



Plan B:

Using Secondary Protests to Undermine Repression



By Zorana Smiljanic
Edited by Liam Mahony

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The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the New Tactics in Human Rights Project. The project does not advocate specific tactics or policies.

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Dear Friend,

Welcome to the New Tactics in Human Rights Tactical Notebook Series! In each notebook a human rights practitioner describes a tactical innovation that was used to advance human rights. The authors are part of the broad and diverse human rights movement, including educators, librarians, health care workers, law enforcement personnel, and women's rights advocates. They are individuals who have contributed positively to the cause of human rights. They have developed tactics that have contributed to human rights in their home countries. In addition, they have utilized tactics that when adapted can be applied in other countries and other situations to address a variety of issues.

That is why each notebook contains detailed information on *how* the author and his or her organization achieved what they did. We want to inspire human rights practitioners to think *tactically* – to think about the tactics they have chosen to implement their larger strategy – and to broaden the realm of tactics considered to effectively advance human rights.

In this notebook, the author explains how the Otpor! student movement built a broad constituency of support by continuously innovating and combining tactics to ensure the safety of their volunteers and break down the fear of its people to speak out against the government. The content of the notebook focuses on "Plan B," one tactic they used to do this. When Serb authorities began arresting demonstrators, Otpor!'s support base could have disintegrated out of fear. But Plan B – organizing secondary demonstrations outside police stations where demonstrators were being held – allowed people to overcome their fear of participation and keep activists involved, especially at a crucial point in the struggle. It also helped turn one of the regime's strengths against it, thus switching the balance of power. People must be able to safely rise above the fear of speaking out if they are to participate, especially in an effort to overcome a repressive regime. Otpor!'s experience allows us to learn about one tactic used to help alleviate fear and empower people.

The entire Tactical Notebook Series will be available online at www.newtactics.org. Additional notebooks will continue to be added over time. On our web site you will also find other tools, including a searchable database of tactics, a discussion forum for human rights practitioners, and information about our workshops and symposium. To subscribe to the New Tactics e-newsletter, please send an e-mail to newtactics@cvt.org.

The New Tactics in Human Rights Project is an international initiative led by a diverse group of organizations and practitioners from around the world. The project is coordinated by the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) and grew out of its experience as a creator of new tactics and a treatment center that also advocates for the protection of human rights from a unique position—one of healing and reclaiming civic leadership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kate Kelsch".

Kate Kelsch
New Tactics Project Manager

Zorana Smiljanic

Zorana Smiljanic has worked at the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Belgrade as a regional trainer since November 1999. She also worked on the Democratic Opposition of Serbia's 2000 election campaign and on Otpor!'s Vreme Je! ("It's Time!") get-out-the-vote campaign. In Otpor!, she led the training-the-trainers program and trained others on working with the media, public speaking, working with volunteers, organization-building and more. Ms. Smiljanic received her degree in industrial engineering from Belgrade University.

Otpor!

The Otpor! ("Resistance!") movement emerged spontaneously in October 1998 during protests by Belgrade University students against Serbia's repressive university laws. The three-month protest resulted in the release of the dean of the department of philology and the movement, with its symbolic clenched fist, began to unite democratic-minded youth in Serbia. Despite brutal repression and arrests, Otpor! went on to use creative nonviolence in its struggle against dictatorship.

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Editor's Preface

In 2000, after a decade of horrible wars and internal repression in the former Yugoslavia, the international community was tearing its hair out trying to figure out how to get rid of Slobodan Milosevic. Negotiation, sanctions and bombing all appeared only to have increased his power. But inside Serbia, change was brewing. Ten years of war, poverty and isolation had left a generation of young people feeling like they had no future if things continued as they were. They were fed up. And they had nothing, really, to lose.

The courageous students of Otpor! ("Resistance!" in Serbo-Croatian) helped turn these sentiments into a powerful national movement. They rallied resources from abroad, including funding, training and manuals, and – just as importantly – drew on the extensive reserves of energy and creativity of the young people of Serbia. In September and October 2000, much to the world's surprise, the Serbian people first defeated Milosevic at the polls, and then took to the streets in a nonviolent revolution to force him from power.

Otpor! built a national campaign throughout the country, holding hundreds of events, putting up thousands of posters, distributing millions of leaflets. While they did this, they faced a relentless response from the state, including over 2,000 arrests of activists. How did they manage to build a movement against such a powerful regime? This notebook focuses on one of Otpor!'s tactics for maintaining momentum and supporting activists in the face of arrests: "Plan B."

Plan B is conceptually simple: whenever the police arrested activists in their demonstrations, Otpor! would instantaneously launch a second operation, mobilizing more people to show up at the police stations and protest the arrests.

The events at the police station became media showpieces, calling attention to the injustice of the arrests and the illegitimacy of the regime. They also provided moral support and encouragement to the arrested activists, turning them into local and national heroes, rather than forgotten victims. Otpor! thus turned the regime's policy of arrests to its own advantage and continued to build a movement.

