

# BRINGING DOWN A DICTATOR



**A Discussion Guide**



# INTRODUCTION

In October 2000, Yugoslav dictator Slobodan Milosevic was removed from power—not by force of arms, as many had predicted, but by a dedicated, nonviolent strategy of honest elections and massive civil disobedience. Milosevic was strengthened by patriotic fervor when NATO bombed Yugoslavia in early 1999, but a few months later, a student movement named Otpor ("resistance" in Serbian) launched a surprising offensive. Audaciously demanding the removal of Milosevic, Otpor recruited where discontent was strongest, in the Serbian heartland. Otpor's weapons were rock concerts and ridicule, the Internet and e-mail, spray-painted slogans and a willingness to be arrested. Otpor students became the shock troops in an army of human rights, pro-democracy, anti-war and women's groups, and opposition political parties.

"Bringing Down a Dictator" is the story of a nonviolent democratic movement that defeated the authoritarian regime of Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia through free elections and massive civil disobedience. The students of Otpor took the lead, adopting a nonviolent strategy that traces its roots to Mohandas Gandhi and the American civil rights movement, among others. This documentary examines those ideas and how they might be used against the world's remaining non-democratic regimes.

## How to Use This Guide

This guide, together with the television program, is a resource for informal discussion groups as well as a supplement in high school and college courses in social studies, world history, international studies, and political science. These materials correlate with the following standards developed by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS):

### **Power, Authority, & Governance:**

Provide for the study of how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance.

### **Individual Development & Identity:**

Provide for the study of individual development and identity (values).

### **Global Connections:**

Provide for the study of global connections and interdependence.

### **Civic Ideals & Practices:**

Provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

### **Specifically, students will be able to study:**

- the "pillars of support" that can be mobilized by the opposition to weaken and dissolve a dictatorship;
- how the world's democracies can help people struggling to remove dictators;
- how nonviolent struggle can be a laboratory and training ground for democracy;
- why nonviolent strategies can sometimes be more effective than military strategy.

Highlights of Balkan history provide the context for understanding both the role played by the Serb culture of victimization and isolation and Milosevic's exploitation of this deep-rooted consciousness to seize power.

More information and resources can be found on the "Bringing Down a Dictator" Web site: [www.aforcemorepowerful.org](http://www.aforcemorepowerful.org).



# Slobodan Milosevic: A Biographical Sketch

Slobodan Milosevic was born in Pozarevac, a small town outside of Belgrade, in 1941, the same year the Nazis invaded Yugoslavia. In his younger days, Milosevic was described as an ordinary but good student, serious and disciplined. In high school he met his future wife, Mirjana (Mira) Markovic, and at age 18 joined the Communist party. He studied law at Belgrade University, where he met the slightly older Ivan Stambolic, a party member who became his best friend and mentor. In 1964 Milosevic finished law school near the top of his class, and the following March he and Mira were married.

Active in party politics in college, Milosevic was a master apparatchik with a talent for manipulation and political survival. After college he held a number of party positions in Belgrade city government. His mentor, Stambolic, was moving up the party ladder and through the 1970s and 1980s he helped Milosevic advance.

In 1986, Milosevic was elected Serbian regional Communist Party President. That same year, he quietly began taking up the cause of Serbian nationalism. Stambolic and others rightly saw this as a major threat to Yugoslavian unity. By this time, realizing the importance of the media in his drive to power, Milosevic had already begun bringing the media under his control.

