

Nonviolent Responses to Terrorism: a strategy game

Goals/ Background:

This strategy game was invented at Swarthmore College for a class taught by George Lakey on “Nonviolent Responses to Terror” in 2007, but could be effective for other groups of adults.

To explore ways of navigating difficult scenarios and gain perspective from multiple angles of an issue

Time: roughly 75 minutes to play plus an equal amount of time to debrief

How to Lead:

It requires six players; we recommend that each “player” consist of a small group or team. The detailed procedure is described following the scenario, or plot.

SCENARIO: Eslandia Challenged by Terrorism

Eslandia is challenged by major political turbulence and a growing problem with terrorism. Eslandia is a country of 15 million people whose present borders were drawn in a compromise through the settlement following the Second World War. Its majority population, the Eslandians, mostly lives in the North of the country in large urban industrial centers. The minority population, the Sulaks, is largely rural and in the Southern part of the country, and is ethnically related to most of the inhabitants of Sulakstan, a neighboring country. The towering leader of Eslandia during the wartime struggle was Adam Eve, and he became president of the newly-established country. He was Eslandian but enjoyed wide popularity among the Sulaks, and he was a strong social democrat who believed in parliamentary forms and a welfare state.

In his first years of rule he campaigned especially hard for public education, and enjoyed opening new schools in the rural as well as urban areas. He insisted that Eslandia have two official languages – Eslandian and Sulak – and that Sulaks be hired in the civil service as well as Eslandians. His support of trade unions and interest in economic justice soon provoked the rise of an opposition party, however, based in the owning class and the growing middle class of urban areas. The opposition party, called the Opp-ohs, checkmated Adam Eve’s drive toward economic equality, and a third party formed of disappointed Sulaks whose aspirations for uplift from rural poverty had been thwarted. At that point Adam Eve was killed in a tragic auto accident and was succeeded as president by another from his party, Adam Over, with the support of the Sulak party (with its history of hope in Adam Eve). However, Adam Over proved to be no visionary and also was a weaker personality and politician.

The power of the Opp-ohs grew. China’s rise in manufacturing of textiles and consumer electronics became a new challenge to Eslandia, whose leading exports were in those goods and cotton grown in rural areas. This led Eslandia’s manufacturers to cut jobs and reduce wages; the workers fought back with strikes and demonstrations. As the economy declined and polls revealed rising support for the Opp-ohs, Adam Over instituted a new economic policy: he reduced taxes on the manufacturing sector and increased compensation for unemployed factory workers. He paid for this by raising taxes in the booming cotton sector, and eliminated the budget for diversifying agriculture and bringing appropriate technology and other developmental programs for the rural part of the country. He also opened vast tracts of government-owned rural

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land to private investment in cotton to take advantage of the booming market. This new land was largely marginal for cotton-growing and led to the uprooting of subsistence Sulak farmers, who moved to the cities. In the cities they met a hostile reception from Eslandians already feeling squeezed by declining living standards. Expressions of anti-Sulak prejudice increased enormously among Eslandians.

One of the things they talked about was demographics: the birthrate among Eslandians had stabilized with their population of nine million, but the Sulaks continued their traditionally high birthrate. The largely Christian Protestant Eslandians laid this to the “old-fashioned and ignorant” faith of the Sulaks, which was Christian Orthodox. The Sulak party strongly protested the policy changes made by Adam Over but was unwilling to break with his party for fear of Adam’s party being replaced in running the government by the Opp-ohs, who were openly hostile to Sulak concerns and some of whose leaders were clearly racist. Militant Sulaks lost faith in parliamentary maneuver and began protests against the new economic policy: demonstrations, marches, even some sit-ins. At first Adam Over’s police ignored the protests, but as they grew in number the Opp-ohs pressed for law and order and the police began making arrests. A few young Sulaks burned cotton fields in response, which led to larger-scale arrests of Sulak militants and longer jail sentences for them although the actual culprits of the burnings were not always among them since the largely Eslandian police force had little connection with the Sulaks who could give reliable information.

