

CHAPTER SIX

STRATEGIC ESTIMATE

And therefore I say: Know your enemy, know yourself; your victory will never be endangered.

—Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (500 BC)¹¹

The strategic estimate is a critical tool for strategic planners. It provides a systematic approach to developing the best course of action to accomplish a mission. It does this by identifying and analyzing important factors such as the environment (physical, military, political), and the capabilities of those expected to be participants (both friendly forces and the opponent) and then compares strengths and vulnerabilities to develop courses of action. Then the best course of action is selected. Since strategic operational plans are based upon information contained in a strategic estimate, the quality of analysis and the quantity of information analyzed significantly influence the chances for success. The strategic estimate process is also useful in developing policies, responding to crises, and providing member organizations of a democratic movement with a source of sound and thoughtful analysis and factual data. Those involved in planning for local campaigns can abbreviate the format and content to meet their own needs in developing courses of action.

The information contained in a strategic estimate should be constantly updated so that planners can more quickly respond to additional missions and adjust operations plans if significant changes in the operational environment or capabilities occur. To ensure that this task is accomplished, someone should be specifically designated to do it, preferably the same “Strategic Estimates” coordinator who supervised the preparation of the estimate. There should be others to assist in gathering, evaluating and submitting information to be included in the estimate and for identifying information that may no longer be relevant or accurate.

¹¹ Quoted in Samuel B. Griffith, *Sun Tzu: The Art of War*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 129.

Because of security concerns there may be some portions of the strategic estimate that should be placed in a separate annex. This annex should be available only to those whose “need to know” requires it. For example, information such as organizational personnel strengths, courier routes, or inside contacts could be very sensitive and not relevant to the information needs of most members of opposition groups.

The detailed format of a strategic estimate described in this chapter, derived from the “Military Estimate of the Situation,” may not be the format that is chosen by any particular opposition group. It is important, though, that some sort of systematic approach to gathering, analyzing, and displaying the information relevant to the adopted strategy and supporting objectives should be adopted. A strategic estimate, or similar format, serves as a “checklist” of types of information that may be important but may otherwise be overlooked. [See a suggested format for a strategic estimate in Appendix 4.]

Reasoning and Considerations in Developing a Mission Statement

The mission statement (that is, what the movement leadership has determined to be the objectives of the struggle, the type of struggle selected and, in a general way, how the struggle is expected to be waged) is the starting point for the strategic estimate. Consequently, it is appropriate to review how a mission statement for a strategic nonviolent movement estimate should be developed.

If a movement is created as a result of an oppressive government, its goals and objectives will reflect demands to remove the oppressor from power, but the movement should also identify how the existing government will be removed and what form of government is to replace it. The form of government to be selected by public consensus is based on the characteristics of the society that the citizens want in place at the end of the struggle—in other words, a “vision of tomorrow.” Unless citizens give some thought to what should replace a repressive regime, they may remove one tyranni-

cal government only to bring another, more despotic government into power. Thus, it is necessary that “visions of tomorrow” be translated into objectives that will result in pragmatic changes.

For example, if there is a national police force, which is often the only “face” of government the people see on a daily basis, and over which the local population has no control, the people may wish to place the local police under the supervision of locally elected officials. The people may also want to influence decisions on political and economic priorities at the local level rather than have all these decisions made in the nation’s capital. In short, there may be a consensus for a devolution of power from the center to local government. These issues would suggest that a movement for change include a call for some form of federalism.

The vision of tomorrow should address problems where there have been religious tensions, either due to outright government-supported discrimination or the abuse of one group by another. Mixing religion and politics is always fraught with danger to a democracy, and compromises between the two are always less than satisfactory to those who desire democracy and also to those who want a theocracy disguised as a democracy. But perhaps some basic framework to preclude the government from imposing religious obligations on its citizens can be agreed upon that would not be perceived by most members of religious groups as compromising their personal religious obligations. Such an agreement could be the basis for language to be included in a new constitution.

