

Civil resistance runs on people power: How to shift allegiances

Target those who can shape the outcome of your struggle

Powerful opponents seem to have everything: money, guns, supplies, the army and police, institutions and prisons. How can simple citizens, with scarce resources and unarmed, succeed against opponents wielding deadly weapons? "Look at us," you say, "we are no match."

When we see conflict as a contest between two players, as in a boxing match, despair can set in. If your only hope is to win over the adversary, the chances of success indeed appear slim.

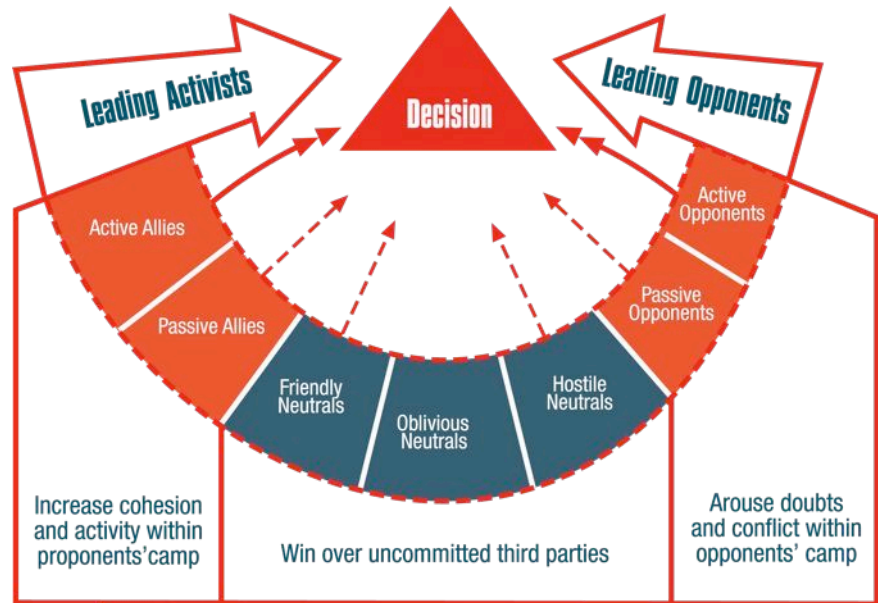
FIGHTING FOR HEARTS AND MINDS

Here's the good news. The theater of social conflict always involves many actors, each with their own fan base and support staff, fighting it out under the watchful eyes of numerous stakeholders and crowds of onlookers. All have their unique point of view on the conflict, seen through the lens of their motivations and aspirations.

Now what if you could help groups change their perspectives, allegiances, and roles? That would make for a different scenario.

Strategizing is the art of writing your own script for how you will influence the actors, supporters and onlookers to play different roles on each side of the conflict. By enlarging your perspective on the public confrontation, you find new segments of society to engage, persuade, or neutralize.

To visualize this strategic framework, imagine a gauge or a barometer. On one side is "us", the activists or proponents. On the other is "them", the opponents. Between the two, a whole dynamic spectrum of opinions and support levels. You can map out



Strategizing for civil resistance

the groups in society, based on their position along the lines of conflict.

THREE TASKS FOR ORGANIZERS

With a picture of where specific constituencies stand on an issue, your job, as nonviolent strategist and organizer, is threefold:

1. Extend and strengthen your base.

From your end of the spectrum, the goal is to strengthen the cadre of organizers, and extend the base of people you can mobilize. This means raising levels of dedication, and increasing numbers. You can strengthen internal cohesion through focused campaigning towards SMART goals— specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. If you can turn some passive sympathizers into engaged activists, that is a significant step forward. Nonviolent struggle, because it is more open, offers major benefits towards building your base. Bold, inspiring nonviolent action can attract and engage not only fit young men (as street fighting and

guerilla warfare tend to do), but also women, the elderly, the less able, children. Nonviolent popular mobilization is open to everyone, not just an elite.

