

POWER BY THE PEOPLE

Ending the World's Nightmare of Oppression and Violence

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Bleeding Kansas

Three years and three days ago, a violent nightmare was dreamt in broad daylight in New York and Washington. Nineteen hijackers, all civilians born and bred in six nations ruled by dictators, killed 2,700 civilians on the soil and in the skies of a nation governed by its people.

America has seen atrocities before. Even here in Kansas, unlikely to be touched by terror in the future, terror came to towns and farms -- in the 19th century, in the years preceding the adoption of the state's first constitution. Gangs of Kansans who wanted the state to allow slavery fought with gangs of "free-staters". One entire town, thought to be harboring freed slaves, was destroyed. People were hacked to death in the streets. The nation called it "Bleeding Kansas."

In the wake of this, a former congressman from Illinois newly emerging on the national scene, Abraham Lincoln, came to Leavenworth, Kansas in December 1859 and gave a speech about the meaning of the country's struggle over slavery. One onlooker noted that buttons were missing from Lincoln's shirt, another said he spoke without grace. We have no transcript of the speech, but the response of those who listened was thunderous.

Two months later Lincoln gave essentially the same speech at the Cooper Union Institute in New York. That one was printed in the newspapers -- and catapulted him toward his party's presidential nomination. In the speech Lincoln told the nation that those who thought slavery was wrong had to oppose its expansion. He said they shouldn't try to grope "for some middle ground between the right and wrong," nor be frightened by the "menaces of destruction" coming from those who believed in slavery. And in his text, he capitalized his final sentence: "LET US HAVE FAITH THAT RIGHT MAKES MIGHT, AND IN THAT FAITH, LET US, TO THE END, DARE TO DO OUR DUTY AS WE UNDERSTAND IT."

If what is right is what is true, Lincoln's famous line foreshadowed what the great Czech freedom fighter, Václav Havel, wrote in his essay, "The Power of the Powerless," in 1979. Havel declared that all who live under oppression and do nothing to oppose it are living a lie -- the lie that life is normal -- but that all people had the choice to start telling the truth, beginning in their own minds. And that when enough people began to act on this truth and start resisting the lies and the rules of the state, it would open up "explosive" and "incalculable" power in the society.

Resistance to American slavery had begun decades before the Civil War, but seldom went beyond the protests of abolitionists, who lacked a strategy to make slave-holding harder. Lincoln was always less interested in taking a stand to make a moral point, than in standing for something that might rally a majority and accomplish change. The historian William Lee Miller says that Lincoln had little use for the "perfectionists, moralizers, fanatics and absolutists" of his time. "We can succeed only by concert," Lincoln once said. "It is not 'Can *any* of us *imagine* better?' but, 'Can we *all* do better?'"

So how did Lincoln “live in the truth” and open up power to change this nation? As Mohandas Gandhi did 60 years later, in rousing Indians to challenge the British raj, Lincoln started by explaining the truth about oppression, in words that all his fellow citizens could understand and that awakened their deepest sense of the country’s purpose. More than any other president, before or since, he taught America how to think about itself.

A Civil War of Ideas

Lincoln summed up what slave-holding meant in four words: “You work, I’ll eat.” And around this simple description, he wrapped a larger political meaning. He called the battle over slavery a conflict between “two principles” which he said “have stood face to face from the beginning of time”:

One is the common right of humanity and the other the divine right of kings. It is the same principle in whatever shape it develops itself. It is the same spirit that says, “You work and toil and earn bread, and I’ll eat it.” No matter in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of a king who seeks to bestride the people of his own nation and live by the fruit of their labor, or from one race of men as an apology for enslaving another race, it is the same tyrannical principle.

But Lincoln argued that for America, the conflict between these principles had already been settled, once and for all, in the Declaration of Independence, and that Americans had only to uphold both equality of rights and the democratic will, for our purpose and future as a nation to be secure. Fusing these ideas to clarify the issue of his day, he said:

The master not only governs the slave without his consent; but he governs him by a set of rules altogether different from those which he prescribes for himself. Allow ALL the governed an equal voice in the government, and that, and that only is self-government.

