

D. Selecting the strategy and tactics

The general strategy, types of tactics, and choice of methods planned by the leaders in advance will usually determine the general direction and conduct of the campaign throughout its course. Their selection is therefore highly important. As in war, a large number of factors must be considered in the selection of strategy and tactics. However, the quite differ-

ent dynamics and mechanisms of nonviolent struggle appear to make the interrelationships of these factors more intimate and complex than in military struggle.

Fundamental to this task is careful consideration of the opponent's primary and secondary objectives, and the various objectives of the nonviolent group. It will be highly important to evaluate accurately the opponent's and one's own strengths and weaknesses, and to take these into account in the formulation of strategy and tactics. Failure to do so may lead either to overly ambitious plans which fail because they are not based on a realistic assessment of possibilities, or to excessively timid plans which may fail precisely because they attempt too little. Evaluation of the strengths and nature of the opponent group may assist the nonviolent leadership in formulating a course of action most likely to produce or aggravate weaknesses and internal conflicts within it. Correct assessment of the weaknesses of the nonviolent group itself may be used in the selection of strategy and tactics which are intended to bypass them, and which may possibly also contribute to strengthening them. Estimates as to the length of the forthcoming struggle will be needed and will be important for outlining the course of action. But provision must also be made for an error of judgment in such estimates and for contingency tactics if the struggle turns out to be long instead of brief.

Careful consideration of other factors in the general situation will be necessary to determine whether conditions are suitable for the launching of nonviolent action, and, if so, what the general and specific conditions of the situation mean for the planning of the campaign. Sibley has emphasized that

. . . the effective use of nonviolent resistance depends not only on adequate training and commitment, but also on the "objective" situation: external conditions must be ripe for effective campaigns, and if they are not, it is the part both of wisdom and of morality not to resort to nonviolent resistance.¹⁶⁵

Gandhi insisted that in formulating and carrying out the strategy and tactics of the struggle the leaders need to be responsive to the demonstrated qualities of their movement and to the developing situation:

In a satyagraha campaign the mode of fight and the choice of tactics, e.g. whether to advance or retreat, offer civil resistance or organize nonviolent strength through constructive work and purely selfless humanitarian service, are determined according to the exigencies of the situation.¹⁶⁶

Strategy and tactics are of course interdependent. Precise tactics can only be formulated in the context of the overall strategy, and an intimate understanding of the whole situation and the specific methods of action which are open. Skillful selection and implementation of tactics will not make up for a bad overall strategy, and a good strategy remains impotent unless carried to fulfillment with sound tactics: “. . . only great tactical results can lead to great strategical ones . . .”¹⁶⁷

Liddell Hart has suggested that the particular course of action should have more than one objective.

Take a line of operation which offers alternate objectives. For you will thus put your opponent on the horns of a dilemma, which goes far to assure the chance of gaining one objective at least—whichever he guards least—and may enable you to gain one after the other.

Alternative objectives allow you to keep the opportunity of gaining an objective; whereas a single objective, unless the enemy is helplessly inferior, means the certainty that you will not gain it—once the enemy is no longer uncertain as to your aim. There is no more common mistake than to confuse a single line of operation, which is usually wise, with a single objective, which is usually futile.¹⁶⁸

To a large degree this frequently happens in nonviolent action anyhow without particular planning, since the nonviolent group aims at achieving both particular objectives and more general changes in attitudes and power relationships within each group and between the contending groups. These more general changes are likely to be taking place during the whole course of the conflict, and may be achieved to a considerable degree even in instances where the particular political goal is not won. However, attention is also needed to the possibility of applying Liddell Hart's strategic principle to concrete limited goals, so long as this does not violate the principle of concentration discussed previously.

The progressive development of the movement, partially characterized by the staged introduction of new methods of action (as discussed in the previous section), will also benefit from careful strategic planning. Such development will help to ensure that the alteration of methods and new courses of action will contribute to the maximum utilization of the actionists' forces, facilitate an improvement in their morale, and increase the chances of victory. Without clear strategic insight, changes from one type of action to another may take place without good purpose or effect, and the discouraging results which may follow can lead first to increased uncertainty as to what to do, then to demoralization, and finally to disintegration of the nonviolent movement.

Strategic phasing of nonviolent campaigns is not new of course. However, greater understanding of the nature of the technique and of principles of strategy now make possible a fuller development and more effective utilization of such phasing than has been possible before. Three earlier examples of phasing are offered here. The provincial convention of Virginia, meeting in early August 1774, outlined a phased campaign of economic noncooperation to achieve its objectives. The convention set dates at which new phases of their campaign were to go into effect, subject to alterations agreed to by Virginia delegates in the Continental Congress. Starting at once, no tea was to be imported or used. If Boston were compelled to reimburse the East India Company for losses (as of tea in the Boston Tea Party), the boycott would be extended to all articles sold by the company until the money was returned. On November 1, an absolute boycott was to be imposed on all goods (except medicines) imported directly or indirectly from Britain, including all slaves from wherever they were brought. If colonial grievances were not corrected by August 10, 1775 (a year later), then an absolute program of nonexportation of all articles to Britain was to be imposed. The year interval before nonexportation took effect allowed for payment of debts to British merchants, and for Virginia tobacco growers to shift to crops which could be used at home.¹⁶⁹ This phased campaign drafted by Virginians foreshadowed the program adopted by the First Continental Congress.