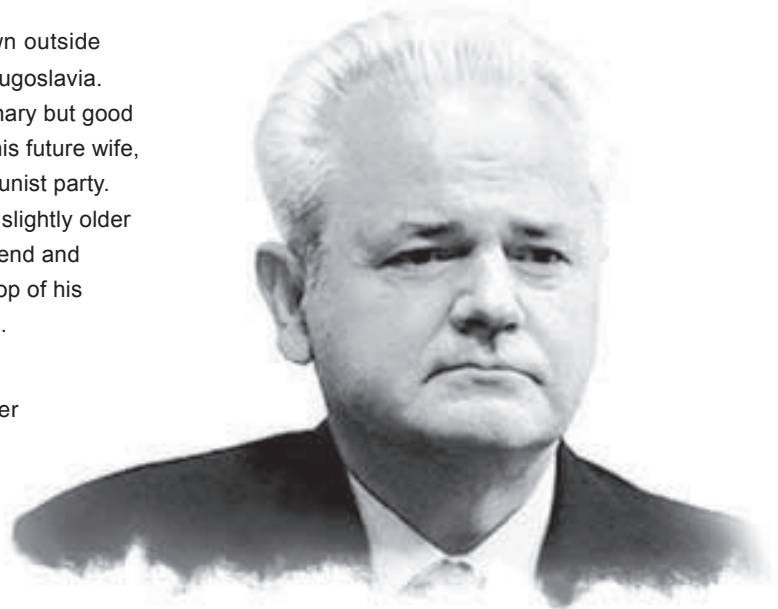
Throughout 1987, Milosevic continued to consolidate his power and launched an attack on Stambolic, his old friend and mentor, which led to the latter's ouster as leader of Serbia. In July, 1990, Milosevic was elected President of the newly-formed Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) and holds that post today. Later the same year, with his wife Mira helping to plot his political maneuvers, Milosevic used the cause of Serbian nationalism to gain the presidency of Serbia. In the following years he started four Balkan wars, in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, creating hundreds of thousands of refugees. The continuing

wars and a disastrous economy led to serious unrest throughout Serbia in the 1990s. These economic crises, and the impact of international sanctions against Serbia because of the war in Bosnia, compelled Milosevic to sign the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995, ending the civil war in Bosnia.



After two terms as President of Serbia, Milosevic was elected President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in July, 1997. In March 1999, NATO began a bombing campaign in an effort to stop the repression of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. In June, Milosevic agreed to withdraw from Kosovo, and the bombing was stopped.

In July of 2000, seriously underestimating the depth of public antagonism towards his regime, Milosevic called for early elections. Although he lost the elections in September, he attempted to manipulate the vote. Ten days of strikes, protests, and massive civil disobedience paralyzed the country, culminating in the storming of the federal Parliament on October 5. Milosevic was arrested on April 1, 2001 and extradited to the Hague. His trial for crimes against humanity began on February 12, 2002.



# A Brief History and Timeline

*The information below outlines Balkan history, providing a basis for understanding the ethnic tensions in the region and the roots of Serbian feelings of victimization which were exploited by Slobodan Milosevic in his rise to power.*



When they first migrated from areas to the north and east of the Balkan peninsula in the sixth century A.D., and for hundreds of years afterward, the Serbs were a collection of loosely organized tribes. In the twelfth century, Stefan Nemanja, head of an early ruling family, transformed the Serbs into a people with a distinct identity. By the mid-1300s the Serbian Kingdom controlled most of the territory of the Balkan peninsula.

June 28, 1389—St. Vitus's Day—was a major turning point in Serbian history. An invading Ottoman army defeated Serbian forces led by Prince Lazar at Kosovo Polje (Field of Blackbirds). In the ensuing centuries, the Serbs unsuccessfully rebelled against the Ottoman Turks several times: in the late 1600s, and twice in the early 1800s. Finally, in 1912, Serbia fought two Balkan Wars, which drove the Turks out of the Balkans. However, in Bosnia, which had been annexed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1908, there was great unrest. The Austrian move had support among Bosnian Muslims, but the Serbs in that region and in Serbia were troubled and planned an insurrection. This was the situation on June 28, 1914 when the Bosnian student, Gavrilo Princip, assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Hapsburg (Austro-Hungarian) Empire, touching off World War I.

After World War I, the Treaty of Versailles redrew Balkan political boundaries, creating the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. In 1929, King Alexander I changed the name of the state to Yugoslavia, the land of the southern Slavs. During World War II Yugoslavia endured a three-year occupation by Nazi Germany, with Croatian Fascists and Bosnian Muslims joining forces with the Nazis against the Serbs. In 1944, Communist forces led by Josip Broz, popularly known as Tito, captured Belgrade. Tito unified Yugoslavia and ruled it as an independent Communist state until his death in 1980.

