

### WITH WEAPONS OF THE WILL

by Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall

**S**addam Hussein brutalized and repressed the Iraqi people for more than 20 years, so President Bush was right to call him an international threat. Given these realities, anyone who opposed U.S. military action to dethrone him had a responsibility to suggest how he might otherwise have been ushered out the backdoor of Baghdad. There was an answer: civilian-based, nonviolent resistance by the Iraqi people, developed and applied in accordance with a strategy to undermine Saddam's basis of power.

Unfortunately, when this type of suggestion is made publicly, hard-nosed policymakers and most commentators dismiss the idea out of hand, saying that nonviolence wouldn't work against a tyrant as pathological as Saddam. That is because they don't know how to distinguish between what has popularly been regarded as "nonviolence" and the strategic nonviolent action that has hammered authoritarian regimes to the point of defenestrating dictators and liberating people from many forms of subjugation.

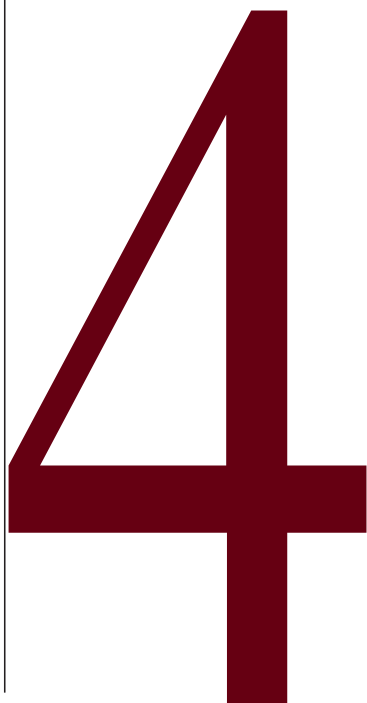
The reality is that history-making nonviolent resistance is not usually undertaken as an act of moral display; it does not typically begin by putting flowers in gun barrels and it does not end when protesters disperse to go home. It involves the use of a panoply of forceful sanctions—strikes, boycotts, civil disobedience, disrupting the functions of government, even nonviolent sabotage—in accordance with a strategy for undermining an oppressor's pillars of support. It is not about making a point, it's about taking power.

Another misconception about nonviolent resistance that policymakers and the media entertain is that there is some sort of inverse relationship between the degree of severity of a regime's repressive instincts and the likelihood of a civilian-based movement's success in overturning it. Three cases come to mind in illustrating that repression is not typically the decisive factor in the dynamics of these struggles.

First, during World War II the Danes gradually developed a broad popular nonviolent resistance to their German occupiers and—through actions such as cultural protests in the beginning and later general strikes—managed both to create the space in which to operate and to impose substantial costs on the Nazi regime for its decision to occupy the country. Even though the Germans were capable of more severe repression in Denmark than they chose to apply, the point is that there was a transactional relationship between the Germans and the Danes, and the Danes discovered that fact—and from that they derived the leverage to press their resistance.

An authoritarian ruler or military occupier wants certain services or benefits from the population, and those benefits can be withheld, albeit at a cost to those resisting. Ratcheting up repression does not necessarily work as a strategy to quell resisters, since when repression increases, more people are antagonized and join the resistance, and business as usual for the regime or occupier becomes even more costly to maintain. It's essential to understand that unless a regime wants to murder the entire population, its ability repressively to compel a population's compliance is not infinitely elastic.

This was illustrated in another case during World War II: the nonviolent public resistance of the Rosenstrasse wives in February-March 1943. Reacting to the internment of their Jewish husbands, hundreds of these non-Jewish wives and other civilians who supported them started daily sit-ins in front of the building at Rosenstrasse 2-4 where their husbands had been taken initially (many were soon shipped to the camps). SS soldiers shot into the air over their heads, shut down the nearest streetcar station, and tried to frighten them off, but they kept coming, their ranks swelling to a



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thousand. The Nazis were faced with a dilemma: To stop the protest, they could drag these women away and arrest them, or brutalize them in the streets—but the regime was concerned that that would inflame other Berliners, who would surely hear about what had happened. In a week Goebbels decided it was easier just to give them their husbands back, and he did so, transporting many back from the camps; 1,700 were set free.