A phased campaign of peasant action was issued in Russia by the Second Congress of the Peasants Union, meeting in Moscow in November 1905, during the revolution of that year. The Congress called for the use of methods of peaceful pressure (such as the peasants' collective refusal to buy or rent land from the landlords) to achieve the free transfer of land to the peasants. If these methods did not produce results, then the Union would call for a general agrarian strike to coincide with a general strike in the cities. If the tsarist government harassed the Union, it would call on the peasants to refuse to pay taxes or to serve in the armed forces.¹⁷⁰

The Pan-Africanists in South Africa had planned their campaign of defiance of the Pass Laws in the spring of 1960 as simply the first stage of a three-front long-range struggle: 1) *political*, with the international aim of isolating South Africa (including United Nations condemnation and expulsion from the British Commonwealth) and the domestic aim of ending collaboration and submission by the African people upon which the government depended; 2) *labor*, the withdrawal of cheap African labor would bring an economic collapse, and therefore stay-at-home strikes

were designed to induce industrialists to demand changes in government policies; and 3) *psychological*, the Africans “would discover the power they have even without weapons and they would never be the same again.” Despite clear thought and certain planning for a phased campaign, however, the organization had not anticipated that the government would seize the initiative by declaring a state of emergency.¹⁷¹

While specific tactics for the later stages of the struggle cannot be formulated in advance, it is possible to explore a variety of general approaches for later consideration. Tactics for use in the early (and possibly intermediate) stages may, however, be successfully selected in advance if one has accurately anticipated the situation and form of attack.

A variety of approaches may be used in tactics, involving different fronts, groups, time periods, methods and other factors. For example, the brunt of the responsibility for carrying out the action may, after certain periods of time or certain political events, be shifted from one group to another, or different roles may be assigned to particular groups. The most dangerous tasks (involving, for example, the use of the most daring methods, such as those of nonviolent intervention) could be assigned to groups with especially high discipline, experience, skill, or training, while other important but less dangerous tasks could be undertaken by groups more typical of the general population. At times particular responsibilities would fall upon certain occupational or geographical groups because of the policies and actions of the opponent. Where the initiative lay with the nonviolent actionists, they could deliberately choose to undertake simultaneous actions on more than one front if their strength and the general situation were such as to make this wise. At times tactics could involve geographical fronts as well as political fronts, as in the use of non-violent raids or obstruction; far more often, however, there would be no semblance of a geographical front and the resistance would be more diffuse and general, as in the case of a stay-at-home. The selection of tactics will be influenced significantly by the immediate and long-term political aims of the nonviolent actionists, and by the mechanisms through which change is sought. Various types of tactics will produce different problems for the usurper and have different effects on the nonviolent population.

Variation in tactics may be important in order to add variety and interest (and often newsworthiness) to the campaign. Such changes may serve other purposes, such as to involve new sections of the population, to augment psychological, political and economic pressures on the opponent, expand or contract the front and to test the discipline, morale and

capacity of the nonviolent actionists. Tactical changes may be designed to achieve a variety of effects on the opponent, leadership, bystanders, or police and troops charged with repression. For example, Ebert points to the deliberate use in some cases of small groups of demonstrators (instead of large ones) and time gaps between demonstrations (instead of continuous ones), as means of reducing brutality in the repression by making it easier for the opponent's police and troops to see the actionists as individual human beings, and by allowing them time for reflection and reconsideration between particular demonstrations.¹⁷²

The unrolling of the strategy and implementation of tactics in specific acts takes place in a context of a sensitivity and responsiveness to the developing conflict situation. Very careful and precise plans may have been prepared for commencing the attack. Following the beginning of the struggle, however, room must be allowed for flexibility in the further development, modification and application of the strategy and tactics.¹⁷³ Liddell Hart has emphasized the importance of flexibility in the formulation and implementation of the anticipated course of action:

Ensure that both plan and disposition are flexible—adaptable to circumstances. Your plan should foresee and provide for a next step in case of success or failure, or partial success—which is the most common case in war. Your dispositions (or formation) should be such as to allow this exploitation or adaption in the shortest possible time.¹⁷⁴

The capacity to respond to unforeseen (or unforeseeable) events must be acutely developed. Especially important is the response, morale and behavior of the nonviolent actionists and potential supporters. If they have proved too unprepared and weak to carry out the plans, the plans must be altered, either by taking “some dramatic step which will strike the imagination of the people, and restore confidence in the possibility of full resistance through nonviolence,” or by calling a temporary retreat in order to prepare for a future stronger effort.¹⁷⁵ There is no substitute for, or shortcut to, strength in a movement of nonviolent action. If the necessary strength and ability to persist in face of penalties and suffering do not exist, that fact must be recognized and given an intelligent response. “A wise general does not wait till he is actually routed; he withdraws in time in an orderly manner from a position which he knows he would not be able to hold.”¹⁷⁶ The leadership will, just as in a military conflict, need to recognize frankly the weaknesses in their volunteers and potential supporters and find ways of correcting these.¹⁷⁷

The means for doing this will vary with the conditions of the given situation.

On the other hand, the struggle may reveal significant weaknesses in the opponent which may call for prompt alteration of the tactics and speeding up the tempo of the struggle. At times, too, the struggle may reveal the nonviolent actionists and the general population to be stronger than had been expected, and then it may be possible to make a more rapid advance on a sound basis than originally conceived.