## Sorting Out the Balkans

The Balkan Peninsula is a land of complex ethnic patterns and influences. This wedge-shaped area of land includes Albania, Bulgaria, mainland Greece, the European section of Turkey, parts of Romania and most of the former Yugoslavia. Collectively, these lands are known as the Balkans. The name "Balkan" means "mountain" in Turkish, and mountain ranges are the major topographical feature of the peninsula.

The population of this area is about 65 million. The majority are Slavs, including Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Bulgars, and Macedonians. The Greeks and Albanians are non-Slavic people.

There are three main religions in the Balkans:

- 1) Eastern Orthodox Christianity, the predominant religion of the Serbs, Bulgarians, Macedonians and Romanians;
- 2) Roman Catholicism, practiced primarily by the Croats and Slovenes;
- 3) Islam, whose followers are mainly in Kosovo, Bosnia, central Serbia, Albania, and Bulgaria.

Over the centuries, the language, customs, dress, food and music of the people of the Balkans have been strongly influenced by a mix of Slavic and Turkish culture, the two main cultures of the region.

# The Milosevic Era

**1987** - Slobodan Milosevic gained sensational popularity when, during a minor dispute between ethnic Albanians and Serbs, he invoked Serb nationalism.

**1989** - Milosevic's speech at Kosovo Polje on June 28, the 500th anniversary of Serbia's defeat by the Turks, stirred up Serbian nationalism and began the process of Yugoslavia's disintegration.

**1991** - The first mass demonstrations against Milosevic's rule took place in Belgrade. Slovenia and Croatia declared independence.

**1992** - Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina declared independence. Yugoslavia erupted into civil war; thousands were killed and millions were displaced in ethnic cleansing operations.

**1995** - American pressure to end the war led to the Dayton Peace Accords, which created a multi-ethnic government in Bosnia. Sixty thousand NATO troops were sent into Bosnia.

**1996** - Elections were held for the Yugoslav Federal Parliament - now including only Serbia and Montenegro. Serbian leaders of the opposition Zajedno ("Together") claimed victory in 32 municipalities, including Belgrade. Milosevic annulled the election results, prompting successful protests. The protests forced Milosevic to recognize and accept the victory of his opponents. The opposition took power in most principal cities of the country, which provided a platform to organize against Milosevic. The protest and opposition movements learned many key lessons from their success against Milosevic in those protests - lessons which the Otpor students applied in their movement beginning in 1998.

**1997** - Barred from serving another term as president of Serbia, Milosevic was elected President of Yugoslavia.

**1999** - In March, NATO launched a series of attacks against military and industrial targets in Serbia and Kosovo, until Serb forces withdrew from the region three months later. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia indicted Milosevic on charges of crimes against humanity during the NATO bombing.

**2000** - Milosevic was defeated at the polls by Vojislav Kostunica.

**2001** - On June 28, St. Vitus's Day, Milosevic was extradited to The Hague to be tried on charges arising out of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.