Nonviolent resistance often confounds the assumption that the next degree of repressive pressure will somehow neutralize further resistance, because conflicts in which strategic nonviolent action is applied are not necessarily contests of physical force in all of their phases. The Nazis could have ended the Rosenstrasse protest on its first day, but they did not—they realized it was not really a physical problem. There was a political context: Killing Jews was one thing, but killing or even injuring non-Jewish German citizens, especially women, was quite another—it would tarnish their image (which is to say, potentially jeopardize the legitimacy of their domestic rule) at a vulnerable time, right after the German defeat at Stalingrad. The lesson: Their latitude for decision-making was not automatically enlarged by their capacity for repression.

Another case that illustrates the importance of this question of legitimacy is that of Chile. No one doubted the willingness of Pinochet's regime, in the 1970s and early 1980s, to use terror as an instrument of repression in order to assure the regime's control: Disappearances, brutal killings of dissidents, and arbitrary arrests had silenced most dissenters. But once that silence was broken in 1983 in a way that the regime could not immediately suppress—through a one-day nationwide slow-down, followed by a nighttime city-wide banging of pots and pans in Santiago—the regime was no longer able to re-establish the same degree of fear in the population, and mammoth monthly protests were soon under way.

After it was clear that a broad cross section of the population opposed the regime, Pinochet felt compelled to reassert its legitimacy, and so he went ahead with a scheduled referendum on his continued rule, which, thanks to internationally supported poll watching and extraordinary grass-roots organizing, he lost. Then his impulse to crack down was blocked when his senior military chiefs made it clear that they would refuse his orders to do so. What had happened? A seemingly innocuous protest had compromised the regime's ability to rule by intimidation, allowing the democratic opposition to organize and eventually capture a higher legitimacy, splitting the ranks of the dictator's supporters.

WHILE IT MAY well be true that Saddam's rule was as brutal as that of any dictator since Stalin, he was not, unlike the Russian tyrant, supported by an entrenched party system that could claim a higher ideological purpose. His hold on power was even more reliant on personal loyalties and their reinforcement by material rewards and mortal penalties. As such, the frequent reports of his repression should have been seen not only as a sign of his brutality, but as evidence of the disaffection that his capricious, personal style bred: He would not have had to crack down if there were no one who might be disloyal.

If instead of military invasion, a campaign against Saddam had begun with civilian-based incidents of disruption that were dispersed around the country and that did not offer convenient targets to shoot at, any attempt to crack down would have had to depend on the outermost, least reliable members of Saddam's repressive apparatus. If such a resistance made it clear to police and soldiers that they were not viewed as the enemy, and even if resisters were at first only a nuisance—mosquitoes that could not all be swatted—the realization that Saddam was being opposed openly would have begun almost immediately to lessen the fear of engaging in further, more systematic acts of resistance. As opposition became more serious or visible, this would have offered to dissenting elements within the regime a place to which to defect, once events reached a crescendo.

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A few years ago, in the holy city of Karbala, when tens of thousands of Muslims gathered for an annual religious occasion, the regime sent in troops because it feared disorder or an uprising. But they were so badly outnumbered by the civilians who came that they were effectively encircled—a graphic display of the limitations on Saddam’s repressive apparatus if it were constrained to respond to incidents in all directions from Baghdad.

Early in 2002 a leading nonviolent Iraqi oppositionist expressed exasperation that the Bush administration appeared to be considering every possible military strategy for regime change without realizing “that 22 million Iraqis detest Saddam Hussein” and that they represented an enormous potential resource in ungluing critical levers of his control. At a conference that year on the future of democracy, another Iraqi oppositionist stood up and reminded other, more skeptical Iraqis in the room that Saddam’s regime could not function without oil revenues, and there were a limited number of civilian oil workers who, if they were to abandon their jobs, could create a crisis by themselves. If Saddam started shooting oil workers or workers at electrical utility installations, how would that keep the oil fields running or the power flowing to his palaces and prisons?