Police arrests of nonviolent activists, and repression in general, are seldom if ever accidental state strategies. Their objective is to deliberately weaken, frighten and disempower resistance. And it often works. Getting arrested is a frightening, isolating and traumatic experience. If a regime uses such psychological tools strategically, it can often cripple the growth of opposition movements. Repression is thus a common state tool of political-psychological warfare. It is our hope that Otpor!'s success in turning this on its head will provide both lessons and inspiration for other activists around the world.

— Liam Mahony, notebook series editor

Introduction

Students of the ancient martial art jujitsu learn to use their adversaries' strength to their own advantage, often outwitting and overpowering opponents who seem to have the advantages of size and power. In the same way, the activists in Otpor! used one of the seeming advantages of the Serbian regime – its policy of arresting those involved in demonstrations and other events – into a source of power for the resistance. The arrests threatened to demoralize young activists and intimidate them into giving up. The Plan B tactic turned each arrest into a political event that would damage the regime's credibility, build public support for Otpor! and provide social and emotional support for the arrested activists, empowering them to stick with the movement.

Otpor! organized nonviolent political actions of all kinds – demonstrations, marches, street theater, etc.– but the Serbian police were less creative: arresting activists became a habitual response to all actions. All of these actions were very well organized: detailed calendars and time charts were mounted on flip charts and task lists were posted for every activist. And, as this notebook will describe, a Plan B was laid out for each primary action, in case the activists involved got arrested.

When activists were arrested, Otpor! knew which police station they would be taken to (because each municipality had its own local police station). They also helped activists prepare psychologically for arrest beforehand by creating a "dialogue list" that explained

what they could expect under interrogation and by assuring them they could count on Plan B to support them.

Once arrests occurred, Plan B consisted of mobilizing Otpor!'s extensive network of contacts by:

- Calling friendly lawyers who would go immediately to the police station and begin negotiating for the activists' release;
- Calling on all Otpor! activists to gather at the Otpor! premises or in front of the police station within an hour. They would then participate in nonviolent and fun activities such as singing and games at this new demonstration;
- Informing the media (including all independent TV stations, radio stations, newspapers and press photographers) and calling on them to come to the police station to support the action, and to take the activists' statements after their release;
- Calling on all opposition political parties in order to condemn the arrest and to call their members from that territory (municipality) to join the activists in front of the police station; and
- Calling on local NGOs to inform international organizations and to send protest letters condemning the arrest.

Before describing the tactic in more detail, it is worth explaining a bit more about the political context surrounding its development.

Serbia: Political Background

In 1990, when Slobodan Milosevic won the first multiparty election in Serbia, the country entered a dark stage of its history. Milosevic's regime led Serbia into wars with the former Yugoslav republics of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia. Rampant inflation, corruption and

crime, sanctions imposed by the international community and other effects of war caused economic hardship for many, particularly refugees and other vulnerable members of the population. Milosevic led through the politics of nationalism, condemning his political opponents and anyone who was against his policies.

Opposition parties, although they had gained some international support, failed to win elections because they were not united, and because of media manipulation and biased electoral laws. The regime discredited opposition leaders in the state media by encouraging the perception that all politicians were the same. People lost any hope that things could change.

In 1996, opposition parties united in the Zajedno (“Together”) coalition and won the local elections in all the major cities in Serbia. At first, Milosevic denied the victory, but Zajedno organized protests everyday for three months, forcing Milosevic to accept defeat. For the first time the citizens of Serbia felt the power of collective action. Milosevic, however, still held power on the federal level in a coalition with several nationalist parties and he used it to enact several repressive laws (against the media and the university, jeopardizing human rights and freedom of speech).

In 1998, Serbia sent troops into the province of Kosovo to halt activities by the rebel Kosovo Liberation Army and soon the situation escalated to heavy fighting. When attempts at

an internationally brokered ceasefire failed, NATO began a three-month bombing campaign in Serbia in March 1999. The state of war and several prominent political assassinations that occurred during that period left opposition parties hesitant to campaign against Milosevic.

By the start of the 2000 election campaign, Serbians’ dissatisfaction with living standards and with Serbia’s isolation from Europe and the world was at a peak. People felt that it could not get worse, that they had nothing left to lose, so they began to act politically again, though often by joining organizations unaffiliated with political parties. When the Democratic Opposition of Serbia, led by Vojislav Kostunica, won the elections in the first round, Milosevic tried to void the results by force. His blatant disregard for the democratic choice of the people catalyzed a nonviolent revolution culminating on October 5, when almost a million people came to Belgrade to fight for their votes and victory, Milosevic conceded his defeat and stepped down. On March 31, 2001, Milosevic was arrested and handed over to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia at The Hague, where he is being tried for genocide and crimes against humanity.