This consensual vision is then translated into movement goals and political objectives. These, in turn, are translated into more specific strategic objectives. The movement leaders may provide these specific objectives to the planners, or the planners themselves may translate policy objectives and statements into strategic planning objectives. Generalities contained in the “vision” are insufficient statements for planning purposes. For example, while the idea of a “better life for all” is a worthy objective for any opposition movement, it is a goal much too broad to be the appropriate subject for strategic planning. Accordingly, attention should be directed to defining those core issues representing government policy, actions or style of rule

that adversely affect the actual or potential prospect for “a better life” of its citizens. With clearer definitions of the problems to be attacked, resources can be more wisely apportioned.

Identifying the entity that is responsible for the overall planning and coordination and ascertaining those who will publish the planning document are other important elements in a mission statement. A mission statement should begin with the “WHO” that is taking this step in initiating a nation-wide struggle of nonviolent conflict. Nonviolent movements, unlike armed struggle, rarely have a clean hierarchical structure. A common approach to accommodate the disparate interests, capabilities, and personalities of opposition groups is to establish an umbrella organization for the purpose of waging the struggle. By consensus, one member group could be tasked with the responsibility for being the lead organization for planning and coordination. Another option for creating a planning element is that the umbrella organization creates its own “core staff” with representation from all or some members. Initially, it may be best to rally member organizations around issues instead of attempting to unify the organizations themselves. It would be appropriate to consider including the exile community in this umbrella organization so that they too can contribute to the struggle through raising funds, providing special studies or research, lobbying internationally or obtaining media support.

After planners consider all the elements that shape a mission statement for waging a strategic nonviolent conflict, a mission statement is prepared, coordinated, and presented to the members of the umbrella coalition for approval. It may look something like:

The people of (insert Country) under the Alliance for Democracy (or whoever) will conduct a strategic nonviolent offensive to remove the military dictatorship (citing the exact name of the regime) from power; install a democratically elected government; establish a federal form of government and protect that government from a coup d'état.

Strategic estimates may first appear to be specialized documents that can only be constructed by highly trained individuals. Using the suggested format, portions of the strategic estimate can be di-

vided among numerous people for preparation, allowing virtually anyone to participate in its development. As more and more portions are completed, the planners will begin to see the “big picture” emerging from the details contained in the document. The more experienced and trained the analyst, the more quickly and clearer the “big picture” becomes.

An example of a strategic estimate and a look at its architecture shows its value and demonstrates that its construction is within most groups’ capabilities.

The following draft of a working paper using the suggested strategic estimate format (see Appendix 4) was prepared at the Political Defiance Committee (PDC) of Burma in 1992. It was not complete nor was it intended to be used as “the” planning tool for the PDC. Rather, its purpose was to train those designated to prepare the strategic estimate. It may be useful to the reader since it provides explanations on the reasons why many of the categories of information are included in the format and what information may be included within those categories.

ESTIMATE OF THE SITUATION

1. MISSION

“The National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) conducts offensive strategic political defiance operations to remove the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) from power; installs a freely elected, democratic, federal government in Rangoon; prevents a coup d’état.”

2. THE SITUATION AND COURSES OF ACTION.

(The second paragraph of the estimate contains all the information about the situation in which the mission will be conducted. In this particular example of a strategic estimate [Burma] not only were terrain, transportation, communications and climate and weather examined but also under close scrutiny were the political and mili-

tary situations of both friendly and enemy forces. It is here that assumptions are identified and examined. It is necessary to know as much as possible about what could have an impact on operations. Only when information cannot be acquired, must assumptions, albeit reluctantly, be made. Recall that assumptions are substitutes for facts—no assumption is ever as good as a fact. Yet another consideration is that an estimate of the situation is prepared at each operational level).

A. Considerations Affecting Possible Courses of Action

(1) Characteristics of the Area of Operations

(a) Military Geography

(COMMENT: Why should the National Council of the Union of Burma be concerned about military geography when it is to conduct political defiance operations? The SLORC will respond with military actions, and military geography will give NCUB some clues about how their opposition may attempt to respond. Military geography will also influence the movement and timing of the NCUB's forces and actions.)

1. Topography. (Contour maps provide sufficient information on topography including terrain, built up areas, road and rail networks.)

2. Hydrography. For the NCUB's purposes, river and stream crossings are a concern. Talking to local villagers can help locate the best places to cross streams and rivers at different times of the year. Locals may also tell about little-known crossing sites.