AT THE MOMENT a nonviolent movement begins, most observers think that success is impossible, because most people can only see the costs of resisting instead of the costs that resisters can impose on those who maintain the existing system. The oppressive rulers who have been brought down by nonviolent movements—whether they were generals in Latin America, Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, or Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia—did not tolerate a degree of dissent or refrain from murdering all opponents because they were softer adversaries than Stalin or Saddam. These were all dictatorial regimes, meaning that openness was tolerated only as necessary to maintain the facade of internal or external legitimacy, or because suppressing it would have been too costly. And the Raj in India was not the exception that proves the rule, unless you think that the massacre at Amritsar or the killings at Dharasana were merely unfortunate lapses in English manners.

The reflexive assumption that nonviolent action has structural limitations related to a regime’s character is in part the product of three generations of stereotyping this strategy as a moral preference or a form of ethical behavior. Most preachers of “non-violence”—by insisting that nonviolent action triumphs when the opponent witnesses the suffering or hears resisters’ messages and is persuaded to relent—have unwittingly reinforced the belief that power cannot be taken from rulers who are willing to use superior military force. That isn’t the way nonviolent resistance has usually worked.

Regimes have been overthrown that had no compunction about brutalizing their opponents and denying them the right to speak their minds. How? By first demonstrating that opposition is possible, peeling away the regime’s residual public and outside support, quashing its legitimacy, driving up the costs of maintaining control, and overextending its repressive apparatus. Strategic nonviolent action is not about being nice to your oppressor, much less having to rely on his niceness. It’s about dissolving the foundations of his power and forcing him out. It is possible in Iraq. ■

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### HARD QUESTIONS FOR PEACEMAKERS

by Jim Wallis

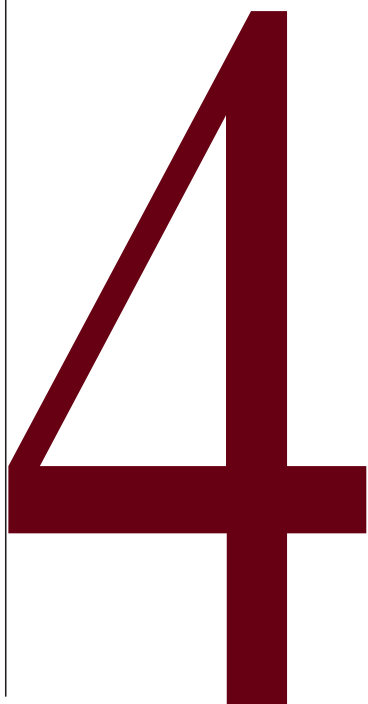
**T**his has been a very difficult time for Christian peacemakers, for those of us who believe that following Jesus leads us to the path of nonviolence. Despite the great challenges to that commitment since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, I still identify myself as a Christian peacemaker. But since Sept. 11, I think we have to go deeper in that commitment.

I've been part of the peace movement for more than three decades. But the U.S. government's "war on terrorism" presents far more difficult challenges than the other wars and interventions I've fought against. In those other wars—declared and otherwise, from Vietnam to Central America, from Chile to the Congo—there was no worthy goal to be pursued, and any notion of "defending" America was nothing but propaganda. In fact, I believe that most American foreign policy since World War II has been wrong. In the name of anti-communism, the United States violated its professed values by backing a succession of ugly regimes that killed tens of thousands of their own people, trampling on every human right we hold dear. Our government backed the wrong people in South Africa until the very end. We have never really stood up for Palestinian rights against our ally Israel, and we made the Persian Gulf safe not for democracy but for our own oil interests. For 50 years, U.S. nuclear weapons policy has been based on a willingness to exterminate hundreds of millions of people. U.S. weapons sales have fueled conflicts around the world. Under both Republican and Democratic presidents, U.S. foreign policy has been morally flawed at its core. That's what I believe, and I've protested it with 20 arrests in 30 years, all for nonviolent civil disobedience.

But the current challenge is much more complicated. The Sept. 11 terrorists murdered almost 3,000 people in one day, and they did so with a cruel intentionality. That those people were civilians mattered nothing to the mass murderers. While President Bush's morally simplistic "good vs. evil" rhetoric is unacceptable (America has hardly been "good," given the above litany of grievances), an inability to see the stark face of evil in the events of Sept. 11 is a moral failure. Our postmodern and politically correct world has a hard time naming evil, but Christians shouldn't. This was a horrific crime against humanity.