# DISCUSSION

1. Otpor did not act alone in bringing about Milosevic's downfall. What other groups became involved in the anti-Milosevic movement? How was Otpor able to enlist their support? What role did other opposition groups play in the movement to remove Milosevic from power?
2. In preparing for the September 2000 elections that ultimately unseated Milosevic, the opposition had extensive help in the form of financial assistance and training from the United States and European countries. What were some of the specific tactics used in the campaign and in monitoring the elections that helped Vojislav Kostunica, the opposition candidate, defeat Milosevic? Can these same tactics be used successfully in other countries trying to establish a democratic form of government? Explain.
3. The Argentine poet and short story writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) said, "Violence is the last sanctuary of the weak." Discuss the meaning of this quote. Why did Srdja Popovic, a leader of Otpor, adopt this quote? What does it say about what he and others in Otpor thought of Milosevic, his use of violence, and his position in Serbia at that time? In the context of this quote, discuss the following:
  - the use of violence by the Milosevic regime in the former Yugoslavia;
  - the purpose and effectiveness of the NATO bombing in that country;
  - the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in September 2001 and the U.S. response to those attacks.
4. Otpor was a student-led movement, not the first time that young people have led the way in agitating for change. The lunch counter sit-ins in the American south in the 1950s and 1960s; the anti-war demonstrations during the Vietnam War, and the marches in Tiananmen Square in 1989 are just a few examples of students taking the lead in trying to bring about change. Why are young people often at the forefront of major social and political movements? In what ways might young age affect people's idealism and their willingness to take action? In what ways might economic times affect people's idealism and their willingness to take action? What conditions made students able to take the actions they did and lead the democracy movement? How was youth culture such as rock 'n roll a part of the movement? Early in the film, Ivan Marovic says of people's view of Otpor, "These are just kids." What does Marovic mean? In what ways can this quote be misinterpreted?
5. A number of factors contributed to the overthrow of Milosevic, especially financial assistance and training from the United States. Based on information in the film, discuss the role of each of the following in bringing down the Milosevic regime:
  - Aid from the United States and European countries
  - The NATO bombing
  - Elections
  - Street marches and protests
  - The strike at the Kolubara Coal Mine



# ACTIVITY: Understanding Nonviolent Conflict

## Resources

*From Dictatorship to Democracy* - <http://www.aeinstein.org/organizations98ce.html>

198 Methods of Nonviolent Action - <http://www.aeinstein.org/organizaitons103a.html>

*A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* - [www.aforcemorepowerful.org](http://www.aforcemorepowerful.org)

Before having the students view the film, review the information below with them. For in-depth background, read *From Dictatorship to Democracy* by Gene Sharp of the Albert Einstein Institution. Chapters 3 and 4 are especially critical for understanding the pillars of support that are used by a dictator and the potential areas of vulnerability that can be exploited by groups opposing a dictator.

## What is Nonviolent Conflict?

In removing Slobodan Milosevic from power, the members of Otpor devised a nonviolent strategy. Nonviolent conflict shares some principles with conventional warfare: to paraphrase Col. Robert Helvey (interviewed in "Bringing Down A Dictator"), the

objective must be clear; forces must be brought together at a decisive point; protagonists must take the offense and avoid being on the defensive. However, in contrast to the weapons of violent conflict, the weapons of nonviolent struggle are psychological, social, economic, and political. In a nonviolent conflict people may refuse to perform acts that they usually perform or are required by law to perform; or they may perform acts that they do not usually perform or are forbidden to perform. Nonviolent conflict is not passive; it is action that is nonviolent, though it can be very disruptive.



About two hundred specific methods of nonviolent action have been identified, classified into three broad categories: nonviolent protest and persuasion, such as banners, leaflets, marches, and assemblies; non-cooperation (social, economic and political), such as boycotts, strikes, and civil disobedience; and nonviolent intervention, such as hunger strikes, sit-ins, and guerilla theater. (For a complete list of the methods of nonviolent protest and persuasion, see Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, vol. 2; Boston: P. Sargent, 1973; or visit - <http://www.aeinstein.org/organizations103a.html>)

# ACTIVITY (continued)

## Otpor's Nonviolent Weapons

**Before viewing:** Have the students read *From Dictatorship to Democracy* (see above) - Chapter 3, "Whence Comes the Power?" and Chapter 4, "Dictatorships Have Weaknesses". Discuss the sources of power in the U. S. government and how that power can be limited or controlled. What factors make it possible for a dictator to take control and maintain his rule?

**Focus for viewing:** Have the students view the film and note the different methods Otpor used in moving toward its objective. Tell the students that they will see some of the methods and also hear some described in individual interviews. Ask the students to list the weaknesses of the Milosevic regime that Otpor was able to exploit.

**After viewing:** Ask the students to list the various methods of protest used by Otpor. Give the students copies of the list 198 Methods of Nonviolent Action. Ask students to identify the methods they saw in the film and where those methods appear in the list. Have a discussion about Otpor's actions in the campaign to remove Milosevic from power. Describe the purpose and the degree of effectiveness of each one. Why did Otpor choose to make its movement nonviolent? When can nonviolent action be more effective than violent action?



