PREPAREDNESS &
Nonviolent Resistance

This paper is one in a series that examines how the act of helping civilians brace for violence can complement and benefit efforts in many fields related to peace and conflict.

Local capacity for self-preservation has powerful implications for protection, human rights, nonviolent resistance, development aid, disaster risk reduction, early warning and response, humanitarian aid, peacekeeping, and security sector reform, as well as efforts to manage conflict, reduce recruitment into violence, mitigate displacement, and prevent conflict returning.

The knock-on effects of civilians being better prepared for inexorable violence have scarcely been considered (even within the field of protection). Nothing else has such crosscutting potential as preparedness: It is the hidden common denominator of our work.

Aid service providers will often be the best situated to support local preparedness. But by getting better joined up with such providers, the practitioners in these other fields may see a very impactful multiplier upon their work on the ground.

Hold the ethical high ground by helping the population brace for violence.

1. Populations often prove better off in the long run as the result of changes wrought by a nonviolent resistance (NVR) movement. And statistically, such civil resistance is successful more often than armed resistance. Yet there is usually a price to be paid. Should activists do more to help people outside the movement prepare for the tumultuous period of resistance?

2. *Put in harm's way?* Might a movement put nonparticipants in harm's way? "Usually not," says Gene Sharp, one of the leading architects of NVR doctrine. [1] Yet he cites exceptions to the rule: "Extreme dictatorships may deliberately act harshly against innocent people in order to frighten others into compulsive submission… Not even passive submission guarantees safety under totalitarian and other extreme dictatorships. They aim to instill fear by the example of brutal repression whether it is focused on resisters or on people who have done nothing." [2] They "make 'examples'" of some and "retaliate against family and friends of resisters or other innocent people." [3]

3. The value of preparedness is in those vicious exceptions to the rule. Its value is in the fact that "usually no" means "sometimes yes."

4. As noted, the oppressor sometimes inflicts reprisals (whether indiscriminate or calculated) against the population at large. At other times, harm to nonparticipants derives from ill-advised decisions by the movement *itself*. Ackerman and Kruegler find "in the heat of conflict… there are many examples to be found of sanctions chosen and strategies pursued with blind disregard for the probable effects, symbolic or material, on both parties in the conflict as well as the bystanders." [4]

5. And at times, others choose armed resistance. Maybe they have been provoked by longstanding grievances against the oppressor. But suppose they have been angered by reprisals that followed NVR action? Brutal "examples" are theater. NVR is partly theater as well. A danger is that the same images of suffering protesters which win sympathy can also push some to take up arms. If their arms do not definitively shield the populace—then quite possibly everyone will be placed further in harm's way.

6. Can a movement disavow all violence that emanates either from the oppressor or from groups that decide to pick up weapons? Clearly the underlying driver of the conflict is the oppressor. Yet just as clearly, civil resistance is premised on challenge and provocation; on exposing abuse, injustice, and illegitimacy. This makes the resister an organic part of the events. No one fully controls the direction of those events. There will be sweeps, purges, and repression. There will be spoilers, agent provocateurs, and "radical flanks." There will be backlash against backlash.

7. Resisters who keep their nonviolent discipline can truthfully say of the killing around them: "We didn't do it!" But can they say the collateral killing of nonparticipants was not predictable or that they had no ethical role in helping prepare those soon to put in harm's way?

8. *Consent of others placed at risk?* Phrases like "mass movement," "popular uprising," and "people power" leave the impression that most people in the affected society have consented to partake in civil resistance or have at least agreed to pay the price that might be inflicted. In reality, the percent of the populace participating is typically in the single digits. [5] This is not to say that obtaining explicit majority consent is possible. But do NVR movements even try?

