

## **BASIC ELEMENTS IN NONVIOLENT STRATEGY**

The strategy and tactics of war have been carefully developed and studied, and major attempts have been made to develop underlying theory. Maxims, rules and systems for conducting war have been formulated in response to “urgent want.”<sup>123</sup> In the field of nonviolent action there has been to date no comparable development. Gandhi made the most important conscious efforts to develop strategy and tactics in this technique of struggle. He was, however, neither an analyst nor a theorist; hence,

despite his contribution in practice and his passing observations, the analysis and formulation of strategy and tactics have been left to others. Only comparatively recently has attention been turned to the examination of the problems and possibilities of strategy and tactics in nonviolent struggle against would-be internal dictators or invaders.<sup>124</sup> Attention is needed both to the broad field of strategy and tactics and to the specific problems which are likely to arise in facing particular opponents and in achieving particular objectives.

Strategy and tactics are of course present in various forms and degrees in many aspects of social life. They are, however, especially important in military action and nonviolent action, which are both techniques by which social and political conflicts are conducted when they have developed to the point of open struggle and a pitting of strength. There appear to be some points at which insights from military strategy may be carried over into nonviolent strategy; and there are also points at which military insights must not be carried over, because the nature and dynamics of the two techniques of struggle differ radically. This section is therefore not purely descriptive or analytical of existing observations on strategy in nonviolent action; it also involves the incorporation of principles of military strategy where these seem valid for the nonviolent technique, and where the military sources are clearer and more explicit than observations from nonviolent actionists.

Here are some brief definitions of basic strategic terms: grand strategy is the broadest conception which serves to coordinate and direct all the resources of the struggle group toward the attainment of the objectives of the conflict. Strategy, a more narrow term, is the broad plan of action for the overall struggle, including the development of an advantageous situation, the decision of when to fight, and the broad plan for utilizing various specific actions in the general conflict. Tactics refers to plans for more limited conflicts within the selected strategic plan.

### **A. The importance of strategy and tactics**

Strategy is just as important in nonviolent action as it is in military action. While military strategic concepts and principles cannot automatically be carried over into the field of nonviolent action, the basic importance of strategy and tactics is in no way diminished. Attention is therefore needed to the general principles of strategy and tactics appropriate

to this technique (both those peculiar to it and those which may be carried over from military strategy and other types of conflict). These aspects need to be considered, of course, within the context of the unique dynamics and mechanisms of nonviolent struggle.

People from a military background may find it strange to discover certain exponents of nonviolent means stressing the importance of strategy and tactics. And people from a background in religious or philosophical nonviolence may also be surprised to find strategy and tactics stressed instead of moral principles and conscience. Therefore, some brief discussion is needed of the function of strategy and tactics in nonviolent action.

In order to influence the outcome of a struggle, it is important to choose the course of action wisely and carry it out carefully and intelligently. It is quite inadequate simply to say that one will be moral and do what is right, for there may be several courses of action which are all morally “right”; what is “right” may involve maintaining or creating maximum opposition to “evil,” and if so the problem is how to do this; in order to meet one’s moral responsibility and maximize the effects of one’s action, those actions must be carefully chosen and carried out at the right time. Specialists in the study and conduct of war have long since learned that the best results were not achieved simply by an uncontrolled outburst of violence and sacrifice. As Liddell Hart has said: “. . . the conduct of war must be controlled by reason if its object is to be fulfilled . . . The better your strategy, the easier you will gain the upper hand, and the less it will cost you.”<sup>125</sup> As in war, strategy and tactics are used in nonviolent action so that the courage, sacrifice, numbers, and so on of the nonviolent actionists may make the greatest possible impact.

The course of the struggle may take any of a wide variety of forms, depending on the strategies, tactics and methods chosen to meet the particular needs of the situation. The specific acts of protest, noncooperation and intervention in the course of a nonviolent campaign will be most effective if they fit together as parts of a comprehensive whole, so that each specific action contributes in a maximum way to the development and successful conclusion of the struggle. The optimal combination of specific actions is therefore best achieved where leaders with an adequate grasp of the situation and the technique are able to chart the course of the campaigns. “Only the general who conducts a campaign can know the objective of each particular move,” wrote Gandhi.<sup>126</sup> Gandhi chose the issues, places, times and methods of action with extreme care, so that his movement was placed in the strongest position possible vis-à-vis the British, and so that the actions themselves conveyed the greatest under-

standing to his fellow Indians and aroused the maximum sympathy and support from everyone. Just as strategy is important in labor strikes,<sup>127</sup> so it is important in more highly developed types of nonviolent struggle— even more so when it is directed against extreme dictatorships.

There is ample historical evidence of the importance of strategy and tactics.<sup>128</sup> Sometimes this evidence is of a negative type, showing effects of the absence of strategy or of failure to make important decisions on strategic and tactical questions. Sometimes difficult problems which arose in the course of given conflicts could have been avoided or more satisfactorily resolved had there been greater understanding of the role and principles of nonviolent strategy. On other occasions, nonviolent campaigns have been continued after the point when achievement of almost all the objectives and demands was possible—far more than is usually the case in military conflicts; subsequent events then led to the defeat of the movement. Or in other cases the nonviolent movement regarded itself as defeated even though by normal standards it was victorious; as a result, that nonviolent action was eventually replaced by military action which was believed to be more effective. The American colonists' struggles against the British government can without difficulty be interpreted in this way. Considerable light would be shed on the problems and general principles of nonviolent strategy if careful strategic and tactical analyses were undertaken of a series of nonviolent struggles. It is also important to have acceptance by the grievance group of the strategy for the struggle; in the case of Finland in 1901, disagreement on how to deal with the opponent seems to have severely accentuated existing internal conflicts.<sup>129</sup>