3. Climate and weather. In this situation, common knowledge about the weather is generally sufficient. For example, the common knowledge is that the southwest monsoon generally occurs between June through September and that April and May are very hot, and the humidity is high. (What value could this information have? Planners can take into account the need for additional drinking water and the need to consider what measures to take to avoid participants from being overcome by heat stroke and heat exhaustion. Massive demonstrations in April and May could

be avoided. If demonstrations must be held in April or May, the selection of a time of day, the length of the demonstration, or the issuance of water bottles to demonstrators could well ameliorate the effects of the weather). Newspapers can provide more information about the weather. *The New Light of Myanmar* (formerly the *Working People's Daily*) has daily information on the amount of rainfall in Rangoon. Discussions with people from various parts of Burma to determine how the monsoon affects their activities are potentially important. Does the monsoon affect scheduling of Burma Airways? (Checking the SLORC homepage on the internet for current schedules may provide many answers to the effects of the monsoon.) Does the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) or the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) have historical data on Burma Army operations by month? What patterns can be detected based upon climate and weather? How does the weather and climate affect courier operations? Is there a particular month when a disease becomes more prevalent? Who would know this? First hand experience can be invaluable.

(b) Transportation. What does information about the transportation sector of Burma have to do with Political Defiance? Couriers travel. Coordinators and actionists travel. The Burma Army travels. People go from city to city or village to village. Supplies move along roads and rivers. How long it takes to get from Point A to Point B could be critically important. What forms of transportation are available to friendly and enemy forces? Bus routes in major cities and to and from cities may be useful. Can bus, rail, taxi and boat workers be organized? How are these forms of transportation affected by climate and weather? Can taxis be hired for inter-city movement? Where can planners get answers to these questions? They can begin by looking at schedules for trains, buses, planes and boats, and they can read newspapers and tourist publications, visit train and bus stations, and talk with tourists.

(c) Telecommunications. What technologies are available to SLORC and to the pro-democracy movement? What communications capabilities could be acquired? (Satellite, rapid burst short-wave, mobile fax machines, etc.). Can strategists afford to purchase secure communications equipment? What about using people with uncommon language skills on major nets? Where is the government vulnerable? (Micro-wave, telephone lines, switches, jamming). Computer terminals with modems for faxing directly to or from Europe and America are available for purchase. Where can information on this subject be found? Some non-governmental organizations are familiar with new technologies. Often disgruntled government communications workers will easily answer questions about their jobs. Catalogues on communications equipment often have articles about new technologies. International magazines sometimes have information. Also available are the internet and search engines.

(d) Politics. In this paragraph strategists want to describe the general political framework in which they must operate. Is martial law in effect? How are political decisions made? Does the “wiring diagram” accurately reflect political power relationships? Politics is the object of the struggle, and planners will be working intimately within the political environment. Therefore, they must know the political currents. Can a description of the SLORC strategy toward the pro-democracy movement be formulated? For example, is the SLORC National Convention a part of its strategy? What about the special economic relationship with Thai Generals? Is there a political “center of gravity”? What is the *quid pro quo* regarding the Burma-ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) relationship? Where can astute observers find answers to these questions? Press releases, news reports, personal interviews, reviews of activities, and political polls are good places to start as well as the political analyses by experienced Burma Watchers.

(2) Relative Combat Power

This paragraph of the strategic estimate should not “jump

ahead” and begin to analyze what the information means. Otherwise, the premature analysis will be comparing “apples and oranges” (military and political defiance are two different “weapons systems”) and the information may get confusing. This paragraph should be limited to containing just the information that is requested.

(a) Opponent Military

1. Strength. (number, size and types of units). SLORC has stated that it intends to increase force levels to 500,000 and will continue to be primarily a light infantry force with limited air and sea capabilities.

2. Order of Battle. (How it is structured, what units belong to which organizations?). This classification may be important in determining what units respond to actions in certain locations. Also by knowing the order of battle, planners will be able to focus on personality profiles of selected commanders. The Political Defiance Committee (PDC) will be primarily concerned with headquarters of Divisions, Regional Commands and higher.