9. Gene Sharp describes the importance of "generating 'cause-consciousness'—an awareness of the grievances and justification for the coming conflict." [6] (Depending upon whether the purpose is to ask people if the risk is justified—or tell them it is—the exercise may or may not be the same as obtaining consent.) Sharp state that, "At an early stage, it is important to publicize the facts, issues, and arguments advanced by the nonviolent struggle group through pamphlets, leaflets, books, articles, papers, radio, television, public meetings, songs, slogans, cassettes," etc. [7]

10. The key activities for fostering cause consciousness include: "(a) Develop understanding of the issues in the conflict. (b) Inform the population of the contemplated action, the requirements for its success, and the importance of engaging or not engaging in particular acts. (c) Justify resort to direct action. (d) Warn of the hardship and suffering that will be incurred during the struggle. (e) Arouse confidence that the likely repression will be worth incurring because nonviolent struggle is more likely than any other type of action to correct the grievances. (f) Bolster confidence that in the long run the combination of a just cause and use of this technique will ensure victory." [8]

11. Campaigns to inform, justify, warn, and arouse are necessary. But again, there a risk that this sometimes becomes an exercise in which a vanguard tells the population what is best for them. Does the aggrieved group speak for everyone, both in terms of the problems and the solutions? True, NVR initiatives sometimes percolates up from the ground in popular, spontaneous fashion. But as noted, their net numbers are a small percent and the fact remains that they may drastically affect the lives of those who have not yet consented to participate.

12. *A special responsibility?* "Arousing confidence" and speaking of an "ensured victory" are not benign acts. They raise expectations that can be dashed and hopes that can be misplaced. For simplistic purposes here, there are two kinds of locals: those who consent to participate in the resistance (a minority) and those who do not (the great majority). Might nonviolent activists and any expatriates who advise and inspire them bear a special responsibility toward nonparticipants who may be increasingly placed in harm's way during a tumultuous period of resistance?

13. The question here is not whether people are better off without the oppressor in power, and better off trying to make this happen through civil rather than armed resistance. The answer there tends to be Yes. Rather it is, are the nonparticipants better off without systematic preparation for threats? The pragmatic and ethical answer would seem to be No.

14. *Equal protection?* Civil resistance can create indirect and intermittent protections for those who are not participants. (a) For example, it may influence international public opinion. To the extent that any resulting sympathy and support for the population, or sanctions against the oppressor, do actually shield the populace, then it is a beneficial outcome. (Sharp warns that reliance on foreign "saviors" may be "totally misplaced." [9])

15. (b) One element of doctrine is to influence the oppressor's own base, for example, to co-opt members of the police and military, making them less inclined to commit abuse. This pertains to security forces' self-restraint rather than locals' self-protection, but is still a very beneficial step if and when achieved.

16. (c) At a tactical level, selection, timing, and location of actions may help protect nonparticipants. As Erica Chenoweth writes, resisters can chose tactics in such a way as to maximize participation and disruption while minimizing exposure to repression and the "collateral damage to ordinary folks." [10] This reduces the concern of crossfire—but of course oppressors then have free reign to select the time and location of their own subsequent actions.

17. Most protections are instead directed toward *participants*. Ackerman & Kruegler note tactics by which movements can "mute the impact" of an oppressor's violence against their members. They recommend acquiring "good intelligence" to help people "get out of harm's way" and conducting "defensive dispersion" in order to remove, preserve, and deny resources. The most successful actions, they note, turn "on the ability to get accurate, timely information." "Given a realistic appreciation of the opponents' potential for destructive repression," they conclude, "it should be easily possible to motivate the civilian population to conceive and plan for such evasive actions at an early stage." "For all of this," they conclude, "preparation is key." [11]

18. If an NVR movement were to be depicted in concentric rings, then it would be the welfare of the inner circles that gets the most attention. A schematic might look like this: Movement leaders → movement rank & file → families and acquaintances of movement rank & file → auxiliary supporters (from the most aggrieved part of the populace). Then outside the movement there would be: → compromised classes of people → general public.

19. Doctrine discusses precautions for the leadership (hide or disperse, devolve decision-making, prepare for attrition, succession, etc.), and support for the operational rank and file, and their families (financial and other relief, etc.). Yet it is hard to find mention of preparedness support for those on the outside: tainted classes of people (*anyone* from an identifiable group that dared to stand up—a profession, a region, a religion, an ethnicity, etc.) or the general public.