So there is no self-government unless every person has the right to give consent -- blacks as well as whites, women as well as men. Compare this concept of political rights to the ideas of those who launched the Confederacy. Its president, Jefferson Davis, who called African-Americans “degenerate,” said his government was founded on the principle that “the Negro is not equal to the white man” and boasted that it was “the first in the history of the world based upon this great physical and moral truth.”

But it was not the last government so founded. In 1933 Adolf Hitler lamented the defeat of the South in the American Civil War, and said: “The beginnings of a great new social order based on the principle of slavery and inequality were destroyed by that war, and with them also the embryo of a future truly great America.” The Nazis metastasized that tyrannical principle into the subjugation of Europe and the Holocaust, only to be dissolved in American blood shed on the beaches of France and the bridges into Germany.

Americans vanquished the idea of oppression here, and we helped extinguish it in Europe and the Pacific sixty years ago. We began to redeem Lincoln’s dream: He had said that the Founding Fathers had “reached forward and seized upon the farthest posterity. They erected a beacon to guide...the countless myriads who should inhabit the earth in other ages.” He said that self-government was “eternally right” and that its expression in America gave “hope to the world for all future time.”

Today three-quarters of the world's nations are ruled by their people, who have given their consent to governments they chose. Lincoln's hope has never been so broadly crystallized in fact. But the civil war of ideas that Lincoln framed is not over, and the "tyrannical principle" now threatens life and liberty once more.

Liberating the World

In his book, *Breaking the Real Axis of Evil: Ousting the World's Last Dictators by 2025*, Ambassador Mark Palmer counts 45 governments in the world that abuse human rights and rule their nations without their people's consent, including all those represented by the 9/11 hijackers. For example:

- In Yemen the president rules by decree, the jails are full of political prisoners, the bureaucracy is corrupt, and the country is a longtime haven for terrorists.
- In Syria the same party has held power for over 30 years, the regime helps fund the terrorist group Hezbollah, and the political opposition is underground.
- In Egypt the longtime president has never faced a contested presidential election, and his government jails political dissidents and outspoken human rights activists.
- In the United Arab Emirates, there are no elections at any level, the press practices self-censorship, and trade unions are illegal.
- In Saudi Arabia, political parties are illegal, the royal family rules by decree, there are no elections, and people can be arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned.

In none of these countries is government based on the will of the people, but to three of these oppressive regimes, and to many others, the U.S. government provides substantial military or economic assistance. However often our leaders say they stand for freedom, in too many places they pay those who suppress it.

But oppression cannot last forever. In 1848, a year when European monarchies were suddenly challenged by popular movements, Lincoln said: "Any people anywhere, being inclined and having the power, have the *right* to rise up, and shake off the existing government, and form a new one that suits them better. This is a most valuable – a most sacred right – a right, which we hope and believe, will liberate the world."

The people's *right* to resist oppression is what Lincoln extolled, but he knew that *having the power* to resist was crucial. Until his time, violent insurrection was the only form of revolutionary power widely tried, but about John Brown's attempt to inspire an armed slave rebellion in America, Lincoln said, "It was so absurd that the slaves...saw plainly enough that it could not succeed." He went further, deriding the very idea of zealots plotting violence: "An enthusiast broods over the oppression of a people till he fancies himself commissioned by Heaven to liberate them. He ventures the attempt, which ends in little else than his own execution."

Since the time of Lincoln, there is not a single case in which a violent movement has collapsed an authoritarian regime and replaced it with a government based on the consent of the people. How then have we come to the point that three-quarters of the world's nations are democratic? Some have been freed after wars begun by totalitarian rulers have ousted those

regimes. Yet there is another force in history that has liberated millions in great waves.

Forty years after Lincoln was martyred, the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy, campaigning for an end to conscription, predicted that “public opinion” would change “the whole structure of life” in the world, in the process of which violence would become “superfluous.” That echoed the American founder James Madison’s insight that “all government rests on opinion,” that it cannot function without the people’s acceptance.

