

# The Road to Athena's Camp



A Briefing on  
Research as an organizing tool

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## Research as an organizing tool

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### **A new movement of social transformation is forming**

The anti-war movement needs a coherent vision to organize around. The Bush regime's war on terror has spilled over into aggressive war overseas and repressive war domestically. Unlike the war in Viet Nam, the Bush war is not the unraveling of long-standing but deeply flawed policies on international relations.

Bush's war is based on the politics of maneuver – a collection of temporary expedients swerving from one action to another. Each of these moves will generate future problems that will eventually come home to roost. The republic will suffer grievous harm to cherished liberties and freedoms as a result of the errors now being committed.

The anti-war movement which is now emerging as a potent national political force is rooted in the defense of justice, freedom and democracy. It will prevail by building a national consensus about what kind of a world we choose to live in.

### **Our task is articulating a vision of the future**

Looking back to Athens, the oldest democratic republic, we would do well to learn from Athena, the patroness of war, wisdom and technology. The ancient Greeks had two ways of representing war: Athena and Ares. Athena was wise, calm and majestic. She never went armed in time of peace. She was accompanied by an owl and her most potent weapons were a shield and breastplate. Ares, on the other hand, was a violent, cruel, raging oaf. His sons were mass murderers and his aides were Terror and Strife. It's not hard to see that Athena represented power under the control of wisdom and Ares was the brutal rage of aggression. Simply put, Ares is the god of empire and Athena is the goddess of democracy. There will always be conflict and aggression. Ares will not go away, but he can be chained up. Our task is to build a world where Athena can triumph over Ares. A world where the warriors are peaceful and soldiers don't have enemies.

## The Road to Athena's camp

- *Information is the key*
- *Research turns on the light*
- *Analysis focuses the energy*
- *Strategy takes us to a new world*

### **Wars are now fought by and with information**

The information revolution is transforming the nature of conflict across the spectrum: from open warfare, to terrorism, crime, politics and social activism. In social conflicts, the Internet and other media are greatly empowering individuals and small groups to influence the behavior of states. Preparing for conflict in such a world will require shifting to new forms of organization, but this shift will prove difficult for states and professional militaries that remain bastions of hierarchy, bound to resist institutional redesign.

Ares, the old brute-force god of war, must give way to Athena, the well-armed goddess of wisdom. Accepting Athena as the patroness of the information age represents a first step not only for preparing for future conflicts, but also for preventing them.

### **Movements of social transformation are about information and conflict**

Luther Gerlach says five key factors must be present to create a true movement:

1. It's a network: A segmented, polycephalous, cellular organization composed of units interconnected by various personal, structural, and ideological ties.
2. It's people-to-people: Face-to-face recruitment by committed individuals using their own pre-existing, significant social relationships.
3. It's breaking free: Personal commitment that separates a converts in some significant way from the established order (or their previous place in it), identifies them with a new set of values, and commits them to changed patterns of behavior.
4. It's about ideas: An ideology which codifies values and goals, provides a conceptual framework by which all experiences or events relative to these goals may be interpreted, motivates and provides rationale for changes, defines the opposition, and forms the basis for unification of network.
5. It's a conflict: Real or perceived opposition from the established order.

## **Netwar is information conflict**

- *You'll always beat fantasy opponents in your mind, but they'll whip the tar out of you in the real world*
- *Netwar is like Aikido*  
*– you help the bad guys beat themselves*
- *Successful conflict resolution is a result of strategy*
- *Strategy requires topsight – comprehensive understanding that surpasses knowledge and approaches wisdom*

### **Netwar is civil-society networks versus authoritarian hierarchies**

Netwar refers to an emerging mode of social conflict in which the protagonists use network forms of organization and related doctrines, strategies, and sometimes technologies. Netwar players are likely to consist of dispersed organizations, small groups, and individuals who communicate, coordinate, and conduct their campaigns in an consultative and collaborative manner without a central command. Netwar differs from modes of conflict in which the protagonists prefer to develop formal, stand-alone, hierarchical organizations, doctrines, and strategies.

