

# 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 trashing: 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
  - Preserve important interests of participants
  - Attract wide support in affected community/society
  - Attract outside interest and support
- **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
  - Initial methods, later methods
  - How to respond to repression and counter-attacks
  - All necessary tasks and who is responsible for them
- **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”
  - Why 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
  - How will opponents (and other players) act next and how should we respond (or pre-empt)?
  - How would we wish opponents (and other players) to act and how can we induce that?
  - 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

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