While working as a lawyer in South Africa, Mohandas Gandhi said he was “overwhelmed” by Tolstoy’s arguments. Inventing a new way for his fellow Indians to fight against hated forms of discrimination, Gandhi enlisted them in burning their racial registration cards and engaging in mass illegal border crossings – all of which derailed the enforcement of a racial law, until it was withdrawn. Gandhi had refined raw negative public opinion into precisely applied political power.

He went on to wage twenty years of campaigns against British rule of India, using marches, boycotts and civil disobedience to demolish British confidence in the permanence of their control. Later the Danish and other European peoples engaged in strikes and nonviolent sabotage to obstruct Nazi occupiers in World War II. Applying Gandhi’s ideas, African-Americans disrupted racial segregation in the 1950s and 1960s, with sit-ins, boycotts and huge demonstrations, until the nation had to enforce their rights.

Less than ten years later, Polish dissidents joined striking shipyard workers to challenge unelected rulers with a new free trade union, soon joined by 10 million Poles -- undermining the regime’s legitimacy and later forcing free elections. In the same decade, Filipinos fielded the “people power” movement against the corrupt, autocratic president Ferdinand Marcos, splitting the loyalty of his military and forcing him out. Also in the 1980s, black South Africans, creating hundreds of civic groups in townships and villages, called strikes and boycotts to make their country “ungovernable” and its commerce less viable, sundering the apartheid system.

As that happened, a nonviolent civilian-based movement in Chile shook off the fear of a military junta, created space for regular protests, and won a plebiscite staged by Gen. Augusto Pinochet, dividing his generals and making him resign. The next year, millions in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and other East European nations besieged the boulevards of their cities and evicted ruling parties in a matter of weeks. In Mongolia the following year, student-led protests forced free elections, and at the end of the 1990’s, Serbian students galvanized the opposition to Slobodan Milosevic, generating a unified campaign capped by a million Serbs converging on Belgrade, until soldiers refused orders to crack down and the dictator had to go.

Today the makings of similar movements can be found in Iran, Ukraine, Belarus, and Zimbabwe. Civilian-based groups using nonviolent tactics are active in Hong Kong, Tibet, Burma, West Papua and the Palestinian Territories. Civilian opposition and dissidence are present in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and other Central Asian autocracies, and also in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and other Arab nations. And the preconditions for clandestine resistance and self-organizing are detectable even in North Korea.

In only one or two of these struggles have certain groups adopted “nonviolence” as a moral preference. Most have chosen nonviolent tactics because they realized that violence would be futile, or because ordinary people could not otherwise participate, sacrificing the full resistance potential of the population. Nonviolent movements that succeed in bringing down dictators do not abhor conflict. They want to recast or abort political systems that have tortured

and killed people.

Whatever their impetus for choosing civilian-based struggle, all these nonviolent warriors have instinctively grasped what Dr. Gene Sharp, the foremost living authority on nonviolent action, meant, when he wrote: "Liberation...ultimately depends on the people's ability to liberate themselves."

Nine Steps to Nine Lives

We know from testimony taken from terrorists arrested after the Madrid train bombings this year that some of the perpetrators rushed back to their apartments to watch the television coverage, savoring the shock they had caused the Spanish people. This was their moment of gratification, but in two centuries of terror, that is the main thing that terrorists have produced – spectacles, not power.

The gratification of those joining a nonviolent struggle is not immediate, and the liberation they attain is hardly ever on the nightly news. Instead, it becomes a fact of history. The British thought they defeated Gandhi after the Salt March in 1931, but they eventually lost India. The Polish communists thought they had beaten Lech Walesa when they dragged him off to prison in 1981, but he told them: "You idiots, at this moment you lost; you will come back to us on your knees." Seven years later, they did. Many nonviolent fighters seem to have nine lives. How is their endurance, and the success of their movements, achieved?

First, the leaders of a civilian-based movement have to articulate clear goals that reflect the people's grievances and animate a sense of the injustice they have borne. Gandhi, Adam Michnik in Poland, Corazon Aquino in the Philippines – they all said essentially, "This government is running the country for their own benefit. Why should we help them?"