The Otpor! Movement

Otpor! was part of a movement of liberation in Serbia, a movement that united people who were isolated but shared the same goals: to bring democracy to Serbia; to overthrow Milosevic; to stop the policies of nationalism, internal repression, economic devastation and armed conflicts with neighboring countries; to bring the war criminals to justice; and to integrate into the European community.

Otpor! was founded in 1998 (although it never officially registered), after the passage of a repressive law against the university. As time passed, Otpor!’s actions became more visible and the organization grew. Young people and students were not only the innovators but the target audience at this stage: Many had lost confidence in the opposition parties and were more likely to join the efforts of a looser

movement like Otpor! than a traditional membership-based organization.

While the organization curtailed its public actions during the NATO bombing and the political assassinations that occurred within Serbia at the same time, it renewed operations in mid-1999. In July of that year, Otpor! drafted the “Declaration for the Future of Serbia,” outlining the students’ vision of a peaceful, democratic Serbia, which was signed by dozens of student organizations across Serbia. Otpor! and other opposition groups began to look toward the 2000 elections as a chance to make permanent change.



Otpor! needed to mobilize a great number of people in Serbia determined to resist the regime. The first rally was staged Nov. 2, 1999, closely followed by another on November 9. Police brutally intervened at the second rally, injuring about 50 students. Nevertheless, Otpor! quickly built up a network throughout Serbia, and began to give citizens hope that change was possible. Resistance actions were growing larger every day and Otpor!, which began as a student movement, became a people's movement. Its symbol, the clenched fist held high, became a national symbol for brave and engaged people of all ages and professions struggling to change Serbia. The regime responded to this growing resistance by intensifying the repression, using raids on opposition organizations (including Otpor!), arrests and murder and banning independent media.

Otpor! sought not only to bring about political change but also to form the next political generation in Serbia. Otpor! believes that young people who understand their role in the political system and come together for collective action will be the best guarantor that life will be better in Serbia in the 21st century and that Milosevic will be the last dictator recorded in the country's history.

Otpor!'s Organizational Structure

We based our organization on the concept of voluntary work, the absence of leadership, individual resistance and personal responsibility.

While mobilizing its network, Otpor! needed to develop a stable system of organization and a long-term plan for the struggle for change. Every single person was important in that struggle, so unity was a crucial priority. To create this unity, Otpor! strived to be horizontal in its organizational structure: There was no official leader, no governing bodies; everyone included in Otpor! activities was equal. There was a clear, unified plan for action, but each of the 50 offices and the activists in 160 cities and towns planned and implemented their own actions in addition to participating in the powerful events that took place nationwide.

This horizontal structure and lack of identified leaders made it more difficult for the regime to weaken the organization. (And Milosevic's regime tried. The police raided the offices regularly, confiscating and destroying materials and arresting those present.) Leaders can be discredited or eliminated, even bribed. Rigid organizations can be shattered. But an idea is a more formidable foe – elusive, flexible and nearly impossible to kill. Otpor! therefore places a strong emphasis on its ideas and its symbol – the clenched fist.

Otpor! maintained strong ties with opposition parties, the Serbian diaspora and international pro-democracy groups (although there was always the risk that the regime would label it a "puppet" of international agents), giving it increased access to funding, training and information networks. This was a crucial moment in political history and to seize it Otpor! had to mobilize a full range of resources.



The Fist

Otpor!'s sign of resistance, the fist, was conceived as a symbol of individual commitment to do something in the conviction that the time and energy of every single person should be invested, because without that, change will never happen. The Otpor! fist came to symbolize personal courage after the first Otpor! leaflet, "Bite the System," was produced. The leaflet was published on the front page of *Dnevni telegraf* (*The Daily Telegraph*) after four activists were arrested because they had written graffiti criticizing the authorities. This brought down drastic penalties against the newspaper under the repressive Information Law. After that, *Dnevni telegraf* was increasingly persecuted. Its owner, Slavko Curuvija, was killed on Orthodox Easter in 1999 and his murder remains unsolved. The principle of unity portrayed by the fist seemed to represent what Serbians were searching for at that moment in history. One powerful Otpor! message said simply "Pull Yourself Together - Resistance Alive," which was evoked most clearly by clenching one's fingers – into a fist.

Turning the Tables on a Powerful Regime

Otpor! drew considerable strategic guidance from the works of political theorist and strategist Dr. Gene Sharp.¹ According to Sharp, there are six sources of power in society: the authority of a person or organization, human resources, skills and knowledge, material resources, sanctions and intangible factors (fear, loss of hope, etc.).²

During the ten years of Slobodan Milosevic's reign, he manipulated all six sources of power effectively. Milosevic had authority over members of his party and over the citizens, who had lost hope in the possibility of any change of regime. He manipulated human resources and used the skills and knowledge of those in the state system. He undermined the resources of the resistance by intimidating citizens so they would not express their discontent or gathering in political parties or other organizations. He had full control of the material resources of the state despite the sanctions of the international community. And he effectively used threats, fear and hopelessness to stay in power.

