling effect of the government crackdown in Beijing, many viewed this as a strategic error on the part of student organizers.

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There are a variety of other reasons that movement leaders may consider negotiations. Talking directly with representatives of government on behalf of a national movement often confers an enormous amount of legitimacy and credibility on movement leadership. This is one important reason why some regimes have negotiated only as a last resort. In some cases, the regime may be prepared to make concessions about democratic reforms. Even without major concessions, however, negotiating a settlement may improve the prospects for long-term survival of the movement. This is a crucial point. There is no sense in having a movement stick so close to its initial strategy that it does not survive. Negotiating to release large numbers of prisoners from jail or to remove a ban on movement organizations allows organizers to regroup and consider another, later round of resistance. Importantly, such concessions may provide welcome relief and encouragement for supporters, persuading them that even if the goals of the movement have not been met entirely, all of their hard work was not in vain.

But negotiation is a risky strategy for many reasons, especially if movement leaders have not explained or justified this decision to movement supporters. In Mongolia in 1990, the decision by democracy advocates to negotiate with the government about reforms was the source of much controversy within the movement. Participants agreed, however, that while the spirit of negotiation requires compromise, a sound negotiating strategy should not sacrifice the core principles that infuse a movement's goals.

### *Coping with Trauma*

The question of arrest and torture was also widely discussed by conference participants. Many participants had been arrested, and some had been tortured by the regimes they opposed. Each stressed the importance of training movement leaders and cadres about what to expect during torture and how to cope with it. While such knowledge would not reduce the damage caused, it would at least prepare adherents as much as possible for these horrendous circumstances. Participants noted that, despite popular heroic myths, most who are tortured eventually provide whatever information they can to their captors. Dealing with feelings of shame and betrayal after confession during torture is one of the many difficulties that victims face. Preparing leaders for these possibilities may help temper their reactions and recover their effectiveness once they are released. Additionally, as a preventive measure, some suggested that movement leaders should structure their organization so that no one individual has more than limited information of interest to the regime, although others noted that an above-ground movement has to disperse decision-making and action-taking as broadly as possible.

## **Concluding Themes**

- There is now a great deal of history on successful and unsuccessful nonviolent campaigns, much of it represented in the writings of Gene Sharp and Peter Ackerman and by the award-winning documentary television series *A Force More Powerful*. From these and other tools, it is possible to learn specific tactical lessons that are transferable to many different societies, regardless of their histories and cultures. While these resources are available to those who want to initiate and organize civilian-based struggles, much more has to be done to create wide access to the knowledge and expertise necessary to carry out effective nonviolent strategies.
- Nongovernmental organizations, practitioners from past campaigns, and some international agencies and government entities can assist civilian movements in framing and carrying out well-conceived strategies for nonviolent conflict. But the scale of this effort should be larger, coordination between organizations should be more systematic, and funding should be more easily accessible and overt.

- At a time when many struggles for various causes are still monopolized by those who are wedded to violence and terror as a means of conflict, the worldwide effort to contain and reduce terrorism cannot succeed unless people's movements are influenced to opt instead for nonviolent strategies. In addition, the resources for terrorism—including money, personnel, material, and safe havens—are found mainly in nations governed by authoritarian regimes or societies that have only a thin veneer of democracy. Because nonviolent revolutions usually bring genuine civil society and democratic government to the countries that they transform, nonviolent conflict as a means of "regime change" can contribute significantly to the effort against terrorism.

For more information on this topic, see our web site ([www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)), which has an online edition of this report containing links to related web sites, as well as additional information on the subject.

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