Second, the movement's organizers have to recruit people from all walks of life to diversify its ranks and broaden the scope of non-cooperation with the demands and decrees of the government -- and they have to unify the opposition behind the basic objective of ousting the regime, without which any particular political goals are unreachable.

Third, the movement's leaders should develop a strategic estimate of all the material, economic and political sources of the regime's power and devise and employ tactics that dilute that power. The political philosopher Hannah Arendt said, "It is the people's support that lends power to the institutions of a country." When that support contracts, and the people act to shred those institutions' ties to the regime, it cannot cling to power.

Fourth, the movement should multiply acts of small-scale resistance horizontally throughout the country, straining the outermost ranks of the regime's repressive apparatus – and the initial tactics should entail low physical risk, to lessen the fear of participating.

Fifth, all stages of the resistance should remain nonviolent, to insure that the movement gains the upper hand in the contest for legitimacy with the regime, which will inevitably discredit itself with acts of brutality – and to prompt the police and military to realize that the movement is not aiming at them, it's aiming at the top.

Sixth, a campaign to sow doubt about the regime's future should be aimed at policemen and soldiers, to befriend them or soften potential rancor. The inner core of an oppressive regime is usually narcissistic and venal, and its armed defenders know that best of all. They

may turn to an increasingly popular movement in a crisis, when defections are conceivable.

Seventh, the movement should seek support from abroad, in the form of direct aid from nongovernmental organizations and foundations, as well as foreign governments so long as that bestows no propaganda benefit on the regime. And international sanctions should be sought, if they are targeted at rulers, not the people.

Eighth, a movement must be ready for a last burst of repression, know when to pause to give itself the opportunity to regroup, or be prepared to exploit an opportunity to negotiate, to obtain more defensible political space if it needs more time before pressing forward again. In short, it has to know how to downshift as well as move into overdrive, as circumstances require.

Ninth, once the movement has gathered as much momentum inside and outside the country as it can reasonably expect, it should escalate resistance to force the regime on the defensive. If the dictator is ridiculed in cafes and classrooms, if taxes and fees go unpaid, if public administration is in disarray, if police and soldiers are demoralized, and if key industries are grinding down, then a dictator's system for keeping control is jeopardized. His only real power derives from making his own people and the world believe that he cannot be ousted except through violence. Once that belief is destroyed, the end is predictable.

Col. Robert Helvey, the president of the Albert Einstein Institution, puts it this way: "A military victory is achieved by destroying the opponent's capacity and/or willingness to continue the fight. In this regard, nonviolent strategy is no different from armed conflict, except that very different weapons systems are employed." What weapons? The truth told openly to counter official lies, the systematic blockage of official business by people who no longer comply, the courageous seizure of public spaces by the people for whom they were built, and the undoing of repression itself by people refusing to follow orders.

Hannah Arendt translated the old Latin truism, *potestas in populo*, as: "Without a people...there is no power." Lincoln framed the idea this way: "Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed." Not even oppression.

So the consent of the people is not just the only legitimate basis of power in a constitutional democracy, it is the fulcrum and agent of power in any society. Power is not only validated by the people, it can be wielded by the people, everywhere. But here and abroad that is still not understood by many who hold office, by most of the media that report on groups contending for power, and definitely not by those who seek it through violence.

"Their Language Smelled Like Death"

In his "Declaration of War Against the Americans" in 1996, Osama bin Laden charged the U. S. with "carrying arms on our land" in the Arabian peninsula, and in his first statement after the attacks of 9/11, he said that American allies – India in its occupation of Kashmir and Israel in its occupation of Palestine – placed Muslims in "a large prison of fear and subdual." He declared that "our fight against these governments is not separate from our fight against you."

In other words, al Qaeda and the wider network it has energized cast themselves as fighters against oppression. America is targeted because we are seen as bolstering their oppressors, not because they "hate our freedom." In fact Bin Laden acknowledges that the "American people have the ability and choice to refuse the policies of their government and even to change it if they want," which is convenient for him: It's why he says that killing civilians

is acceptable.

But would-be liberators are out of business if they don't have movements, and those who sign up are invited not only to embrace a movement's goals but also its strategy for action – which is why violence is proclaimed by terrorists as the only possible path to power. Bin Laden, sounding like Lenin, has said, "The walls of oppression and humiliation cannot be demolished except in a rain of bullets."