The government of neighboring Sulakstan protested the repressive actions of Eslandia’s government and made no attempt to prevent sympathizing citizens from crossing the border in aid of Eslandian Sulaks. Some of these border-crossers were members of a Sulakstan university radical student group, whose name loosely translates as: Student Terrorists Uplifting Democratic Sulaks (STUDS). At about this time an extraordinary oil deposit was discovered by geologists in the rural South of Eslandia. The excited buzz among Sulaks was: with this oil on our land, we would do better to secede than to remain oppressed by the Eslandians. STUDS organizers find a ready response among Sulak young people and rapidly build underground cells. Their first coordinated action was burning 27 cotton fields the same night. The government reacted with major police raids backed by military troops. More Sulaks joined STUDS. Their next action was to begin burning the houses of Sulak police officers who participated in the raids – two family members were caught in the burning houses. More repression followed. STUDS formally announced their demand of secession to join Sulakstan and their commitment to armed struggle. Another round of house burnings occurred and one Eslandian Protestant church; several people were hurt but no one killed in this round. Adam Over announced conscription to increase the size of the army to handle the terrorist threat. Members of his party denounce thugs who call themselves Christians but burn churches.

Six Players:

Adam Over’s inner circle

Opp-oh-s inner circle

Sulak Party’s inner circle

STUDS inner circle (including both citizens of Sulakstan and citizens of Eslandia).

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Eslandian Alternatives Group: a group of labor leaders, intellectuals, progressive Protestant leaders, the well-respected daughter of Adam Eve. Some of these are well-connected to Adam Over's party but in a low-profile way.

Sulak Alternatives Group: peasant co-op leaders, intellectuals, progressive Orthodox leaders, some are well-connected to the Sulak Party; some are parents of STUDS cadres.

PROCEDURE

Note: Participants in the strategy game are aware of a "toolbox" of eight non-military methods for resisting and overcoming terrorism. The toolbox can be found below. Because of college class schedules, the strategy game needed to be played in two different classes, on a Tuesday and Thursday. In other settings it might be possible to do the entire game in one evening. In the first class session, volunteers were recruited for the six teams. We then read the scenario aloud, and did a brief question/answer (for clarification). The teams were given ten minutes to plan an initial course of action. Then one at a time a spokesperson for each team rose to announce the action taken by the team. We then went to Round Two, in which teams had five minutes to prepare, then announce to everyone else. We continued that way almost until the end of class. The teams were not allowed during this class session to negotiate with each other during their prep time. The role of the professor in this game includes the authority to rule actions out of order (if a team claims to mobilize the Pope and United Nations to do highly unrealistic things) and also to announce results if needed (if a team wants to know what percentage of the population participated in a strike).

Preliminary debrief: In the final fifteen minutes of class the teams discussed (a) "What moves did we make that we believe were most effective?" (b) (if defending against terrorism) "What non-military techniques did we overlook?" (c) (if seeking to mobilize more terror) "What non-military techniques used against us gave us the most problem?" At the beginning of the next class the group received the following handout, which I wrote in light of what had happened during the previous playing of the game and my sense of what needed to be "hyped" to pose further challenge.

STRATEGY GAME SCENARIO UPDATE

This is the updated situation facing Eslandia in the light of external events and also in light of moves taken AND not taken up until now:

STUDS Convert Interviewed: A recent convert to STUDS from Eslandia's capitol city submitted to an interview by this newspaper yesterday. He's known to be rapidly ascending in the leadership chain although not yet in the inner circle, and he is sufficiently sought-after by the police to live an underground life. He says that he was brought up in a law-abiding Sulak family but was outraged by the daily insults that his mother and dad received from Eslandians. He lived in a Sulak neighborhood in the Eslandian capitol, and when he started at an Eslandian university he found himself snubbed by ethnic Eslandians, and when he complained about it, was further marginalized. That, he said, plus the violently repressive tactics employed by Eslandian police who had no idea what was going on among Sulaks like himself drove him into the arms of the STUDS.