20. (d) Perhaps the tactics in NVR doctrine offering the best basis on which to build broader, more equitable protections are those of "alternative markets," "alternative economic institutions," and "parallel government". They have been seen as a way to undercut the apparatus of the oppressor as well as raise up a positive vision for the population. The vision is one of self-capacity and service. It reached its most elaborate expression under Gandhi. The many alternative institutions under his "Constructive Programme" were devised to "increase self-reliance and confidence, build a sense of community, and provide needed services." [12]

21. In the case of India's independence campaign, parallel institutions for the general population were seen as a prelude to self-rule. This paper sees them as a prerequisite for mere survival; as forms of governance that are not only constructive—but protective. They constitute what might be the strongest "doctrinal basis" on which NVR movements could build structures for bolstering the safety, as well as the life-critical sustenance and services for the population at large.

22. Such alternate institutions constitute "one of the most advanced methods of nonviolent struggle." [13] Parallel institutions of national scale are rare. But a movement can help inform and mobilize people's self-reliance in more localized forms. In so doing, it might join up with other platforms already working locally for the population's welfare.

23. Beyond the fairly indirect and intermittent examples above, NVR doctrine "typically does not," as Maria Stephans notes, "focus on [nonparticipants' protection], because it is generally not conceptualized as being part of the active prosecution of nonviolent struggle." [14] There does not appear to be equal, systematic attention to helping nonparticipants prepare for getting their families and assets out of harm's way.

24. It is logical and inevitable that there has been more focus on the security of participants than nonparticipants. But strong arguments can be made that security should be made more equitable, not only for the ethical reasons suggested above but also for tactical reasons cited below.

Gain tactical advantage by helping the population brace for violence.

25. "Preparedness" here refers to the ability of civilians who are not participating in a movement to survive alone in the face of violence. Support for locals' preparedness focuses on their ability to ensure continued *safety* as well as life-critical *sustenance* and *services* during the unknown period of upheaval ahead. What the supports are (primarily for helping inform and mobilize) and who provides them (whether an arm of the movement or the next best platform available) is the subject for a separate paper.

26. Helping civilians (who heretofore have not joined civil resistance) brace for violence seems to have the potential to either discourage or encourage their future participation. It is important to note that preparedness support is *not predisposed* to either choice. This support is fundamentally about peoples' abilities for self-preservation. Whether that then comes to mean space for survival or space for activism is up to them.

27. In civil resistance, "the key factor to success is the power that mass, broad-based *participation* provides for a movement." [15] Participation depends on peoples' beliefs and perceptions—so this might be the great fulcrum point for a movement's outcome. Has there been enough doctrinal attention to the impact that helping people brace for danger might have on their perceptions of the movement and their potential to join it? What are the tactical implications of such support on future recruitment into the cause? Should the public's ability to stay safe be conceptualized as part of the active prosecution of nonviolent struggle after all?

28. *Weakening participation? Argument one.* Might helping nonparticipants prepare for danger make them think civil resistance is too provocative? Might it put them in a fearful posture; cause them to lay low and stay disengaged—and thus have a breaking effect on the movement? Would focusing on the vulnerabilities of the "great nonaligned middle" make them even less likely to participate?

29. If one borrows from insurgency and counterinsurgency doctrine, then the answer seems to be No. Belligerents and armies often treat the populations' safety, sustenance, and services as conflict's "center of gravity". They establish programs (of both the help and self-help kind) addressing these life essentials in an attempt to win popular participation or at least tacit cooperation. Those who intend to win hearts and minds do not neglect risks to the public.

30. Silence about risk is not an option. As seen, NVR doctrine says "inform the population of the contemplated action… [and] warn of the hardship and suffering that will be incurred." The assurance is "repression will be worth incurring because… [action will] correct the grievances." Thus warning comes with a vision of hope. Might it telegraph too much danger to go a step further and help the population *act* on those warnings by bracing for the worst? That seems like a possible outcome: taking tangible steps to prepare for disruption and danger could make the risks seem all too real.