In the face of this power, Otpor! had to develop its own sources of power and simultaneously weaken the power sources of the regime. Our authority was moral; citizens joined the organization voluntarily, motivated by their own discontent and mobilized by Otpor!'s nonviolent and unthreatening participatory tactics. Otpor!'s informal structure enabled members to channel many different kinds of skills and knowledge into the campaign, while using minimal material resources.

However, a couple of months before the elections, the regime increased the use of one of its own sources of power – sanctions and

repression. Activists were being arrested every day, but it was already too late: Otpor! had grown large enough and its members aware enough that the regime's actions were felt as attacks on the awakened citizens' own consciences, leading to even stronger solidarity.

Otpor!'s strategic campaigns of nonviolent and often humorous actions (which thwarted the regime's attempts to label it a terrorist organization and made each round of arrests seem more and more senseless) thus spread to the national level. As the elections approached we focused our message on convincing citizens that their vote could make a difference, and on getting them out to vote. Despite the ceaseless police raids on Otpor! premises and the confiscation of campaign material, some 4.5 million pieces of campaign material were distributed (the printing and distribution was done in local offices). These efforts helped to encourage an unprecedented voter turnout of approximately 75 to 80 percent, ultimately leading to the end of Milosevic's rule.

¹ Gene Sharp is a senior scholar at the Albert Einstein Institute for Peace and author of seminal texts on the theory behind nonviolent conflict.

² Sharp, Gene. *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*. Boston: The Albert Einstein Institution, 1993.

The Birth of a Tactic – Plan B

Zorana Smiljanic's Story

When I was arrested for the first time Otpor! was still a small student organization. They had held a few demonstrations to spread the idea of resistance to the regime and to attract new activists, but it already had suffered arrests. After the first demonstration four students were arrested and spent 10 days in prison.

On December 16, 1998, Otpor! organized a protest walk through Belgrade, starting at noon. All University of Belgrade students were encouraged to join the protest walk and several hundreds of students gathered. Ten minutes before the protest walk, I was informed that a friend of mine had been arrested and taken to the police station. Along with the students leading the protest we decided that the walk should continue in the way it had been planned, but that it should end in front of the police station in order to support those arrested, and that the three of us would immediately go to the police station to meet the lawyers and to find out what happened.

We got to the police station in 20 minutes, but the lawyers were not there yet. As we waited on the sidewalk, we started calling lawyers, the media and various political parties and nongovernmental organizations, so they could inform international organizations, the U.N., Amnesty International, etc., who would then condemn the student's arrest.

All of a sudden we heard policemen shouting, "Get them!" and in a few seconds I felt somebody's hand on my shoulder. It was a policeman, much bigger than me, and not exactly being gentle. A minute later, we were hauled in off the sidewalk. It happened just like in a movie: We disappeared and nobody saw it. In that moment I remembered a few friendly pieces of advice: "Don't be afraid," and "Don't sign a thing without your lawyer."

We were taken to a room in the basement of the police station. There were three of us in the room, one in each corner, and eight policemen. They took our personal information. They did not beat us but they used their position of power to threaten us. We spent two hours in

that room. A friend of mine was slapped in the face five or six times because he had asked a question (apparently they didn't like it, and they had all the power at that moment). It was a strange feeling of helplessness – sitting in the basement, powerless to do a thing. My fear mixed with a sense of rage, and I think that strange mixture kept me in a fighting spirit. I knew it would all end and I was never going to retreat from fighting for the thing I thought was right. But the power was still in their hands.



Police break up an Otpor! protest.

Suddenly their phones began to ring. We didn't know why, but after each phone call, they were more nervous. They took us from one room to another, until we were left in the office of the head of the police department. He lined us up and severely asked us what we were doing in front of the police station. Then he simply told us that we could go, and turned around and left the room. We stood in the room alone a few minutes after he had gone, paralyzed by confusion. And then left the building.

We were welcomed by about a hundred students and many journalists who wanted to hear our stories and take our pictures. Our friend, who got arrested first, was also released, but unfortunately had been badly beaten. After it was all over, we found out why we were released so suddenly and why the policemen were nervous. Political parties and local NGOs had sent a letter protesting our arrest throughout the world, and in a few minutes many international organizations and

Mass actions:

- ♦ long protest walks (e.g. Belgrade to Novi Sad, 80 km)
- ♦ concerts and techno parties
- ♦ class boycotts

Media actions:

- ♦ *The Wall of Truth* (activists downloaded news from the Internet and posted it at the university)
- ♦ *A Cake for the President* (activists made a cake for Milosevic's birthday with colors representing each breakaway republic)
- ♦ *Dinar for Change* (fundraising campaign that also emphasized Otpor!'s local base of support)

NGOs signed on. The letter was addressed to Slobodan Milosevic and the minister of justice, asking for the immediate release of the innocent arrested students. We also contacted friendly lawyers and called on opposition parties to condemn the arrests through the media present at the event. All of these elements, the opposition parties, media, student activists, lawyers and NGOs played a role in getting the word out.