Instead, netwar is waged by loosely-connected groups, often composed of less than a dozen people, but connected to many other groups by social, political and cultural ties. Netwars waged by civil-society players have already generated movements to ban the use of landmines, support the Zapatistas in Mexico, oppose the WTO, enlarge the use of renewable energy sources and reform politics through instant run-off voting. Civil-society netwars can and do reduce the violence inherent in conflicts.

### **Netwars are won by gaining topsight – comprehensive understanding**

The side with the best research and intelligence wins.

In defensive netwar, the role of research is critical to gaining a complete picture of the conflict. Without that picture, opponents will retain the initiative, control the situation, surprise you and force you into reactive response.

In offensive netwar, civil-society players take the initiative and start changing the world. Research provides the facts and builds a knowledge base. That knowledge is filtered through analysis to determine strategy. Operational research guides the tactics used to accomplish the strategy. In netwar, multiple groups adopt their understanding of the situation to develop the strategy and tactics most favorable to their situation.

# Information is data that changes behavior

***Data*** > ***Facts*** > ***Information*** > ***Knowledge*** > ***Wisdom***

- ***Data is mostly noise***
- ***Facts are proved by evidence***
- ***Information is the facts that matter***
- ***Knowledge is information in a framework***
- ***Wisdom is where knowledge meets the world***

## **We are swimming in a sea of data**

With the advent of modern communication technology, netwar players have access to an enormous bandwidth of data. The problem is that data is not information. You may be swimming in a sea of data, but you can drown in it, too.

News has been largely replaced by entertainment, as Neil Postman has observed in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Most people's world views are more strongly shaped by stereotypes, fiction, rumor and myth than knowledge.

The dearth of knowledge is a two-edged sword, since uncivil society is equally a target of the misinformation which dominates the sea of data. There's one saving grace here: the bad guys are liars and manipulators. Lies are the nemesis of knowledge. Liars often actively work to deny their side knowledge.

## **Facts first, policy later**

The task of a researcher is to find the facts. All the facts. The whole facts. And nothing but the facts. Research separates facts from misinformation by finding the evidence that enables judgment. The most common questions you will hear one researcher ask another is "how do we know this?" and "where is the evidence for this?" Fiction may be an art, but facts are science.

## **Research is mostly a process of collection and condensation**

The purpose of most research is not to pile up huge amounts of data. That happens as a side-effect, but it's not what research is about. As you get better at research, you will test data by evidence. It's really about finding the evidence. Evidence is the residue of a fact. The end result of a research project can usually be written on one side of one piece of paper. The fact that there may have been boxes and boxes of data collected to produce five hundred words of knowledge is just part of the process.

# The Basic Theory of Information

- *Kurt Gödel showed any organized system of knowledge must contain contradictions*
- *Alan Turing showed no definite method can be provably bug-free*
- *Claude Shannon showed information is energy*

$$H = -\sum p_i \log p_i$$

## The foundations of information science were laid down in the last century

World War Two was won partly by physics, but mostly by information. Gödel, Turing and Shannon were all mathematicians. They started a scientific revolution like the physical revolution launched by Galileo and Newton. These guys were heroes; the modern equivalents of Hercules and Ulysses. They broke the German *enigma* codes. They invented computers. And we can stand on their shoulders.

You can read about this as fact or fiction. The best non-fiction on the information revolution is Roger Penrose's *The Emperor's New Mind*. Two lovely novels are Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and Neil Stephenson's *Cryptonomicon*.

## Life is full of contradictions

Gödel's theorem says that formal mathematics is bound to contain contradictions. And if math has contradictions, life will be full of contradictions. Don't make a big deal out of discovering a contradiction. They have to be understood or they can be traps. Contradictions can be the key to understanding. Life is full of contradictions. Live with it.