2. Attract public support and move the uncommitted.

The central area of the spectrum is where a majority of the population is usually found, at least initially. This is also where the most significant shifts can happen. That is why it pays to target "neutral" people who have yet to take sides. This segment offers greater fluidity. It is a huge win if you can get a group that was slightly hostile to move into neutrality. Those who can gain the sympathy of fence-sitters or some small participation of yet uncommitted sectors of society are often those who win. The benefits of nonviolent action in this area are obvious. Nonviolent action is more likely than violent action to attract sympathy from neutral sectors of society. Those who use explicitly

nonviolent means are less likely to be painted as terrorists or savages by the media (and if they try, the accusation will not stick). And because violent repression against nonviolent activists is more likely to be seen as undeserved, more people will feel compelled to step in and take a stand against unjust attacks.

3. Pull away, divide or neutralize those who prop up the opponent.

A third strategic task for nonviolent organizers is to weaken the pillars that hold the power structure in place, such as the police, the army, the business elite, the controlled mass media, etc. This can be done by deliberate use of tactics aimed at driving a wedge between soft supporters of the adversary, and its more extreme or "hard-core" elements. Actions that appeal to the shared fundamental values of these sectors can create insoluble dilemmas for the authorities. The advantage of nonviolent action is that it is more likely to provoke important rifts, causing dissensions and defections among key supporters of the opponent. If the movement remains nonviolent, it will eventually break elite consensus on violent repression as the best way to deal with the resistance. A split will emerge between those who push for violent repression (the hawks), and those who argue for co-optation, reform, more time, or more conciliatory measures (the doves). In addition, because nonviolent action does not threaten their lives, members of the army and the police are more likely to be divided. In the end, some may start to deflect orders to crack down. Defections, refusal to serve and conscientious objection become more likely.

ONE WEDGE CAN BE ENOUGH

There's more good news: Moving just one wedge, one simple step in your direction can allow you to succeed. Just as surely as the balance will tip

over when you add that last pea to the plate, it is often enough to move just one part of the spectrum. Granted, for large-scale change, you will need key groups, some bigger peas, to inch closer to your side. But to win, you don't need everyone to join you. You don't even need the hardliners to budge. That makes the job much easier, doesn't it?

EXPECT POLARIZATION

In major conflict, what often happens is that, as your side gets fired up and mobilized, the other side reacts as well. You see the wedges closest to your adversary start moving away from you, towards your leading opponent. That is called polarization.

It doesn't mean you can't win. If a large enough section of society takes a step in your direction, you can still achieve your goals. In the end, it is not necessary for the opponent side of the spectrum to move your way, although it would certainly hasten victory.

NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE HAS A ROLE FOR EVERYONE

When the time comes to choose which action to undertake, it pays to look at how your methods will play out with groups in the sympathizers, neutrals, and opponents camps, as your choice of tactics may influence differently various segments of the spectrum.

For instance, will the tactics you choose to mobilize your activist base also help win over uncommitted parties? Say your closest allies really enjoy confrontational direct action with leading opponents. How will your next action help convince more neutral groups to join your efforts?

Will the likely repercussions empower your constituencies, or disempower them? Tactics need to be planned in relation to how much they do or do not attract key groups that you need to influence in society.

GOOD STRATEGY AND OPTIMISM

Campaigns are more likely to succeed when a large array of tactics are used to mobilize people. Different types of actions will appeal to different people along the spectrum. Not everybody will be willing to call a politician, for instance, or to be dragged to jail. Your strategizing will help identify ways for people to plug in, based on things they are more willing to do.

Armed with better knowledge of the terrain and good strategy, you will carry more optimism into the task of mobilization, which can only bring more people on board.

STRATEGIZE WITH THE SPECTRUM OF ALLIES

Group Exercise

For a step-by-step method on how to facilitate the group exercise called the "Spectrum of Allies":
<http://TrainingForChange.org>.

To identify tactics to use with specific segments of the spectrum, see the exercise called "Move your allies" at <http://bit.ly/C3ngC>.