Although I've opposed the language and tactics of war in this campaign against terrorism, the task of preventing further terrorist violence against innocent people is a very worthy goal, and the self-defense of Americans and other people is clearly at stake here. If there is a good—and even necessary—purpose in defeating terrorism, and if the lives of my neighbors and my family are indeed at risk, how do I respond?

While the terrorists use and manipulate American global injustices to justify their crimes and to recruit the angry and desperate for their violent purposes, they have no interest in the global justice and peace that many of us have lived and fought for—indeed, they are its enemies. Their vision for the world is absolutely oppressive; they would destroy democracy, deny human rights, repress women, and persecute people of other faiths and even those of their own religion who disagree with them. Even worse, they blaspheme the name of God by doing their violent work in the name of religion. To dismiss them as merely Islamic fundamentalists or marginal extremists is not enough; these terrorists are educated, well-financed, and coldly calculating ideologues who will quickly and massively kill whenever it suits their clear purpose—



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which is taking power over Islam and the entire Muslim world. We must be realistic at this moment and confront the fact that terrorists are even now planning further violence against innocent people, on as massive a scale as their weapons and capacities will allow. They are people who seem not to be bound by conscience or limits on the destruction they seek.

SO HOW DO WE stop them? How do we prevent them from killing more innocents? And most poignantly, how do advocates of nonviolence try to stop them? For nonviolence to be credible, it must answer the questions that violence purports to answer, but in a better way. I oppose a widening war that bombs more people and countries, recruiting even more terrorists, and fueling an unending cycle of violence. But those who oppose bombing must have an alternative.

I've advocated the mobilization of the most extensive international and diplomatic pressure the world has ever seen against bin Laden and his networks of terror—focusing the world's political will, intelligence, security, legal action, and police enforcement against terrorism. The international community must dry up the terrorists' financial networks, isolate them politically, discredit them before an international tribunal, and expose the ugly brutality behind their terror. But when the international community has spoken, tried and found them guilty, and authorized their apprehension and incarceration, we will still have to confront the ethical dilemmas involved in enforcing those measures. The terrorists must be found, captured, and stopped. This involves using some kind of force.

To accept any use of force is a very difficult thing for those of us committed to nonviolent solutions. Is any kind of force consistent with nonviolence? If so, what kind? What limitations are required? What ethical considerations must be brought to bear?

Since Sept. 11, I've talked to a wide range of Christian peacemakers. Some are delving into Dietrich Bonhoeffer's painful decision, as a pacifist, to join the plot to assassinate Hitler. Others are rereading French theologian Jacques Ellul, who explained his decision to support the resistance movement against Nazism by appealing to the "necessity of violence" but wasn't willing to call such recourse "Christian." Many are going back to Gandhi and asking what he meant when he said that nonviolent resistance is the best thing, but that violent resistance to evil is better than no resistance at all.

Some believe that there can be no resistance to terrorism, either because of American foreign policy sins or because of their principled pacifism. Others are only willing to deal with "root causes" and continue to oppose the American foreign policy that, in their view, is behind this terrorism. They point out the true fact that the United States has been guilty itself of sponsoring or supporting "state terrorism"—a painful reality I've observed most recently in the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza, which are occupied by Israeli Defense Forces.

But many practitioners of Christian peacemaking, including me, can't accept such a non-response to horrific terrorism, despite the history of U.S. foreign policy. Gandhi said that if a lunatic is loose in the village and threatening the people, you first deal with the lunatic, and then the lunacy. I believe we must find a way to deal with the threat of terrorism—a threat that must not be avoided or minimized by those committed to nonviolence. We cannot turn away from this. But how do we confront this crisis?

The "just war" theory has been used and abused to justify far too many of our wars. This crisis should not turn us to the just war theory, but rather to a deeper consideration of what peacemaking means. In the modern world of warfare, where far

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more civilians die than soldiers, war has become ethically obsolete as a way of resolving humankind's inevitable conflicts. Indeed, the number of people, projects, and institutions experimenting in nonviolent methods of conflict resolution has been growing steadily over the past decade with some promising results.

