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# Stage Six Grand Strategy I

8-11 minutes

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## [From: History is a Weapon](#)

### **The Movement Action Plan: A Strategic Framework Describing the Eight Stages of Successful Movements**

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Excerpted from Stage Six: Winning Majority Public Support (pp. 23-25)

### **Grand Strategy**

Activists need to develop a “grand strategy” for waging social movements in Stage Six. Lacking a viable strategy, most activists are unable to see a relationship between their day-to-day activities and the accomplishment of the movement’s goals. Some of the key elements are the following:

- Keep the issue in the public spotlight and on society’s agenda over time. Keep the policies and conditions that violate the values, interests, and beliefs of the majority of the populace in the public spotlight. Over time, this helps build the social and political conditions for change because it helps fulfill Robert Jay Lifton’s view that the way to get rid of a social delusion is to keep telling the truth. The present social movements against

nuclear weapons and in opposition to U.S. intervention in Central America should recognize as tremendous success the fact that these issues have been kept in the public spotlight and on society's social and political agendas for a number of years.

- Identify all of the movement's key goals and identify which stage each is in and develop strategies to achieve them. Identify the movement's full range of demands, from the very specific to the general, such as end all nuclear weapons, stop nuclear testing, stop Star Wars, and stop U.S. Euromissiles. Strategies, submovements, and campaigns need to be developed for each of these major demands. Activists should identify which MAP stage the movement is in for each of these demands and develop strategies, submovements, and campaigns to achieve each major demand. For example, stop U.S. direct invasion of Nicaragua might be in Stage Seven, official support for the contras in Stage Six, and a positive Contadora peace resolution for all of Central America is possibly just in Stage Three.
- Counter the powerholders' strategy. The movement needs to identify the powerholders' long-term goals, strategies, and programs and develop counterstrategies against each one. For example, the U.S. is considering invading Nicaragua, supporting the contra's war against Nicaragua, preventing a meaningful peaceful Contadora resolution, etc. The movement needs to develop campaigns to prevent the government's achieving each of these objectives.
- Beyond reforms: propose alternatives, larger demands, and a new paradigm. The movement now needs not only to protest present policies but also to propose specific alternatives. In the

process of struggle, people act their way into thinking, and they learn that the problem is much bigger than they had thought. They come to realize that their original concerns were merely symptoms of much bigger and deeper problems; consequently, the movement needs to make larger demands. This ultimately includes the necessity for a whole new worldview or paradigm. The movement against Cruise and Pershing 2 missiles in Europe, for example, realized that they needed to remove all nuclear weapons from East and West Europe. This has led a new worldview of a nuclear free East and West Europe that will become increasingly neutral and independent of the Soviet-United States superpower bloc system.

- Guide the movement through the dynamics of conflict with the powerholders. Waging a social movement is similar to playing chess. The movement and powerholders constantly engage in moves and countermoves to win the public and build conditions to support their own position. The movement tries to build moral, political, and economic conditions that will erode the support that enables the powerholders to continue their policies. The powerholders keep changing their policies to keep their capacity to maintain the status quo. The movement's goal is to keep weakening the powerholders' position and raising the price that they must pay to continue their policies. The Reagan administration, for example, seemed about to invade Nicaragua in 1984, but the anti-intervention movement raised public opposition to a new level. The government then switched its chief focus to supporting the contras, but the movement made this illegal by helping pass the Boland amendment, thereby

forcing the government to undertake the high-risk policies of illegal and unconstitutional covert aid through Ollie North. This has weakened President Reagan's capacity to wage his policies in Central America as well as elsewhere.

### **Powerholders**

The powerholders launch a hardline conflict management strategy to defend their policies, which included the following:

- Promote new rhetoric and myths and re-emphasize the threat of outside demons, such as terrorism and Communism, to try to rally an increasingly skeptical public.
- Increase their counter-movement strategy to gather intelligence; discredit the movement; cause internal disruption, control, and steer the movement; preempt it by claiming to do the movement's program (e.g., "Star Wars will end nuclear weapons"); and try to co-opt the movement under mainstream political control (e.g., co-sponsor grossly watered down Congressional bills).
- Engage in the dynamics of conflict with the movement by switching strategies, stance, and policies as needed, for example, from invading Nicaragua with U.S. troops, to supporting the proxy contras and waging low-intensity warfare against Nicaragua.
- Publicly appear to be engaged in a meaningful "negotiation process", while actually carrying out operative policies and doctrines without giving up any important advantages. Powerholders keep pronouncing that their policies are correct and winning. Finally, splits begin happening within the power

structure, as over time pressure from the new social and political consensus force increasing portions of the mainstream political, economic and social elites to switch their position, even openly oppose the policies of the central powerholders in order to protect their own self-interests. The issue is now hotly contested within Congress, the Administration, and all other political levels.

## **Public**

Public opinion opposing the powerholders' policies grows to as much as 65 percent within a few years, and then, over many years, slowly swells to a large majority of up to 85 percent. The populace, however, is evenly split over wanting a change in the status quo. Half fear the alternatives more than they oppose the present conditions and policies. By the early 1970s, for example, 83 percent of Americans called for an end to the Vietnam War, and currently 65 percent oppose aid to the contras and U.S. military intervention in Central America.

## **Goals**

- Keep the issue and the powerholders' values violations in the public spotlight and on society's agenda.
- Switch from only crisis protest to waging protracted social struggle to achieve positive social change.
- Gear efforts to the public to keep winning a bigger majority opinion.
- Involve large numbers of the populace in programs at the grassroots level.

- Propose alternatives, more demands, and a new paradigm.
- Have activists able to use a strategic framework such as MAP.  
32 Bill Moyer
- Adopt empowerment organizational and leadership models.

### **Pitfalls**

- Activists become stuck in the protest stage.
- Movement violence, rebelliousness, and macho radicalism.
- Believing that the movement is losing and local efforts are futile.
- National organizations and leadership disenfranchise grassroots activists by dominating the movement.
- Cooptation by powerholders through collusion and compromise.
- Political sects dominate the movement organizations.

### **Conclusions**

Over many years, perhaps decades, public opinion against the powerholders' policies swells to an overwhelming majority of up to 85 percent, as was opposition to the Vietnam War. Almost every sector of society eventually wants to end the problem and current policies—most politicians, the Democratic Party, celebrities, professionals, students, Middle America, youth, the unemployed, local governments, and the general population. But strangely, nothing seems to change. The problem continues, Congress seems unable to make decisive votes, and the central powerholders continue their policies, although with cosmetic changes. Moreover the movement appears to be in a lull. There are demonstrations, meetings, and activists, but they

seem small, routine, and mechanical, as the movement's position has been adopted by the mainstream of society. Over the years, however, the weight of the massive public opposition, along with the defection of many elites, eventually takes its toll. The political price that the powerholders have to pay to maintain their policies grows to become an untenable liability.