That, we know, is the voice of historical ignorance, and any movement predicated on ignorance is prone to failure. To expedite that failure, the vulnerabilities of terrorists should be discovered and targeted, and what is most vulnerable is their ideas. Right now the market for their ideas is growing -- the number of violent Muslim fighters targeting Americans is swelling. We can continue to rely mainly on a military strategy to reduce the supply of terrorists, and try to liquidate the market that way, hoping our tactics don't backfire. Or we can work to shrink the demand. And the demand comes from those who accept al Qaeda's claim that only terror will remove the American roadblock to self-rule in Muslim lands.

But the case for terror is built on false history, infeasible goals, and a form of fighting that only fanatical exhortation can freshen with new recruits. Bin Laden has declared that our democracy "is for the white race only" and declares that the U.S. had "no mentionable role" in the collapse of the Soviet Union, which he attributes to the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, of which he was a member.

Yet at the same time that he portrays the U.S. as cowardly and rotten, he implies we have decisive mastery of Muslims' fate. Two months after 9/11, he recited a poem on videotape, ending in these words: "We will not stop our raids, until you free our lands." Until we free *his* lands. Not the words of someone who knows how to liberate his people with the power they already possess.

So what is the heart of what he wants from America, which his followers are supposed to die for? There is no heart, there is only a litany of disparate demands: Bin Laden insists that all Americans (civilians as well as soldiers) leave all Muslim lands, stop interfering with traffic in weapons of mass destruction, outlaw alcohol and gambling, ban images of women in advertising, ratify the Kyoto agreement, stop banks from charging interest, quit other religions and adopt Islam, and stop using "bad manners". Unless we do these things, he will destroy us.

To accomplish that destruction, Islamist terror groups need a steady stream of fighters willing to die – and the lengths to which their language goes, to reinforce that readiness for suicide, approximates the jargon of a cult. In his "Declaration of War" on America, Bin Laden said that every Muslim has the "individual duty" to kill Americans "in any country in which it is possible" – a duty that all but a tiny handful of more than a billion Muslims have entirely disregarded in the six years since it was proclaimed. Indeed, the constant need of terrorists to re-legitimize violence reveals doubt that many followers can reflexively embrace it.

So Bin Laden quotes Allah's messenger, "The best of the martyrs are those who do not turn their faces away from battle till they are killed," and he tells Americans that young jihadists "have no intention except to enter paradise by killing you." But this empties the fighter's motivation of any political content, for if the only reason to kill is to be killed, the killer has abandoned concern for the living. Whatever else it may be, liberation is not about the dead.

This decoction of spurious ideas and demented urges can be discredited. We should

subsidize a vast new independent educational effort, with the collaboration of governments in the Islamic world, to document in schools and on television the two centuries of our struggle to reform and revitalize American self-government, so that all Muslims know that our dedication to rights and equality is embedded in our soul and more characteristic of who we are than our government's recent patronage of undemocratic governments. And that patronage should end, not because it places us under threat, but because it is wrong.

We can also undermine the culture of suicide in terrorist lore, not by denouncing it as evil, but by demonstrating to Muslims everywhere that it's not necessary, because the young people who kill themselves to attack our country -- which is based on the same idea they prize, the right to govern themselves -- can achieve that right without violence. Self-rule is not delivered by self-destruction. Muslim clerics who condemn terror are not in short supply, but they don't yet have an answer to the claim that no other strategy exists for Muslim peoples to gain the power they believe they lack. We can help them find that answer: the legacy and might of nonviolent movements, the strategy of civilian-based struggle.

There are many precedents in the history of Muslim nations for this kind of conflict, among them:

- In 1929, the Pashtun leader Abdul Ghaffar Khan founded his nonviolent "Servants of God" movement against British rule in what is now Pakistan. He organized hundreds of villages and thousands of people, to boycott state stores and lie down in front of police lines holding the Koran.
- In 1985, in Sudan, weeks of nonviolent protests in Khartoum and Omdurman against the repressive rule of a dictator was capped by a general strike that paved the way for a bloodless coup.
- In 1987-88, in the first Palestinian Intifada, tens of thousands of civilians boycotted Israeli products, marched in demonstrations, refused to pay fees, and inspired military "refuseniks" in Israel to split public support for the occupation.