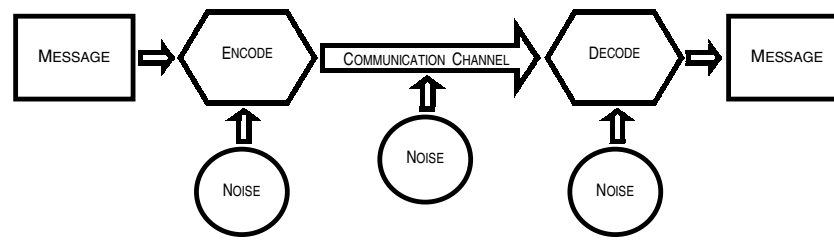
## There will always be a few bugs in the system that haven't been found yet

Alan Turing's paper, *On Computable Numbers*, defined the laws of computing. Written years before the first electronic computer was built, the Turing Machine (a thought experiment) showed exactly what computers can and can't do. The most important thing they can't do is debug themselves. Think about that when *Echelon* and *Star Wars* come up as issues. The system is buggy.

## Knowledge might be power, but information is certainly energy

Claude Shannon's "A mathematical theory of communication" defined information as entropy, the measure of energy. The same formulae is used in ecology to determine the diversity of an ecosystem. Diversity is our strength.

# Thermodynamics of information



***Signal to Noise rules the world***

## **Research and Organizing happen through communication channels**

This diagram shows Shannon's model of communication. At one end is the sender and at the other end is the receiver. The encoding/decoding mechanism can be as simple as speech or as complicated as an encrypted spread-spectrum radio link. At each stage between the sender and receiver, noise creeps into the system. Like friction, noise degrades the signal.

## **Research is swimming upstream to the truth**

The position of a researcher is complicated by noise. Seeking the facts, research moves back through the data channel in search of the original message and sender. The most common pitfall in research is mistaking noise for signal and following the wrong path to a dead end. It is worth noting that repetition of a noisy signal is of little value in distinguishing facts from noise. The repetition of misinformation does not make it more true.

## **Organizing is swimming downstream to the world**

The organizer and activists tasks concentrate on transmitting information so it reaches the intended receivers. In today's media-saturated world, it might seem that getting a message out is an easy thing. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Messages get smothered, distorted and buried in noise. Creating a clear data channel to your intended audience is like trying to push the contents of a 55-gallon drum through a soda straw.

## **STASM: Subject Target Audience Sender Message**

These five characteristics of a communication are very useful to keep in mind when doing research or applying analysis. The subject is the general heading. Target is the intended effect. Audience is the intended recipient. Sender may not be obvious and can be the hardest part to nail down during research. The message is the content of the communication.

## Basic Rules of Research and Analysis

- *Who are those guys? What's the deal?*
- *You never know...until you look*
- *Things are always worse than they seem*
- *The business of war, like the business of life, is using what you do know to find out what you don't...*
- *Research and analysis is changing your mind – finding out every way that you are wrong*
- *Knowledge comes slow and hard, but wisdom strikes like lightning*

### **The central task of research and analysis is building a body of knowledge**

Buckminster Fuller called it “comprehensive understanding.” Your task as a research analyst is to find out everything there is to know about a subject. The most common mistake beginning researchers make is trying to “prove” a proposition. That’s just fattening up an opinion with data. Gaining knowledge means learning new things and looking at the world in a new way. It particularly means finding out things that you didn’t already know. Start out with the assumption that everything you know is wrong. It’s not often true, but when it is you’re on the threshold of a very important discovery.

### **What you are looking for is evidence:**

**facts that prove the truth or falsity of a proposition**

The critical distinction between scientific knowledge and other forms of understanding is that scientific knowledge is falsifiable. It is testable by evidence and can be proven right or wrong. Proof is a test.

Newspaper articles and information from the internet are usually conclusions or opinions. The underlying facts in these stories are what have to be tested by evidence. Saying it doesn’t make it so. Just because somebody wrote something doesn’t make it true.

