

Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict

Chenoweth, Erica, and Stephan, Maria J. *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. West Sussex, England: Columbia University Press; 2011. Paperback, 320 pages, 11 figures, 19 tables. ISBN: 978-0-231-15683-7. \$22.00/£15.00.

Review by COL (Ret) Warner “Rocky” D. Farr, MD, MPH

Is violence always the most effective way of waging a political struggle? Do opposition movements choose violence because it is inherently more effective than the alternative nonviolent strategies to achieve their chosen policy goals? I was reading an article in *Foreign Policy* magazine recently concerning the Ukraine. It postulated that the way ahead for the Ukrainians was to use nonviolent resistance against the Russians. It further stated that “evidence shows that nonviolent resistance is roughly twice as effective as armed conflict in routing dictators and ending foreign occupations.”¹ Such a broad statement raised the eyebrows of



this Special Forces Soldier and I chased down the reference. It was first an article² (its case study being East Timor) and then it became a book—hence, now it is a book review. How do nonviolent oppositions compare with violent resistance movements in their ability to remove a regime or in achieving secession? Does it succeed more often and does it result in easier transitions to democracy? Is it cheaper, better, easier?

This book looks at the success of nonviolent resistance campaigns by the use of selected case studies. The featured studies include the Iranian Revolution, 1977–1979, the First Palestinian Intifada, 1987–1992, the Philippine People Power Movement, 1983–1986, and the failed Burmese Uprising, 1988–1990. The authors develop a penetrating analysis of the conditions under which nonviolent resistances succeed or fail. This volume shows that the traditional scholarly emphasis on only forceful approaches has ignored the ability of nonviolent movements to often better mobilize supporters, better resist regime crackdowns, better develop innovative resistant techniques, and in other ways take on and defeat repressive regimes and then frequently to build durable democracies.

The analysis in this book is quite rigorous and well documented. The lists of movements and the authors’ conclusions should have profound implications for anyone seeking to understand such movements. The authors evaluated 323 violent and nonviolent campaigns occurring between 1900 and 2006. They found that the nonviolent campaigns succeeded 53% of the time, while only 27% of the armed struggles ultimately succeeded. This went for the entire spectrum of severity of repressive regimes and for all regions of the world. It is interesting that Max Boot’s book³ “*Invisible Armies*” and Asprey’s classic work⁴ “*War in the Shadows*” both have lists of insurrections and these lists DO NOT overlap very much with the

list of nonviolent campaigns in the back of this book. This disconnection demonstrates something, most probably my lack of knowledge!

So, why does nonviolence work more often? The authors postulate that a commitment to nonviolence enhances both the domestic and the international legitimacy of movements and encourages a broader-based participation in the resistance movement, which then causes increased pressure on the targeted regime. In addition, targeted regimes find it harder to oppress nonviolent movements and any attempts at repression tend to backfire more often. Nonviolent movements are perceived as less extreme and therefore have an enhanced appeal, which facilitates their extraction of concessions in bargaining with the regime. A regime is 12 times more likely to grant limited concessions to a nonviolent opposition versus to a violent opposition. In addition, regime members such as civil servants, security forces, and the judiciary seem more likely to shift allegiance to nonviolent opposition groups than to outwardly violent opposition alternatives. If resistance movements are threatening regime members with violence, then they do not become attractive choices for turncoats to consider. There is a bit of advanced mathematics in this study, and one regression analysis shows that nonviolent movements have a statistically significantly higher percentage of population participation than violent movements. These authors make a very good case challenging the conventional wisdom that a resistance movement, being weaker, must always resort to the use of force against the stronger regime in power. Think of it as another tool in your toolbox.

References

1. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/04/10/how_to_beat_russian_occupation_non_violent_ukraine_flash_mob?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_term=%2AMorning%20Brief&utm_campaign=MB.04.11.2014.
2. Stephan MJ, Chenoweth E. Why civil resistance works. *Int Security*. 2008;33:7–44. http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/IS3301_pp007-044_Stephan_Chenoweth.pdf.
3. Boot M. *Invisible armies: an epic history of guerrilla warfare from ancient times to the present*. New York, NY: Liv-eright; 2013.
4. Asprey RB. *War in the shadows: the guerrilla in history. Two thousand years of the guerrilla at war from Ancient Persia to the present*. New York, NY: William Morrow; 1994.