31. Perhaps the key to peoples' reaction lies in the messaging. Suppose nonparticipants were told: "Danger is coming but here are proven steps you can take to weather it." Might that provide people a way to channel their healthy new respect for danger? Sharp states that, "A prerequisite

for participating in nonviolent struggle is to cast off or control fear," and that, "Fear arises from the assumption of one's weakness." [16] This makes sense both for people in the movement as well as those who hesitate to join it. In this vein, preparedness support mitigates nonparticipants' vulnerabilities and in so doing reduces their fears. Perhaps then it is not axiomatic that addressing fears and vulnerabilities weakens participation in a cause.

32. *Weakening participation?* *Argument two.* Might helping nonparticipants become substantially safer remove one of the strongest impetuses for joining—anger over bloodshed? It is perverse but true to say that enlistment in militias and movements alike often spikes after outrageous attacks on life and dignity. In a variation of what Sharp calls political *jiu-jitsu*, "repression can legitimize the resistance movement because it 'deepens the injustice.' [It] can increase the determination of existing nonviolent resisters and may increase the number of resisters." [17]

33. It seems undeniable then that the converse is true as well: shielding the broader populace from repression and injustice can decrease the number of those joining a movement. It is morbid but accurate to say that not providing the shield may help swell a movement's membership. Sharp states that, "The launching of nonviolent action will almost always sharpen the conflict. It will likely cause the conflicting groups to become more sharply delineated and stimulate previously uncommitted people to take sides." Yet he also seems to acknowledge that Jefferson's blood-soaked "tree of liberty" must not appear to the populace as the hangman's tree, in adding that, "It is especially important for the nonviolent resisters to be most careful in their behavior during this period because it will influence which side receives support". [18]

34. A nonviolent movement of true liberal democratic orientation will not deliberately provoke and leverage repression for recruitment sake. Yet if it forgoes the recruitment "benefits" of bloody theater and instead actually shields the populace, then perhaps it should make propagandistic use of that fact in order to turn recruitment losses into gains.

35. *Strengthening participation?* Shielding the population arguably can have the secondary effect of increasing enlistment in the movements' cause: (a) It can reduce alienation or anger over dangers stirred by NVR activism. (b) It can free individuals to become activists by attending to what is commonly their first preoccupation—the welfare of their loved ones. (c) It can increase solidarity between participants and as-yet nonparticipants.

36. (a) As suggested earlier, ethical responsibilities are at stake. Nonparticipants can be alienated by a movement that directly or indirectly puts them in harm's way without seeking their consent in some substantial fashion. But they might become outright angered and opposed if they sense that the movement has taken steps for the safety and relief of its members—but not their own families. Offering preparedness support might reduce these negative perceptions of a movement. This redounds to the movement's benefit.

37. (b) Even individuals who sympathize with a movement might feel they have a deeper or more imminent responsibility to their own families and communities. They might be too occupied with the welfare of those closest to them to participate in NVR actions that diminish their ability to be present or provide for their people. But a movement that takes steps to "have their back" (providing early warning networks, etc.) and support them on "the home front" may be able to free them up for participation. This is the same reasoning Sharp applies to the welfare of movements, when he says if "resisters and their families lack food, housing, money, and the like—because of participation in the struggle—a major effort to supply those may be needed." [19]

38. (c) It is common for an NVR movement to contend it is in a struggle for self-evident good that benefits everyone, including those in the population who do not join. Be that as it may, can the movement win even more trust and affection by demonstrating concern for the imminent welfare of those who are not participating? One of the basic purposes in NVR doctrine of the parallel or alternate institutions cite earlier actually is to engage "previously indifferent groups" with a positive vision. [20]

39. The power of certain forms of support and accompaniment should not be underestimated. This would seem to be why Ackerman and Kruegler find that, "Self-sufficiency with respect to food, clothing, energy, and medical supplies can contribute immeasurable to their ability to persevere. Relief efforts aimed at caring for families of fallen resisters, or others placed at risk, heighten solidarity and hope." [21] That short phrase—"others placed at risk"—seems not to get enough elaboration in NVR doctrine, but it certainly applies here. Demonstrable concern for the risks and suffering of others could increase their solidarity with and participation in the cause.