### **Be very suspicious of arriving at the conclusion you started with**

If you haven’t discovered that you are wrong about something, you probably haven’t done enough research. This can get frustrating when you start finding out what “everybody knows” is wrong. Stick to your guns. If the evidence is on your side of the argument, stick with the evidence. Information changes behavior and people don’t like to change. New information usually encounters resistance. Knowledge is very hard to transmit.

## Research plows the data

- *If you can find a book or article at the library, you already have the basic research skills*
- *If you can ask a research librarian a properly framed question, you have above-average research skills*
- *The rest of research is just shoe leather and button-sorting*
- *Research finds data, you have to find the facts*

### **Research is often called “digging”**

And that’s what you have to do in research. Dig broadly to make sure you have a comprehensive understanding of the situation. Dig deeply to make sure you have the facts correct. The task of research consists mostly of broadening the communication channel and filtering out noise.

If there is one secret to research it is understanding the power of indexes (maps) and reference staff (navigators.) For every form of organized knowledge, there are many indexes to that knowledge base – those are your maps. There is even more information in the staff. They are navigators of the sea of knowledge.

Learn to ask properly framed questions. Don’t ask reference staff “How do I find the Annual Elephant Fact Book for 1987?” That’s a question you can answer with an index or catalog. Ask reference staff sharply focused questions like “How many pounds of elephant poop were generated at the Cleveland Zoo in 1987?”

The reference staff are your friends. Be nice. Offer them chocolate.

### **Don’t stop just because you found one answer.**

Nothing has a simple easy explanation. Your task is to find the facts, not justify an opinion. Part of your task is understanding all the points of view.

### **Look everywhere, not just the obvious places**

The Reporter’s Handbook lists the places you must look. Start there. Go further.

### **Evaluate your sources**

Much of the data you unearth will contain noise, misinformation, mistakes and outright lies. Identify the source of the information and be aware of biases.

### **Organize your data**

Plan on spending at least 25% of your time filing and organizing your research data.

## **Analysis builds the framework of knowledge**

- ***Rhetoric is not only useless, it dangerously puts conclusions before knowledge***
- ***Factual analysis means starting with a clean slate – you only know you don't know anything***
- ***Analysis begins only after research fails to uncover new information (data that changes behavior)***

*Wisdom is the goal of analysis  
and only the open-minded reach that goal...*

### **Analysis is like distillation, you boil down the data**

Research gets you the raw data and allows you to build a framework of knowledge. Analysis is where you condense the information. This means being selective. Your audience doesn't need to know all the data you've turned up. They need to know the essential information that creates a framework for understanding and action.

As a research analyst, you are not in the business of opinion. Opinion is justified ignorance. If you know, you have fewer opinions. Beware of constructing a rhetorical opinion piece when you should be building knowledge. One cynic said that opinion is comforting lies, while knowledge is frightening truths.

Any good analysis can be summarized in one or two paragraphs. If the summary is longer than that, you aren't done yet. First drafts are long. Final results are short.

### **There is rarely just one interpretation of the data**

There is good and bad analysis. Bad analysis is what most people learn in school – clever arguments justifying opinion. Good analysis shows why the conclusion is correct. In order to put your point across, you have to understand the objections that will be raised to your analysis. Put yourself in other people's shoes.

### **Critical thinking is critically important**

Research is lots and lots of not very difficult work. Analysis is not a small amount of very hard work. Question yourself. Watch for mistakes. Be prepared to go a long way down blind alleys and then turn around. You know you are on the right track when you start recognizing mistakes. Making mistakes is normal. Being able to correct mistakes – to say you are wrong and start over – is vitally important.

Be patient. If the analysis isn't coming together, you need to do more research. See what other people have written. Be critical. Above all, be critical of yourself.

# Strategy is the vision that changes the world

- *Research lays the foundation*
- *Analysis finds the opposition's weak points and your greatest strengths*
- *Strategy harnesses the analytic energy of information to a goal*
- *Tactics are the means to accomplish the ends of strategy*

## **Movements of social transformation are built around visions**

Luther Gerlach and Virginia Hine's book, *People, Power, Change*, lays out a framework of how movements work. At the core of any movement there is a transformative ideology – a new way of seeing the world. When Martin Luther King said “I have a dream” he was describing a possible future. The vision of the future is both the goal and the core strategy of any movement.