This year in Egypt, opposition parties boycotted parliamentary elections, and civilian dissidents against authoritarian regimes in North Africa are gathering force. The ranks of these and other embryonic campaigns in the Islamic world, to open up closed societies and force governments to observe human rights, are more numerous than the membership of terrorist networks -- because they stand for people living freely, here and now.

A young leader in the Serbian nonviolent campaign against Slobodan Milosevic in 2000, Srjda Popovic, said that they succeeded because "we loved life more." He said the regime's very language "smelled like death," and that the people were tired of killing and desolation. Sometimes, something obvious still comes as a welcome relief: People don't like death. So when Bin Laden says, "Death is truth," he is upholstering the coffin of his own movement.

When they happened, the atrocities of 9/11 galvanized worldwide support for the United States. Any equivalent terrorism against us in the future would trigger the same reaction, so long as we are seen as loving life more than those who practice death. But the world so detests war, as history's surest bringer of death, it may no longer rally to a nation that invades another, even in the name of liberation.

Terror is less a form of war than it is a tactic of insurrection. To the extent it is

supplanted by another, more effective strategy to liberate those who are oppressed, it can be diminished. Terrorists kill people, and they must be stopped, but they won't be stopped until their ideas are. Their ideas are merely the latest shape that Lincoln's "tyrannical principle" has assumed, because terrorists do not appeal to reason as the basis of rallying consent for a new way to govern. They would compel acquiescence by threatening death, to enforce the agenda of self-appointed saviors. That is why all terror, indeed all political violence, is anti-democratic.

Lincoln, who called the Civil War a "rebellion," knew his election had triggered the secession of southern states, but he said that "when ballots have...decided, there can be no successful appeal back to bullets." Only the people, all the people, could express the people's will. Those who objected had to be shown "that what they cannot take by an election, neither can they take it by a war." For Lincoln, protecting the people's power was the greatest duty.

For us, projecting the people's power – through encouraging the strategic use of civilian-based resistance throughout the world – may be our greatest opportunity, because it can dissolve the oppression that gives terror its rationale and thereby divert millions from the lure of violence as the means of liberation.

Thus the struggle against terror is a political conflict. And the stakes are colossal: There are very few Muslims in the world who agree with Bin Laden that obtaining nuclear weapons is "a religious duty," but when the materials needed to make these weapons may not be fully controlled by the major powers or the international community, the safety of millions is at stake. It can be said of these terrorists what the great scholar Harry Jaffa said about the Nazi and communist tyrannies, that they threaten a "rebarbarization of mankind."

"What Our America Means"

In 1909, Woodrow Wilson, then president of Princeton University, four years later president of the United States, spoke at a ceremony on the 100th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth. He recalled the names of other great men born the same year – Darwin, Chopin, Tennyson. "But you cannot pick Lincoln out," Wilson remarked, "for any special characteristic...He does not seem to belong in a list at all." Instead, "he seems to stand unique and singular and complete in himself" – which made him "a typical American...Lincoln seems to have been of general human use and not of particular and limited human use."

If America intervenes abroad to protect our security, we are using our power for our particular benefit. If our government uses military force and another people is liberated from a dictator, our power will be of limited but beneficial human use to them, although the cost is critical. Some say we should be proud that our forces freed Iraq and Afghanistan from brutal rulers. If we applied that strategy to liberating all peoples living under oppression, and the cost followed a straight-line progression, our further pride would cost us \$17 trillion and 100,000 American lives. We know that will not happen – so a military strategy against terror is not really about liberation, it is about security, and it has to be judged on that basis.

Only a global political strategy can pull out the roots of terror and rally support for general liberation. If Americans were to organize ourselves, or command our government, to cover the world with the knowledge of how oppressed people can liberate themselves through nonviolent conflict, or to fund international institutions to propagate this knowledge, the cost of effacing oppression anywhere this worked would be radically less, liberated person by liberated person – and thus more realistic as a strategy, if freedom for the world is actually our motive. We would then undeniably be "of general human use." We would be "typical" Americans, in the

sense that Wilson thought Lincoln was.