3. Location and disposition. (Where are these units, how are they deployed, and what are they doing?).

4. Reinforcements. (What units are normally designated to reinforce committed forces—Airborne, Commando, Strike Forces, Air Forces? What are normal reinforcement times for operations 10, 30, 50, 100, 200 miles from garrison location? Time-distance factors for deployment delineate how much time is available for PD [political defiance] operations before the risks become unacceptable).

5. Logistics. (How are units re-supplied? How often is re-supply conducted during contact or without contact? How soon before an operation begins are porters conscripted? Are there established holding areas for porters prior to commencing operations? Are re-supply convoys heavily guarded? Where are the major depots?).

6. Combat Efficiency. (Estimate of training, strength, unit history, casualty rates, and morale. This information is important in designing propaganda themes and dissemination

techniques. Different units have different capabilities. Cite the units being described [22d Infantry Division, 121 Regiment, Armor Brigade]. These citations will allow strategists not only to conduct a pattern analysis, but also to be able to “flag” certain units for special consideration. Defector reports prepared by the CNAB [Committee For Nonviolent Action in Burma] in New Delhi indicate low morale in the Burma Army. Are there other defector reports being prepared and available so that conclusions can be drawn about whether low morale is widespread or just in certain units? What caused the low morale in these units?)

7. Profile of Military. In this paragraph is the placement of information concerning the human make-up of the Burma Army as an institution—education, class, religion, motivation, age range, etc. The information about the location of the enemy’s military can be found in newspapers, foreign press and broadcasting, prisoner of war interrogation reports, defectors, escaped porters,¹² the resistance group’s own agents and sympathizers, radio intercepts, battle reports, and interviews with friendly military officers who have fought the enemy on several occasions.

(b) Friendly Military. For successful strategic political defiance operations, military forces may be required to isolate their own battlefields for a period of time or they have to create a diversion to permit retrieval of PD teams. The strategists’ own military can be very useful in supporting psychological operations against the Burma Army. Therefore, planners should gather the same information as above about their own military forces. Where do they obtain information on friendly military forces? They can begin at the headquarters of the military forces. Very likely, the military commanders will be reluctant to provide information on their own

¹² It has been common practice for the Burma Army to round up civilians to serve as porters to transport military supplies for combat units on operations. There have been recurring reports over the years of these porters being forced to walk in front of military columns while operating in insurgent-controlled areas to serve as “human mine sweepers.” Due to the dangers and hard treatment by the soldiers, many attempt to escape.

strengths and vulnerabilities. This information is quite sensitive so it must be protected. Therefore, appropriate personnel should be able to demonstrate their need to know the information and how that information will be protected at the PDC office. **(COMMENT: For a nonviolent movement to have a military component is a major disadvantage. It interferes with the dynamic of nonviolent struggle, makes recruitment into the movement much more difficult, opens the movement to charges of being a terrorist front for armed struggle, makes it difficult to gain the support of the international community, and invites an increased violent reaction by the regime. The reality is, however, that some opposition groups sometimes refuse to “give up” this option even though they know from experience that the costs far outweigh any advantages gained. If these groups cannot be convinced to transition to nonviolent conflict without an armed component, yet the population under their control or influence is considered essential, the armed activities must be distanced from the movement, and the strategy should consider a phasing out of the use of the military component.)**

(c) Opponent Political Defiance. SLORC has an enormous potential for waging nonviolent struggle. At this point, this potential is not being realized, but it is essential to recognize what that capability could be if a determined effort were made to counter our own operations. Important aspects of SLORC capabilities to be considered are:

1. Strengths

- a. Censorship.
- b. Ownership of radio, television, and press.
- c. Control of all education.
- d. Power of purse to influence behavior
- e. International recognition and access to world press and other key communicators.
- f. Well-trained and extensive intelligence net.

- g. World-class communications capability.

2. Weaknesses

- a. Incompetent to govern.
- b. Despised by the people.
- c. No trained strategists.
- d. Sponsored a policy of genocide against minorities.
- e. Other weaknesses or vulnerabilities.

3. Pillars of Support

- a. Burma Army
- b. MIS (Military Intelligence Service)
- c. Media
- d. Foreign Investors
- e. Business Community
- f. Civil Servants
- g. Other (ASEAN, China, etc.)