Research is like scouts exploring the surrounding wilderness. Analysis suggests the most accessible pass through the mountains. Strategy describes the unseen territory over the mountains – the promised land.

## **The best strategy is not the most obvious or the easiest, it's the one that is most possible for achieving the goal**

If a movement shares a broadly understood analysis, strategies become obvious. Each node in movement network is pursuing their strategy. These strategies compete to recruit people and mobilize resources. There's sort of a natural selection to strategies: some thrive and grow the movement and others become immobilized. A good strategy is one that grows and spreads.

## **Don't confuse tactics with strategy**

R.V. Jones, head of British Scientific Intelligence during WWII, once said, “Sometimes I think strategy is just tactics talked through a brass hat.” Tactics are what you can do, they aren't what you must do. Just because something can be done doesn't mean it has to be done.

Tactics mean using what you have to do what you need to accomplish strategic goals. If tactics don't contribute to strategic success, they should be set aside. Excellent tactics leave the opposition confounded and confused. Tactics that succeed will provoke a reaction from the opposition. If it works, stick with it. If it stops working, find something new. Tactics must evolve with strategic progress.

# The Road To Athena's Camp

- *Netwar is information conflict*
- *Information is data that changes behavior*
- *Information is energy*
- *Research plows the data*
- *Analysis builds the framework of knowledge*
- *Strategy is the vision that changes the world*

## Summary

The anti-war movement is in its early phases. It will acquire a strategic analysis, but it remains to be seen if this analysis will succeed – like the Civil Rights Movement – or fizzle out – like the opposition to the first Gulf War. In order to succeed and flourish, any movement must spread a vision of the future that is both possible and widely desired.

Looking back at the earliest roots of democracy in Athens offers some hints as to the durable and deeply held values that can energize this movement.

Wars are now fought by and with information. The Netwar framework is a valuable way of viewing movement dynamics in terms of information and social networks.

Movements are all about information and conflict. Opposition from establishment sectors of society provides a valuable source of energy for growing a movement.

Existing social values attacked by reactionary forces supply the motivation for people to join movements to defend their society.

Netwars are fought and won by comprehensive understanding (topside). Research and analysis is a powerful tool for strategic thinking. Most people possess the basic research skills. What they lack is the framework for applying those skills – due to a conflicting framework that falsely values emotional opinion over rational knowledge.

The most valuable contribution you can make to the anti-war movement is to start practicing research and analysis. Find the facts, locate the center of gravity of the pro-war establishment, discover and evolve a strategic vision of a world where we win and they lose. Promote tactics that use our strengths against their weaknesses.

Above all, organize.

## **The very best book:**

*The Investigative Reporter's Handbook: a guide to documents, databases and techniques* edited by Brant Houston, Len Bruzzese and Steve Weinberg (IRE)

## **Recommended Reading:**

*Get The Facts On Anyone* by Dennis King

*The Opposition Research Handbook: A Guide to Political Investigations* by Larry Zilliox, Jr.

*The Craft of Interviewing* by John Brady

*People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation* by Luther Gerlach and Virginia Hine

"Revitalization Movements: Some Theoretical Considerations," by Anthony F. C. Wallace, *American Anthropologist*, LVIII (1956), 264-281

## **Hot search terms for Google**

Ronfeldt Arquilla

Luther Gerlach

Athena Cryptonomicon

Social Movement Networks SPIN

Segmented Polycentric Ideological Networks

Neocortical warfare

Noopolitik

Netwar Emerald City

Public Eye Political Research Associates

Phantom Cell Networks

Zapatista Netwar

Norman Cohn pursuit warrant

Project New American Century

Walter Karp

William Chambliss Take

RV Jones War

Arrow Riders Cyberwar

Pallas Athena

Foreign Policy in Focus

Five Rings Musashi