—Zorana Smiljanic

How the Tactic Works

Although the activists didn't know it at the

They can arrest us, maltreat us, even kill us, but we won't give up. We are staying here, we don't have a spare country.

— Jovan Ratkovic, the day after his arrest, as he called on the public to see the students off on their protest walk to Novi Sad, December 17,

time, the lessons learned during that incident and others like it would lead to the development of a new tactic – Plan B. Otpor! organized many different kinds of actions which might lead to police arrests, and for each of them it prepared a Plan B. These primary actions could be

divided into two groups: mass demonstrations in which hundreds, thousands or hundreds of thousands of people participated, and media events with a smaller number of activists that happened every day. During the latter was when the arrests occurred.³

Preparing for Arrest

In repressive and often frightening conditions, Otpor! employed methods of fear control. One of the most important methods was preparing activists so they knew exactly what to expect if and when they were arrested. Activists who had been arrested earlier informed the others about their experiences in the police station. They

kept track of the questions they had been asked under interrogation and the best (truthful) answers that had kept the police from using violence. These were turned into “dialogue lists” for other activists to practice. This preparation made the arrest experience more predictable, more under the control of the activists, and less likely to intimidate, humiliate or disempower them.

Setting Up Plan B

Plan B could not be organized on the spur of the moment, after arrests had already occurred. Each aspect needed to be organized carefully in advance. We had to plan for:

- How many Otpor! activists were needed and who would stay in the office during the primary action;
- How many activists should be informed and kept on stand-by and who would go to the police station to participate in Plan B;
- How many lawyers should be on stand-by so that they could go immediately to the police station after the arrest (some activists signed letters in advance giving legal authority to a particular lawyer);
- What media would be called upon to cover the primary action and, in the case of arrest, would they move to the Plan B site in front of the police station;
- How NGOs and opposition political parties would be kept informed. We would inform them about the demonstration in advance and then call on them to support the Plan B action if necessary. We would communicate with each group personally and keep in constant contact through meetings, phone calls, letters, faxes and e-mail.

This level of extensive and rapid mobilization was possible only due to the meticulous work Otpor! had done over two years in building accurate and up-to-date databases. We had a general database of activists who could be called on for a variety of primary actions and for Plan B actions. We had databases of opposition party members and friendly NGO activists. Our media team could count on an up-to-date media contact database, including TV,

³ Otpor! drew on pre-existing lists of possible actions such as Gene Sharp's book *198 Methods of Nonviolent Action*, modified to fit the situation in Serbia. This list is also enclosed at the end of this notebook. The organization also created its own training manual for new activists, *Working With Activists*, which is available only in Serbo-Croatian.

radio and print journalists and photographers. To intervene to help those under arrest we had a database of willing lawyers, developed with support from such institutions as the Humanitarian Law Center in Belgrade. And to add even more creativity and public impact to our actions, we had a database of musicians, actors, poets and other celebrities who supported us. These databases were built up through the constant gathering and systematization of personal contacts. The more the movement grew, the stronger the databases became. We were in constant communication with these people, coordinating daily plans and informing them about our actions in advance, so they could join and support us.

We quickly learned that it was too risky to hold these contact lists in a central location. They were destroyed too many times during police raids. So individuals were made responsible for contact lists of 10 to 15 people. They programmed these lists into their mobile phones. If anyone asked about them, it was easy enough to say, "These are just my friends."

On the day of the demonstration, activists came to the office, picked up the necessary materials and went to the primary action points. At each action point there was also one more person, called "the reserve." That person did not participate directly in the action, but stood close by (100-200 meters away). If there were arrests, he or she was the witness and had only one duty – not to get arrested, and to call the premises and pass on the information about the arrested activists.

Then, if arrests did happen, we were ready to initiate the "response mobilization." The press team started contacting the local, independent TV and radio stations, journalists and press photographers by phone, fax and e-mail. Press releases called upon citizens to gather in front of the police station where the arrested activists were taken. NGOs and opposition parties were also contacted and they called their own members to meet in front of the police station. The idea was to spread the information personally. That was not a problem in smaller cities, because word of the arrest spread very quickly through word of mouth. In larger cities, public awareness had to be raised in advance.

Lawyers went to the police station to inquire about the arrested activists – the reasons for their arrest and what further steps would be taken with them. One of the rules was that lawyers would always be first at the police station, and then the others would join them. The lawyers' presence prevented additional arrests from occurring at the station.⁴

A slow but steady protest walk to the police station would begin. Although those walks were often very short, the pace was kept very slow to garner more attention. Bear in mind that Otpor! was already popular and its symbols were well known in those days, so this task was not hard at all.