4. Demographic Considerations

- a. General (used in analysis of both sides)
- b. Population 45,103,809 (1995 estimate)
- c. 0-14 yrs: 36% (female 7,963,544; male 8,285,459)
- d. 15-64 yrs: 60%; 65+ yrs: 4%
- e. Population growth: 1.84%
- f. Birth rate: 28.02 births/1,000 population
- g. Death rate: 9.63 deaths/1,000 population
- h. Population densities occur in Rangoon, Mandalay, and Moulmein.

5. Opponent Political Considerations

- a. "Natural allies"
 - 1. Burma Army
 - 2. MIS

3. Civil Servants
4. Business Community
5. China, Singapore, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand
6. Other?

b. Organizations

(COMMENT: Recall that organizations are the basis for “loci of power” i.e., sources of societal power. They can be important in the process of decentralizing power as well as being used by PD strategists to identify pillars of support for neutralization or transfer.)

1. Union Solidarity Development Association
2. Sangha (Buddhist Religious Leadership)
3. Artists and Writers Association
4. Teachers’ Organizations
5. Veterans’ Organizations
6. Sporting Clubs
7. Others

c. Political fissures

1. Army Commanders and MIS
2. “Moderates and Hard-liners” within SLORC
3. SLORC and Farmers
4. Junior and Senior officers
5. Privates and Non-commissioned officers
6. Others

(d) Friendly Political Defiance Capability. Much of the information about the PD capability can be obtained from those who have been active in the Political Defiance movement and those who are members of the Political Defiance Committee. Information

on organizations, order of battle, locations and disposition of PD coordinators and actionists, recent activities, and numbers is available from PDC members.

1. Pillars of Support

(COMMENT: The Pillars of Support are the focus of our efforts. The opponent pillars of support are the objectives of our attack; friendly pillars of support are our greatest operational resource.)

- a. National League for Democracy
- b. National Council of the Union of Burma
- c. Burmese Young Monks Association
- d. Political Defiance Committees
 - 1. Ethnic minority organizations
 - 2. International Community organizations (Open Society Institute, etc.)
 - 3. United Nations

2. Demographic Considerations (Same as for opponent above)

a. Distribution of College graduates
(College graduates provide the skills and leadership for political defiance organizations; they will receive different types of information from propagandists. Intellectuals have traditionally been considered a serious threat to tyrants, and rightly so.)

b. Literacy rate by region

c. Ethnic and religious densities. (This information will assist in the selection of actionists and coordinators and provide propagandists appropriate data for designing literature for different groups.)

d. Standards of Living by Region. (If a village has little food, no running water, no electricity, no access to medical care, no cash crops, and no young people remaining, perhaps we should not expect that village to contribute much toward our efforts. We should give them something. Not only something

tangible, but also a vision of what could result when a democratic federal government is established.)

3. Political Considerations

a. “Natural allies”

(COMMENT: Whose interests are being served by served by the NCUB?)

1. Business groups along the Burma borders
2. Students
3. Religious groups
4. Most ethnic nationality groups
5. NLD
6. Environmental groups
7. Human Rights Organizations
8. Others

b. Organizations

(COMMENT: Recall that organizations are the basis for “loci of power”. The creators of the strategic estimate must be very objective in assessing the capabilities of its own organizations. They might also include international organizations involved, or that have interests, in Burma.)

1. NLD (National League for Democracy)
2. Pan-Kachin Development Society
3. NCUB member organizations
4. Democratic Voice of Burma
5. FTUB (Free Trade Unions of Burma)
6. RSO (Rohinga Solidarity Organization)
7. UN
8. National Endowment for Democracy

9. International Republican Institute

10. Open Society Institute

11. Other?

c. Political Fissures

(COMMENT: Political fragmentation is widespread within the pro-democracy movement. The most serious disagreements should be identified.)

1. National Coalition Government of Union Burma and DAB

2. NCUB and Rohingya over exclusion

3. NCUB and FTUB over coordination

4. NCGUB and NLD-LA over leadership of border

5. Others

4. Security Considerations

a. Effectiveness of Counter-Intelligence. (Is it uniformly effective or are there opportunities for early implementation of PD operations?)

b. Individuals vulnerable for recruitment.

c. Organizational vetting procedures.

