Notes on Strategic Planning

Based on “Elements of Strategy” by an activist friend, January 18, 1998.

Why Strategy is Important

- Other things being equal, the best strategy wins
- Opponents do extensive strategic planning
- A good strategy helps focus limited resources on effective means so nothing is wasted
- Counters movement trashers: burnout, squandering vital resources, infighting, hopelessness

Five Levels of Strategic Planning

- **Policy (Goals)** — What you hope to accomplish, the “Ends”
  - What are you fighting for? How will you know you have succeeded?
  - Also known as “grand strategy”
  - Overall goals of the movement — all subsequent strategy is oriented toward achieving these objectives
  - Essential that goals be clearly decided
  - **Criteria for good goals (functional objectives)**
    - Concrete, specific, achievable in reasonable time frame
    - Measurable
    - Readily suggest an array of nonviolent methods
  - **Other important policy-level decisions**
    - Bottom-line positions that cannot be compromised versus those subject to negotiation
    - When to begin and when to stop the campaign
    - Costs the movement is willing to bear and willing to inflict
  - **Overall form of struggle — techniques** (strategic NV action, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, sabotage, satyagraha, conventional warfare)
    - Long-term projections of the technique’s effect on both sides
    - Logistical and other support required
    - Growth potential (large enough to win)
    - Skills of participants required

- **Operational Planning**
  - How will you win?
  - **Step by step plan for how the campaign will win**
    - How the movement will be organized
    - How decisions will be made
    - When and where the campaign will begin
    - Subsequent activity until completion
  - **Spell out actual method of victory**
    - **Conversion** — opponents realize the error of their ways and join us
    - **Acquiescence** — opponents are converted enough or worn down enough that they don’t stop us
    - **Accommodation** — opponents lose support from supporters crucial to them and accede to our demands
    - **Incapacitation** — opponents lose support from supporters and are rendered powerless or irrelevant (dethroned, demoted, defeated in an election, etc.)
    - **Emotional coercion** — we threaten something that opponents value enough that they concede (this is nonviolent only if we can do it without hurting them or threatening to hurt them) — example: threaten to remove them from office
    - **Physical coercion** — we physically force them to concede (this is nonviolent only if we can do it without hurting them or threatening to hurt them) — example: restraining people so they can’t hit and are forced to talk
    - Most nonviolent campaigns rely on undercutting the support of opponents until they are forced to change — not on converting opponents or overwhelming them with force

- **Strategy** — Why you will accomplish your goals, the “Ways”
  - **Strategy will you win?**
    - Planning the ebb and flow of the actual campaign — how all assets (human and material) will be deployed
    - Current strengths and weaknesses of each side, especially the critical vulnerability of opponents
    - Opponent repression and brutality can induce indignation, increase sympathy for us, and undercut support (political jiu-jitsu)
    - **Shift sympathizers more into our camp, encourage moderates to sympathize with us, encourage opponents to reconsider their opposition, arouse dissent and opposition in the opponent’s camp”
Tactics — How you will enact your strategies, the “Means”
- Who are you going to influence?
- Immediate actions to enact strategy
- Limited in time, geography, scope
- Must match abilities and resources of activists at the particular time and place
- Must also match overall goals (policy), mechanism (operational plan), and particular strategy
- Don’t belligerently confront potential allies; don’t waste effort trying to woo hard-ass opponents who are unlikely to be converted; don’t employ a method just because it is familiar and you “want to do something”
- “This action is designed to influence __________ to do __________ by using __________ because we have determined this is the most efficient and effective use of our resources toward achieving our goals.”

Some Methods to choose from (and some examples)
- Protest and Persuasion — statements, banners, leaflets, picketing, marches, teach-ins, walk-outs, giving symbolic gifts
- Non-cooperation
  - Social — shunning, boycotts of social norms
  - Economic — economic boycotts, stock disinvestment, embargoes, strikes
- Political — election boycotts, draft card burning
- Intervention
  - Psychological — fasts, risking one’s life
  - Physical — blockades, sit-ins
- Social — acting according to new social norms, creating and patronizing alternative social institutions
- Economic — work-ins, defiance of blockades, seizure of assets
- Political — revealing classified information, parallel governments

Logistics
- What resources do you need? Where will you get them?
- Activities to support each tactical encounter
- Reconnaissance, gear and supplies, legal support, personal and emotional support, internal and external communication, skills training, and so on

Interrelationship between Levels
- Logistics should serve tactics, tactics should serve strategic ends, strategies should realize policy goals through the steps of the operational plan
- Maintain consonance between methods, mechanisms of change, and policy goals
- Avoid evaluating strategic conclusions from tactical outcomes: a tactical win might still lose the campaign, a tactical loss might advance towards the victory of the overall campaign
- Tactics that achieve their limited goals are effective
- A series of tactical losses against a massive opponent might be planned for and assumed as long as there is a way for them to add up to overall victory
- Don’t devote too much energy to developing superior tactics; instead develop powerful overall campaigns and use available tactics
- The best laid plans may still not lead to victory; changes in circumstances may require that plans be re-done

Bibliography
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