40. The value of that solidarity is not to be measured solely by the enlistment of new participants. NVR literature makes it clear that the resolve of those already participating in a movement may be constantly and severely tested. The fact that a movement might increase solidarity in the ways described here would seem to have real ramifications for sustaining the resolve of those who have been at the forefront of the struggle: more of "the people" express support, and in that way the notion of a "larger cause" feels more real. This poses an ethereal yet quite tactical gain.

41. Preparedness support can help civil resistance movements gain ethical and tactical strength.

Endnotes

[1] Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential*, Extending Horizons Books / Porter Sargent Publishers, Inc., 2005; pp. 383-385. The author states that in "nonviolent struggles, as compared to violent ones… persons not participating in the struggle are usually not seriously affected" He adds that even when resisters provoke "intense repression… it is usually inflicted on the volunteers themselves, not on the general population."

[2] Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential*, Extending Horizons Books / Porter Sargent Publishers, Inc., 2005; pp. 363 and 379.

[3] Gene Sharp, *How Nonviolent Struggle Works*, The Albert Einstein Institution, Boston, 2013; pp. 89-90.

[4] Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century*, Praeger, Westport, CN, 1994; p. 51.

[5] Erica Chenoweth, "People Power", *Sojourners*, May 2011. The author studied NVR movements from 1900 to 2006 and found "the average nonviolent campaign has more than four times as many active participants (with about 200,000) as the average violent campaign (with about 50,000)." Two hundred thousand represents less than ten percent (a single digit percent) of the population in the majority of the world's countries. Those for which 200,000 is more than ten percent are mostly island nations.

[6] Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential*, Extending Horizons Books / Porter Sargent Publishers, Inc., 2005; p. 365.

[7] Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential*, Extending Horizons Books / Porter Sargent Publishers, Inc., 2005; p. 366.

[8] Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential*, Extending Horizons Books / Porter Sargent Publishers, Inc., 2005; p. 367.

[9] Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*, The Albert Einstein Institution, Cambridge, MA, 1993.

[10] Eric Stoner, *Participation is Everything - A conversation with Erica Chenoweth*. Found at: http://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/participation-is-everything-a-conversation-with-erica-chenoweth.

[11] Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century*, Praeger, Westport, CN, 1994; pp. 38-39.

[12] Christopher A. Miller, *Strategic Nonviolent Struggle: A Training Manual*, University for Peace, Addis Ababa, 2006; p. 52.

[13] Christopher A. Miller, *Strategic Nonviolent Struggle: A Training Manual*, University for Peace, Addis Ababa, 2006; p. 22.

[14] Author's correspondence with Maria Stephans, October 26, 2006.

[15] Eric Stoner, *Participation is Everything - A conversation with Erica Chenoweth*. Found at: http://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/participation-is-everything-a-conversation-with-erica-chenoweth.

[16] Gene Sharp, *How Nonviolent Struggle Works*, The Albert Einstein Institution, Boston, 2013; p. 53.

[17] Gene Sharp, *How Nonviolent Struggle Works*, The Albert Einstein Institution, Boston, 2013; p. 119.

[18] Gene Sharp, *How Nonviolent Struggle Works*, The Albert Einstein Institution, Boston, 2013; p. 83.

[19] Gene Sharp, *How Nonviolent Struggle Works*, The Albert Einstein Institution, Boston, 2013; p. 98.

[20] Christopher A. Miller, *Strategic Nonviolent Struggle: A Training Manual*, University for Peace, Addis Ababa, 2006; pp. 51 and 53.

[21] Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century*, Praeger, Westport, CN, 1994; p. 30.