**Extension:** To give the students a broader view of strategic nonviolent strategy, have them review one or more of the conflicts described in *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict*. You may use either the book or the video. Go to [www.aforcemorepowerful.org](http://www.aforcemorepowerful.org) for complete information. Explain that one of these first steps in developing a nonviolent strategy is to identify the totalitarian regime's "pillars of support"—those institutions that provide the dictator with his necessary sources of power. These could be the police or military, businesses, the press, and other organizations. The sources of power are different for each situation. Ask students to choose one of the conflicts mentioned above and identify the "pillars of support" that were targeted in the nonviolent movement toward democracy.



# RESEARCH

## U.S. Foreign Policy

The Balkan Wars and the ethnic cleansing sparked by Slobodan Milosevic took place during the 1990s. Have the students do research to answer the following questions: What principles guided U.S. foreign policy then? Were there changes in policy from the first Bush Administration to the Clinton Administration? Leading up to the Dayton Accords in 1995, why was Milosevic seen as the key to peace in Yugoslavia? Why was the U.S. not more supportive of the opposition to Milosevic? What is the U.S. policy toward Yugoslavia and the other Balkan countries today? After students complete their research, have a class discussion of these questions.

## Advocates of Nonviolent Action

Otpor based its strategy and tactics on those developed by earlier leaders of nonviolent conflicts. Have the students choose an advocate of nonviolent action and report on how that person came to adopt a nonviolent strategy in the pursuit of a particular cause. Among the individuals students may consider are Henry David Thoreau, Mohandas K. Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Bishop Desmond Tutu, Corazon Aquino, and Lech Walesa.

## Spreading Nonviolent Strategy

*Note: Before beginning this activity, review with the students one or more of the conflicts featured in "A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict", using either the book or the video. Complete information is at [www.aforcemorepowerful.org](http://www.aforcemorepowerful.org)*

Ask students to make a list of areas of conflict in the world today. They can find this information in the newspaper, newsmagazines, or online news reports. Divide the students into groups and ask each group to choose one of the conflicts and analyze it in terms of its "readiness" for nonviolent action. The students should identify the following:

- the parties in the conflict;
- which of the conflicting groups might take the lead in applying nonviolent tactics;
- one clear objective of the nonviolent conflict;
- suggested methods of nonviolent action they would use.

## The Media and Modern Conflicts

Have the students explore how the media were used by Milosevic to stir up and maintain nationalistic feelings among the Serbian population. One good source of this information is *Milosevic: Portrait of a Tyrant* by Dusko Doder and Louise Branson (see Resources). How did Otpor and other opposition groups use these same media to spread their message? Why was the Internet important in this struggle?

Next, ask the students to review American media reports on the "war on terrorism", comparing the coverage in the weeks immediately following September 11, 2001 with more recent reporting. Divide the students into groups who will review news and special reports on television; in major newspapers; newsmagazines; and the Internet. Each group should produce a written report noting any changes in coverage of the war over time, as well as the level of detail in the news reports, and the sources cited by the journalist. Have the class analyze the news reports as to whether they are favorable or unfavorable toward the government and its actions. Discuss the ways news can be controlled in a democracy.

# RESEARCH

## Taking a Stand

Have students write a response to one of the following:

- 1 - The members of Otpor and other opposition groups in Serbia faced the police during street protests. Sometimes the police were relatives of the protesters; some protesters' parents worked for the government. Similarly, during the Vietnam War era, children and parents (including government leaders) often found themselves on opposite sides of the fence. Would you be willing to stand up against your government even if it meant that you would be standing up against your parent's employer? Why or why not? Would you be able to face your parents across the dinner table after you had spent the day facing them across "enemy lines"? Explain. How would your parents feel about you participating in a group such as Otpor?
- 2 - The United States government gave over \$25 million dollars in aid to Otpor and other opposition groups during the movement against Milosevic. Some of these groups declared themselves to be anti-American. What is the purpose of the US funding of anti-American groups overseas? Does accepting US funds weaken a group's anti-American stance? If a group is fighting for justice, does that automatically mean that the group is a good group? Do the methods they use in their fight have any effect on whether the group is "good" or not? Explain your answers to the last three questions.
- 3 - In Serbia, the students were spurred to act by strong feelings of injustice and outrage. They wanted to change their lives and make their country a better place to live in. What type of situation or issue might make you act against the government or established authority? What would you do?