(What is being done to reduce the opportunity for penetration by intelligence operatives? Pinpointing disinformation, surveillance, and second tier references are examples of some ways to check out recruits.)

d. Communications. (How are messages transmitted? How secure is the system? Couriers, radio, dead drops, receive-only, pre-arranged codes, PGP and other forms of computer communications are examples for evaluation.)

e. Information and document security.

One must never underestimate the ability of a regime to penetrate opposition groups. Therefore, a “chain of custody” of all sensitive materials should be established. That is, the movement should keep

a record of everyone who has read these documents and retains a copy of them. There should be continual emphasis on the need to limit sensitive information to only those who “need to know”. (In a nonviolent movement there is little information to be considered “secret” and that is information that places people at great risk.)

(3) Assumptions

Looking at the mission and the information that has been obtained, the strategists may have to fill in the blanks with assumptions. They may have to add assumptions as they examine possible courses of action. Effective strategies cannot be based on assumptions. Getting the facts whenever possible is the foundation of a successful nonviolent movement. If assumptions must be made, personnel must make every effort to make sure they are valid. For example:

(a) There will be no military assistance provided to the NCUB by foreign governments.

(b) Influenced by multi-national corporations, western democracies will not take any strong actions against SLORC, but will limit themselves to empty verbal exchanges.

(c) The money from Indonesian and Thai interests to the National Democratic Party headquarters influenced US policy regarding Burma.

(d) Foreign investment is critical for sustained economic growth and political stability in Burma.

(e) Others

At this point in the strategic estimate, strategic developers start using the obtained information and the assumptions that have been made. The next step is the determination of enemy capabilities that could affect the political defiance courses of actions. This intellectual exercise begins in paragraph 2B of the strategic estimate.

B. Opponent Capabilities

By reviewing and analyzing information about the Burma Army, the nonviolent movement can identify its enemy’s capabilities that

could affect its own possible courses of action. Conclusions about the capabilities of the Burma Army are that it could:

- (1) Re-arrest, murder, or exile Aung San Suu Kyi
- (2) Violently suppress major civil unrest in three major population centers without degrading its capabilities to conduct military operations in the liberated areas.
- (3) Obtain the cooperation of Chinese, Indian and Thai military and intelligence organizations to isolate and limit the effectiveness of Burmese pro-democracy groups along the borders.
- (4) Jam foreign broadcasts
- (5) Attack and seize NCUB/KNU Headquarters

C. Own Courses of Action (CA)

After reviewing the movement's mission one more time and analyzing its own capabilities, those preparing the strategic estimate can develop courses of action that would accomplish its mission. Recall that an effective strategy will distract and dislocate the enemy; that an indirect approach to the objective (with intermediate objectives) is generally most desirable; that nonviolent movements capitalize upon their own greatest strengths to attack the enemy's weakest points; and that at the strategic level, developers engage all of their capabilities.

CA 1. A strategy that would establish PD strong points throughout Burma whose objectives are to:

- a. Conduct PD operations to reflect nationwide political instability.
- b. Recruit members for pro-democracy groups.
- c. Make preparations for a general strike.
- d. Present SLORC with multiple, dispersed targets.

CA 2. Other

3. ANALYSIS OF OPPOSING COURSES OF ACTION

In this paragraph is the determination that the effect of each enemy capability has on each of the movement's own courses of action. From the capability used in the example above, the democracy forces would have a problem if a course of action being considered called for a major uprising in Rangoon, Mandalay and Moulmein only without first undermining Burma's Army's obedience to orders.

4. COMPARISON OF OWN COURSES OF ACTION

In this paragraph, the advantages and disadvantages of each course of action (with respect to what is considered to be governing factors) are weighed. For example, a governing factor might be a desire to keep civilian casualties to a minimum.

5. DECISION

The course of action decided upon is translated into a completed operational mission statement.

Summary

This chapter reviews the contents and processes involved in developing a strategic estimate. The strategic estimate is a critical document for a strategic war planner. It is a document that is not quickly prepared, but its development is well within the capability of political opposition groups. A well-prepared estimate reduces the chance of failure by identifying the best course of action to accomplish a mission. The strategic estimate can be a "living" document if it is constantly updated. As in the staff study, format and intense concentration are necessary. A format permits clear thinking—even under pressure.