At the Police Station

In front of the police station it was important not to disturb the public order, meaning that activists had to stay on the sidewalk, out of the street, so as not to disturb traffic, and that the action was nonviolent, to avoid provoking the police. Only lawyers had the legal authority to go into the police station to enquire about the cases of those arrested. Sometimes it took hours in front of the police station and we used nonviolent, humorous activities to maintain a positive atmosphere, such as listening to music, singing songs and playing volleyball. Passersby found this funny and the police found it irritating – but what could they do? They could hardly arrest people for standing on the sidewalk and listening to music.

It was important that everyone involved understand that they had to maintain this discipline to help the arrested activists, that their presence was the reason the police would release the activists and not beat them (although of course often those detained were beaten). The police knew that the press photographers would take the activists' photos right after they left the station. At the same time, Plan B left the activists and the public with the feeling that something had succeeded that day. The primary demonstration had been broken up, but the Plan B action attracted even greater number of citizens and activists.

⁴ In some cases the Plan B activists also got arrested, so we needed to initiate a Plan C.

The lawyers always succeeded in getting the arrested activists released. Generally there was no reason for their arrest (except to stop the action and to frighten the activists). The arrested activists would then be welcomed as heroes and would hold a press conference in front of the police station or at Otpor!'s office after they were released.

These activists were in most cases very exhausted, tired, frightened and angry, but they were also motivated and happy because they were not alone when they were released, but were greeted by crowds of friends and well-wishers. Still, the pressure the police put on them during hours-long interrogations could affect their decision to participate in future

events. It was extremely important to speak with them a day or two after the arrest about their experiences, their plans and activities and family situation (sometimes the parents were much more frightened than the activists). We encouraged all activists to share the experiences and stay in constant contact.

The arrested activists were very often the ones in charge of planning subsequent actions and motivating others to participate in them, or they would participate in Plan B actions. Then, the previously arrested activists could talk to others about what it was like to spend hours in the police station, what questions the police asked and how they felt. This built a sense of solidarity in the organization.

Results of the Tactic

Otpor! later found confirmation that our tactic was effectively frustrating police plans. After the revolution, Otpor! activist Nebojsa Andric was able to read his police file.

When I first entered the state security offices after the change of the regime in Yugoslavia I was feeling sick and uneasy, which were probably common feelings for everybody who had anything to do with the state security. I wanted to find out whether they had a file on me, and, if they did, when could I come to read it.

I started reading my file. Everything was in it – who I was with, what we were doing, where I traveled, everything about my family. Because I knew they were following me, I always had meetings in the open. In one place in the file it stated that after Otpor!'s first public actions, when the police realized that we were a powerful group of people, it was obvious that we had been making arrangements in advance, although they didn't know about it. When a bomb exploded at my doorstep, in order to frighten me, I realized that the police had an order not to arrest me because I was too popular and that would make me a victim, a martyr. Several times during Otpor! actions, the

police arrested all the activists around me, except me, even though I offered myself.

When I read the file, I found out that the police in the field reported about the counterproductivity of the arrests, because even when people didn't know about the primary action, they knew about the arrests and gathered in great numbers. But Vljako



Stojiljkovic [former minister of the interior, indicted for war crimes at The Hague tribunal, committed suicide in 2002] gave the order to continue with the arrests. – Nebojsa Andric

An Otpor! protest

The broader impact of Plan B can be understood only in the context of the overall impact of Otpor!. After ten years of Slobodan Milosevic's reign, when the citizens of Serbia had lost hope for a better future, when motivation for resistance had faded, Otpor! offered action. People started to believe that change was possible, and the result was a

revolution. The Plan B tactic added to this momentum by empowering activists to continue their struggle and delegitimize the regime's repressive tactics.

The “always-successful action”: Plan B was not just a reaction to arrests. It was also an active offensive tactic, one that guaranteed that some successful action would take place, whether or not the primary demonstration was broken up. This raised the morale of all Otpor! activists and weakened the credibility of the government's police machinery.

Support of the “third party” (media, political parties, NGOs, citizens): Serbian citizens were already fed up with Milosevic. But they got particularly incensed when he began arresting young people who were doing nothing wrong. Thus Plan B, which called attention to the illegitimacy of the arrests, became an important factor in mobilizing the general citizenry in Otpor!'s favor.

Solidarity lessons: Arrested activists knew that they would not be alone after their release from prison. In most cases, they stayed active in the organization even after the arrest. When facing violence and repression you must prove that you are an organization that cares for its own members. Serbia learned a big lesson from our activities — the lesson of solidarity.

Fear control and morale-building: Plan B was part of a larger effort to help activists control their very real fears of arrest and mistreatment. First, we told people that fear was normal. Then we taught them to stick close together at demonstrations, and gave everyone tasks to keep their minds off their fear. Most importantly, we took the fear and mystery out of arrests and interrogation by preparing them for it. Also, activists knew they would never be alone: If they were arrested, they knew for sure that lawyers, the media and more protesters would stand in front of the police station until they were released.