One of our greatest poets, Walt Whitman, who revered Lincoln, was blunt about this. “I say the mission of government, henceforth, in civilized lands, is not...authority alone, not even of law, nor...the rule of the best men, the born heroes and captains of the race...but higher than the highest arbitrary rule, to train communities through all their grades, beginning with individuals and ending there again, to rule themselves.”

“To work in...the People,” Whitman declared, “this, I say, is what Democracy is for; and this is what our America means.” Who is doing this work today? Is it my colleague Peter Ackerman’s son, a Marine lieutenant on patrol trying to keep order in Iraq? Yes, because public safety is a precondition for democracy, and if we do not help bring about a government based on the consent of the people in that country, after having invaded it, of what even “limited human use” are we to that people?

Who else is working “in the People”? They include Daniel Serwer, the director of peace operations at the U.S. Institute of Peace, who was instrumental in getting aid to the nonviolent student group Otpor, which was pivotal in undermining Milosevic’s hold on power in 2000. They include the filmmaker Steve York, now overseeing the production of a new computer video game that will enable self-teaching around the world in nonviolent strategies to defeat oppression. And they include people such as Veronika Martin, now working at the U.S. Committee for Refugees, who brings the voices of displaced people to policymakers, most recently by documenting human rights abuses against women by the Burmese military regime.

These Americans don’t wear uniforms and don’t carry arms. But they are certainly “of general human use.” That most of these liberators are civilians – not diplomats or generals or special agents – reflects an insight of Lincoln’s, that the “struggle for maintaining in the world” this kind of self-government “is essentially a people’s contest.”

And the ranks of liberators are not limited to Americans, since ideas about the power of the people -- identical to those of Lincoln -- are fuel for their passion. Those whom I’ve met in recent years include:

- An Italian woman working for UNESCO in Paris, assembling kits that teach the basic ideas of nonviolent action, for circulation in schools all over the world.
- An Iraqi-born journalist, returned to the country of his birth after long exile in Europe, to edit one of Baghdad’s uncensored, honest and popular newspapers, in the explosion of free speech happening in that city today.
- An Egyptian woman raised in Britain and now living in Berlin, working to help local activists throughout the Middle East fight government corruption.
- A young Belarusian student, a woman determined to help bring genuine democracy to her country, and to use the ideas of strategic nonviolent action to organize the opposition.

In the past two years, when the Belarusian and the Egyptian visited Washington, I took each of them to the Lincoln Memorial. The Belarusian had never heard of Lincoln, the Egyptian only knew he had freed the slaves. Neither had read before his words, inscribed on the walls of the Memorial, that America was dedicated to the proposition that all people are equal, and to the

“great task” of insuring that the idea of government by the people would be preserved for all mankind. These were already their causes, although they did not know the framer.

We know the framer, and we know the causes. And now we know the means of liberation that can consummate the causes. That we stand for these causes and fight for these ideas should be a central proposition that our leaders voice as the basis for America’s engagement with the world. And if we help teach the people of the world how to liberate themselves, with strategies of nonviolent power, we will do at least as much, if not far more, to protect our own security than we would by sending out new legions to kill new terrorists – who will keep coming, until their claim that violence can liberate is nullified.

Since 9/11, some of our leaders have told us, often, that they are resolved to find and kill any terrorists who kill Americans. About that as a motive for action, Abraham Lincoln might well remind us of what St. Paul quoted, in the book of Romans: “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.” Lincoln taught us what kind of resolve we should rather have, in the wake of losing lives in a war we have been obliged to fight.

In his spirit, and in his words, Americans should resolve that our people, lost on 9/11 or any other date, will not have died in vain, because we will act to help the two billion people who do not rule themselves to achieve “a new birth of freedom” – and that “government of the people, *by the people*, for the people” shall be universal. This is how oppression will vanish, and with it, the hallucination of violence as a path to power.

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