

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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— Prepared by Randy Schutt, P.O. Box 608867, Cleveland, OH 44108 <<http://www.vernalproject.org>>. I revise this paper every few years and appreciate your comments and criticisms. OK to copy for non-commercial purposes.