Corruption Revealed in Economic Development Schemes: Eslandian TV reported that a leaked government audit revealed widespread corruption among officials charged with carrying out economic development work in the South. The officials were ethnically both Eslandian and

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Sulak. “Very little of the budget for the projects of the last five years made it to benefit the people who were targeted,” the auditor general said. “The budget has been cut back drastically because of economic hardship for Eslandia, but even the money that was still in the pipeline has been misappropriated and ended up lining individuals’ pockets.”

Demography Report on Ethnic Concentration: The ten-year census analysis shows that the two biggest trends in the past decade have been (1) increased Sulak population growth, and (2) increased segregation in housing and schools. Even in smaller cities in the north where Sulaks have frequently been as much as one-third of the population, neighborhoods are increasingly of one ethnicity, the demographers said.

China Announces Assistance Plan: The Chinese government is now offering Eslandia technical assistance in exploiting the oil reserves, according to the Eslandian commerce department. The department is now weighing the merits of the proposal. The offer mostly focuses on technical training and seminars for Eslandian and Sulak business entrepreneurs.

Radical Students Infiltrating from Sulakstan: Reuters has learned that 200-400 radical students from Sulakstan have entered Eslandia in the past three weeks, carrying with them explosive materials and weapons. Their intention is to persuade STUDS to escalate its armed struggle, and if that doesn’t work, to start a new movement, THE REAL STUDS, to go all-out for the freedom of the Sulak people. Reuters is unable to confirm rumors that these students have been trained by the Sulakstan military, and that more young adults are being recruited for further training.

PROCEDURE

The student teams played several rounds with these new circumstances in mind. They then discussed within their teams the same debrief questions as previous, then reported out to the whole group their conclusions. That led to underlining of theoretical points previously made in the readings.

THE TOOLBOX, SUMMARIZED:

Eight Nonmilitary Techniques for Defending Against Terror

Non-repressive police work and the infrastructure of norms and laws. Police work can be less or more effective – what’s worked? And what could make it still more effective, for example more coordination with other police forces, more community policing, more of a pro-law/justice orientation on the part of states, more global law/agreements (Int’l Criminal Court, Kyoto Treaty, Land Mines Treaty, etc.).

Ally-building and the infrastructure of economic development. While there’s rarely a direct link between poverty and terrorism, there are indirect links of great importance. Case studies of economic development as a way of fighting terrorism (and not). How economic development could make a bigger difference, including in gaining allies in the search for nonviolent alternatives.

Policy changes and the concept of reckless behavior. It’s now clear that states sometimes make choices that invite – almost beg for – a terrorist response. For example, occupying someone else’s land or seizing their resources. How can states learn not to be reckless, endangering the lives of their people?

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Negotiation. Governments often say “we don’t negotiate with terrorists,” but history shows that they do, in one form or another. How can this technique be used most effectively?

Reducing marginalization through paying attention to culture. As Britain has learned, among others, marginalizing a group within your population is not safe or sensible; terrorists grow under those conditions. This is also true on a global level. Much marginalizing behavior is unconscious; but it can be reduced.

Nonviolent protest/campaigns among defenders. Terrorism happens in a political context and is therefore influenced by that context. Some terror campaigns have lapsed because they lost popular support. The rise and fall of support for terrorism is in turn influenced by social movements using people power (nonviolent struggle). How can this technique be enhanced?

Education/training for conflict. Terror happens when a population tries to suppress conflicts instead of waging them. A technique for reducing terror is to teach pro-conflict attitudes and skills.

Post-terror recovery programs. Not all terror can be prevented, any more than all crime or natural disasters. This technique builds resilience in a population through, for example, trauma work, so the population doesn’t become rigid with fear and create more terrorism through retaliation.

Where This Tool Came From:

Created by George Lakey