Implementing Plan B in a Different Situation

If you are organizing a movement or campaign and facing repression from the state, you would be wise to organize in advance explicit strategies for responding to the state's attacks. If you are not prepared to respond, then repression is more likely to weaken you.

Secondly, your response needs to take into account not only the need for protest, but also the emotional needs of your activists. The response plan should leave your activists stronger, not weaker, and more likely to keep on with the struggle. This emotional support needs to extend from the preparatory stages right through to the debriefing and follow-up after an action.

Thirdly, the ideal response to repression is an action that is not merely defensive, but rather one that turns the tables on the regime, making their repressive strategy a liability for

them, while strengthening your movement and its message.

This particular Plan B, and the rest of this discussion, is based on the assumption that the state's repressive strategy is based on the use of arrests. Rather than a recipe or list of steps to follow, we feel it will be more useful to think in terms of the right questions to ask and issues to address as you plan your reaction.

Questions to Consider Before Developing This Tactic

- Is there some semblance of the rule of law in your country? If the police do not feel at all responsible to the public – or do not feel the need to make a show of following proper procedures – then they are far less likely to bow to pressure from the public, the press or the international community.
- Do you expect (or have you suffered) arrests as a reaction to your primary actions? Are the arrests weakening your movement or work, or do you fear they will? Are the

arrests frightening activists away from working with you? If so, you need to develop a strategy to mitigate this damage, support your activists and stay strong.

- Are the arrests legal? If your activists are being arrested unjustly for legal behavior you are, of course, in a stronger position to get them released and to mobilize public opinion in their support. If they are actually breaking the law (for instance, in civil disobedience actions) you may not be able to count on their rapid release. Nor will it be such a simple matter to use such arrests to call attention to the “illegitimacy” of the state.
- Is the state likely to release arrested activists if they become the focus of attention and pressure? If the answer is “no,” then of course you must still make plans for supporting those arrested. But this particular type of Plan B will not be guaranteed to be an “always-successful action” and morale-builder if the state detains people for longer periods despite your protests. In such a situation you will need to devise a longer-term campaign for their support and release. And you will need to prepare your activists psychologically for this higher risk of extended detention.
- What is the public attitude towards your movement and towards the arrests? Can a Plan B effectively mobilize public opinion in support of those arrested? Does your particular campaign require such broad mobilization, or can it be effective by mobilizing smaller numbers?

Resources Needed

- **People:** This means both activists and up-to-date contact lists. You must be able to mobilize Plan B quickly or your activists will be left hanging, isolated and alone. This speed requires that you be ready with the lists of whom to call and mobilize. This is not the moment to find you have the wrong phone number for the lawyers and reporters! Otpor! spent years developing their databases of contacts and continued to augment them daily.

- **Legal support:** You must have the lawyers prepared in advance. They should know about the action and the timing, so they can be prepared to go to the station, and so they know exactly what happened, in order to effectively press for release of the activists.
- **Media contacts:** Obviously your most likely targets will be members of the independent media, if that exists in your situation. Personal contacts will work best, but once your organization builds a reputation your actions will be more likely to interest the media. Remember that journalists won’t want to waste time (possibly risking their jobs, or perhaps their lives), so you must be able to give them as much precise information as possible.
- **International contacts:** You’ll want to make personal contact with influential groups that can create international pressure for the release of those arrested.

Preparatory Steps

Emotional preparation of the activists: People should feel confident that you will carry out Plan B for them if they are arrested. You should encourage interaction and communication between activists who have already experienced an arrest and those who have not, in order to reduce the fear and uncertainty. They need to know that they will be respected as “heroes” if it happens to them.

Dialogue lists: The more people are prepared and “rehearsed” for an interrogation, the less frightening and damaging the experience is going to be for them. You should encourage activists to remember and write down what happened during interrogations, and try to analyze these experiences in order to come up with dialogue lists advice for those activists who have not lived through it.

Action plans: You should have planned in advance some creative and amusing ways to keep people busy after they gather in front of the police station. These actions can serve as

| Sample Dialogue List | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Who is Otpor!'s leader? | Everybody knows that Otpor! has no leader. We don't have a president or any other governing body. Anyone could be the leader on his or her street, in a department, at work. ... I don't even know all the people in the office. There is always somebody else, and those who are there regularly I know only by their first names or nicknames. |
| How did you become a member? | I filled in the application form at their Web site, www.otpor.com. It's no secret. Anybody can go to the Web site, even you. |
| Who finances Otpor!? | Serbs from the diaspora. Some citizens also come to the office and give small donations. |
| Where did you get the material? | I took it from the office. Everybody knows that the office is in downtown Belgrade, at 49 Knez Mihajlova St. |

focal points for the media. They also serve to prevent boredom. Boredom is not a minor problem: in a situation where fear and hopelessness are great risks, moments of

boredom — which are sometimes interpreted as moments of uselessness — can allow disempowerment to take hold. You need an action plan to keep people busy and positive.