# Resources

## Books:

Ackerman, Peter and Jack DuVall. *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

Ackerman, Peter, and Christopher Kruegler. *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century*. Westport: Praeger, 1994.

Campbell, Greg. *The Road to Kosovo: A Balkan Diary*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000.

Collin, Matthew. *This is Serbia Calling: Rock 'n' Roll Radio and Belgrade's Underground Resistance*. London: Serpent's Tail Press, 2001.

Daalder, Ivo H. and Michael E. O'Hanlon. *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2000.

Doder, Dusko, and Louise Branson. *Milosevic: Portrait of a Tyrant*. New York: The Free Press, 1999.

Glenny, Misha. *The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers, 1804-1999*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2000.

Gordy, Eric D. *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.

Halberstam, David. *War in a Time of Peace*. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 2001

Ilic, Vladimir. *Otpor: In or Beyond Politics*. Helsinki: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, 2001.

Sharp, Gene. *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*. Boston: The Albert Einstein Institution, 1993.

Sharp, Gene. *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 3 vols. Boston: P. Sargent, 1973.

## Web Sites:

**www.b92.net** - B92 is an independent radio and television station in Belgrade. It began as a student radio station and has become an umbrella association including the fields of television, radio, Internet, music, film and publishing. Along the way B92 has pioneered the use of the Internet as a means of bypassing media repression; won global acclaim for its part in the downfall of a corrupt and violent regime; and nurtured a thriving creative scene in Yugoslavia. The site includes daily news updates, archives, and information on the fall of Slobodan Milosevic.

# RESOURCES

**www.un.org/icty** - The International Criminal Tribunal of the Former Yugoslavia is responsible for trying serious violations of International Humanitarian Law in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. The ICTY is a part of the United Nations Security Council.

## Organizations

**The Albert Einstein Institution** ([www.aeinstein.org](http://www.aeinstein.org)) is a nonprofit organization advancing the study and use of strategic nonviolent action in conflicts throughout the world.

**The Foreign Policy Association** (FPA) ([www.fpa.org](http://www.fpa.org)) is a rational, nonpartisan, non-governmental, educational organization founded in 1918 to educate Americans about significant world issues that affect their lives. FPA provides programs and publications that reach high school and college students as well as adults.

**Freedom House** ([www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)) is a clear voice for democracy and freedom around the world. Founded nearly sixty years ago by Eleanor Roosevelt, Wendell Willkie and other Americans concerned with the mounting threats to peace and democracy, Freedom House has been a vigorous proponent of democratic values and a steadfast opponent of dictatorship of the far left and the far right. A non-partisan and broad-based organization, Freedom House is led by a Board of Trustees comprised of leading Democrats, Republicans, and independents; business and labor leaders; former senior government officials; scholars; writers; and journalists.

**Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe** ([www.idea.org](http://www.idea.org)) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

**International Republican Institute** (IRI) ([www.iri.org](http://www.iri.org)) was established as a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing democracy. IRI conducts a wide range of international programs to promote and strengthen democratic ideals and institutions. These programs include training on such issues as civic responsibility, the legislative process for newly elected government officials and the mechanics of organizing political parties and election campaigns.

**National Democratic Institute for International Affairs** (NDI) ([www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org)) is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions.

**The United States Institute of Peace** ([www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)) is an independent, nonpartisan federal institution created and funded by Congress to strengthen the nation's capacity to promote the peaceful resolution of international conflict. The Institute's Board of Directors is appointed by the President of the United States and confirmed by Congress.

**The World Affairs Councils of America** ([www.worldaffairsCouncils.org](http://www.worldaffairsCouncils.org)) are nonprofit, nonpartisan organizations open to all who wish to join. The Councils' educational and travel programs are designed to connect people at the grassroots level.

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NARRATED BY MARTIN SHEEN

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