I AM INCREASINGLY convinced that the way forward may be found in the wisdom gained in the practice of conflict resolution and the energy of a faith-based commitment to peacemaking. For example, most nonviolence advocates, even pacifists, support the role of police in protecting people in their neighborhoods. Perhaps it is time to explore a theology for global police forces, including ethics for the use of internationally sanctioned enforcement—precisely as an alternative to war.

Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder was engaged in that very task near the end of his life. He was asking whether those committed to nonviolence might support the kind of necessary force utilized by police, because it is (or is designed to be) much more constrained, controlled, and circumscribed by the rule of law than is the violence of war, which knows few real boundaries. If that is true for the function of domestic police, how might it be extrapolated to an international police force acting with the multinational authorization of international law? Yoder's work in this area was never completed, but perhaps now it should be. I recently heard New Testament theologian Tom Wright provocatively suggest that the ethics for global policing possibly might be extrapolated from Romans 13.

Theologian Stanley Hauerwas, author of the seminal *The Peaceable Kingdom* and other works, says, "I just don't feel like I've found a voice about all this yet." Hauerwas doesn't like it when people tell pacifists to "just shut up and sit down" during a time like this. He believes that pacifists cannot be expected to have easy policy answers for every difficult political situation that are often created, in part, by not listening to the voices of nonviolence in the first place.

Nevertheless, he believes the advocates of nonviolence can and should offer alternatives that reduce the violence in any conflict. As a professor of ethics, he is quite willing to call governments to observe the principles of a "just war," such as the recognition that soldiers killing each other is morally preferable to soldiers murdering civilians. And Hauerwas favors the use of international courts and global police to resolve conflicts. But he doesn't agree with the conventional wisdom that says "The world changed on Sept. 11." Hauerwas says, "No, the world changed in 33 A.D. The question is how to narrate what happened on Sept. 11 in light of what happened in 33 A.D."

Walter Wink, a biblical scholar at Auburn Theological Seminary, offers a crucial critique of how—in the war against terrorism—the "myth of redemptive violence" is again being used to try to prove to us how violence can save us. He remains convinced that it cannot. Nonetheless, he admits to being glad when the "bad guys" lose in Afghanistan and women, among others, are liberated from Taliban tyranny. He too would greatly prefer the course of international law and police. We simply haven't trained the churches, or anybody else for that matter, in the crucial theology and practice of active nonviolence, says Wink. That must now become our priority. Wink would no doubt agree with the approach of Fuller Theological Seminary professor Glen Stassen, who speaks convincingly of the "transforming initiatives" that can be taken to reduce violence in any situation of conflict. Exploring what practical nonviolent initiatives can be undertaken to open up new possibilities is more important to Stassen than merely reiterating that one doesn't believe in violence.

John Paul Lederach, who teaches at Notre Dame and Eastern Mennonite University, is perhaps doing more to open up those possibilities than any other con-

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temporary Christian thinker or practitioner of nonviolence. In this terrorism crisis, he has many creative insights into how a network like bin Laden's might be defanged and defeated without bombing an entire country. In particular, Lederach speaks of the need to form "new alliances" with those closest to the "inside" of a violent situation. In this case, he feels that Islamic fundamentalists who don't share the terrorist's commitment to violence might be the most instrumental group in defeating them. Undermining violence from within, Lederach feels, can often be more effective than attacking it from without.

In this crisis, Christians must continue to defend the innocent from military reprisal, prevent a dangerous and wider war, and oppose the unilateralism of superpowers. But we must also help stop bin Laden, his networks of violence, and the threat they pose to everything we love and value. All that presents difficult questions for peacemakers, but it is a challenge we dare not turn away from.

No one has all the answers. Humility is a good trait for Christian peacemakers, while self-righteousness is both spiritually inappropriate and politically self-defeating. This much is clear: Jesus calls us to be *peacemakers*, not just *peacelovers*. That will inevitably call us to face hard questions with no easy answers. In the end, Christian peacemaking is more a path than a position. ■

*Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners. This article appeared in the January-February 2002 issue of Sojourners magazine.*