Reserve activists: When your primary action is happening, you need observers there who can quickly report if arrests happen. You also need people on reserve back at your premises who will be ready to get the phone calls and launch Plan B quickly into action.

Knowledge of police procedures: It is important to know what the police do when they make arrests. Wherever your primary action is happening, you should know what station they are going to take people to after they are arrested, so you can get there quickly with lawyers and protesters.

Clear lines of communication: Regardless of whether it is done by runners or by people with mobile phones, you should have an explicit advance plan for communication in the event you need to launch Plan B. Everyone should know exactly whom they need to call, and have those numbers ready. Those who need to receive these calls must be there. And there should be a fallback option in case a crucial communication is unsuccessful.

At the Police Station

Nonviolent discipline: People must always keep their eyes on the goal. They are not there to take out their anger on anyone. The ultimate goal is to convince the public and the police that the arrests are wrong and must be reversed. Nonviolence builds allies. Nonviolence gives the police no excuse to treat protesters or arrested activists with more violence.

Order and calm: An organized event is more respected than something that appears to be a mob. The police are understandably nervous about crowd scenes, since crowd behavior is uncertain. The more you show yourself to be calm and dependable, the better the relationship with the police will become. (But calm does not mean quiet! Creative and energetic actions are important to keep up people's energy.)

Clear communication with authorities: Multiple people cannot be approaching the police with contradictory messages. The role of the lawyers must be respected as well.

Commitment to stay: Those who gather should be committed to staying until the activists are released. The morale-building impact of the gathering is greatly weakened if, in the face of delays, people start leaving and the groups gets steadily smaller. Similarly, it will be helpful to have some solid contacts with the media, so that in the event of an extended presence you always have some media who stay around.

The Aftermath

Emotional support: A positive crowd when activists walk out of the station is a good thing for them to see, but it is not enough. You need to follow up with your activists, talk with them and their families, and be sure to learn what the emotional impact of the experience was. The more camaraderie you can build among

people who have gone through traumatic experiences, the better your chances are that they will want to stay with your organization and its cause.

Thank people! If you want people to keep showing up for you, you need to let them know how important they are, and that their presence is truly appreciated.

Conclusion

In only two years, Otpor! grew to be an organization that enjoyed great support and confidence in Serbia. In a time when people were losing faith in the opposition, Otpor! offered action. Otpor! activities gave hope back to the people of Serbia, helping to liberate them from their fear, allowing them to believe that the regime could be replaced in democratic elections.

Positive and hopeful thinking have always been key to Otpor!'s actions. This optimism and the conviction that change can really happen is exactly what repression tries to kill. By constantly preparing our activists, and supporting them when they were in trouble,



Otpor! activists face to face with the police.

difference in Serbia. We did not crumble in the face of the regime's repression. Instead, our mobilization helped to topple the regime. More importantly, it awakened people's minds

we were able to maintain our strength and keep the movement growing. Our positive message, our faithful support of our activists and the growth of our movement made a

Appendix I

Otpor! – A Chronology

October 1998

Otpor! movement founded.

November 1998

Four activists arrested during first Otpor! demonstration.

Veran Matic, director of the independent Radio B92, receives MTV's Free Your Mind award wearing T-shirt with Otpor!'s symbol – the clenched fist.

Daily newspaper *Dnevni Telegraph* banned for publishing Otpor! leaflet.

December 1998

Otpor! starts protest at University of Belgrade.

First 100 km protest walk from Belgrade to Novi Sad.

February 1999

First department dean resigns at the University of Belgrade.

March-June 1999

NATO bombing. Otpor! freezes its activities.

July 1999

After-war gathering.

August-September 1999

Daily actions across Serbia.

November 1999

First big rallies, followed by police beatings.

January 2000

Celebration of Orthodox New Year's Eve, with more than 20,000 people

February 2000

First congress of Otpor!, transforming it from a students' movement to a people's movement.

April 2000

Second 100 km protest walk, from Novi Sad to Belgrade.

May-August 2000

Repression reaches a peak. Daily arrests, beatings.

August-October 2000

Get out the vote campaign "Vreme Je!" ("It's Time!"), with more than 40 rock concerts throughout Serbia.

"Gotov Je!" ("He's Finished!") campaign. The nonviolent revolution continues.

Through the end of 2000

Completion of the process of democratic changes in Serbia. Otpor! receives MTV's Free Your Mind award.

Appendix II

Selected Resources

Ackerman, Peter, and DuVall, Jack. *A Force More Powerful, A Century of Nonviolent Conflict*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.

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Bringing Down a Dictator. <http://www.pbs.org/weta/dictator/>.

Sharp, Gene. *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*. Cambridge: Albert Einstein Institute, 1993. (Available online at <http://www.pbs.org/weta/dictator/otpor/sharp/>)

Notes

